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Review of **Yoder, Marcus. 2017. *Cathedrals, Castles, & Caves: The Origins of the Anabaptist Faith*. Winesburg, OH: JPV Press. Pp. 223. $19.99.**

By Fred Witzig
Apostolic Christian Church of America

It is difficult to say how much the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation stirred up interest in the groundbreaking event, even among church-going Americans. Many in my own denomination, the Apostolic Christian Church of America, reported being unaware of the anniversary, although a few friends did think to buy me a Playmobil Luther, a bobblehead Luther, and a pair of socks imprinted with "Hier stehe ich. Ich kann nicht anders." There were enough of us interested folks to fill a "Reformation Tour" of central Europe in 2017, and there it was clear that Germans had no intention of forgetting the event, even if they appropriated it for such modern sensibilities as religious tolerance and pluralism. "Whoever believes in diversity must also practice tolerance," German Chancellor Angela Merkel reminded everyone at an official state function in Wittenberg on October 31, 2017. However much this belief may serve us well now, it was not Martin Luther's message five hundred years ago.

Such a belief certainly would have assisted the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century who suffered by the tens of thousands during the Reformation period. Two historians who stand in the Anabaptist tradition have written sweeping overviews of the first fifteen hundred years of church history, reminding us of the fact that religious persecution of Christians and by Christians has been something of a norm for the Church since its inception two thousand years ago. Keith Crider writes for Christian Light Publications, an organization that, according to its website, "produces high-quality curriculum for Christian schools and homeschools." Their doctrinal statement reflects strong Anabaptist influences. Marcus A. Yoder, a self-described Mennonite who serves as the Executive Director of the Amish and Mennonite Heritage Center and the Ohio Amish Library, also writes as an Anabaptist scholar.

Of the two, Yoder writes more openly of his own Anabaptist commitments. His "Note to the Reader" reveals his deep love for the Anabaptist story as revealed in the Heritage Center's huge mural depicting church history from the Anabaptist perspective. Refreshingly, Yoder admits his own bias in the Introduction: "I am a Christian and an Anabaptist in practice and belief" (xviii). Though respectful of other Christian traditions, Yoder's love for his own spiritual ancestors is apparent, particularly as he tells the stories of the martyrdoms of Felix Manz, Michael Sattler, and others whose courage facing death gives final "testimony of the strength and grace of God evident in their lives" (150). Yoder seeks to challenge the reader with these stories. The question that seems to inspire the book is how today's Christians could match the commitment of sixteenth-century Anabaptists in giving up everything to follow Jesus. "In our safe 'freedom of choice and religion' world today, it is difficult to fathom how this could be accomplished" (134). This reviewer finds that question very timely.

Yoder ends the book with a few answers that flow logically from and summarize nicely the history he tells. First, the Anabaptists kept in view a vision of "a church unbound to the state." Second, they perpetuated and extended their vision through "songs, stories, and booklets." Third, Anabaptists held to a two-kingdoms theology and committed themselves to living that theology in every area of their lives. "The way that one related to other Christians with love, care, and mutual aid," and "interacted with the larger world around them with peace and nonresistance" proved an effective method of evangelism (192-193).

If there is a weakness to Yoder's book, it may be the way it sets up the reader's expectations. The subtitle "The Origins of the Anabaptist Faith," the underlying premise of the book, that "we need to teach Anabaptist history to our people," and the Prologue, made up entirely of the story of Anabaptist hero Dirk Willems, may leave the reader unprepared for the fact that well over half of the book deals with events before the famous baptisms in Zurich in 1525 that spawned the Radical Reformation. The book abandons the Anabaptists entirely from page one to page 117 (out of 194 pages of history) while it takes the reader from the

time of Jesus and the pre-Constantinian church (Part I) to the the Medieval church (Part II) and the Reformation at large (Part III). Part IV on the Anabaptists struck this reader as a bit anticlimactic after spending so much time on other subjects.

Though Crider covers the same historical ground and themes as Yoder, he positions his book more directly as a general survey of Church history from the time of Jesus through "the beginning of the Anabaptist movement" (back cover). The book is twice as long as Yoder's and goes into more detail about each era. It includes the timelines, maps, and sidebars of a textbook (though it lacks study questions and suggested readings), but Crider's concise but lively writing style moves the story along well and keeps the book from feeling like a schoolbook. The book attends to places left out of Yoder's account, such as England, Ireland, China, and India. It also devotes an entire chapter to the rise of Islam and its challenge to Christian empires.

Crider writes explicitly as a Christian, but his preference for Anabaptist interpretation and application of Scripture is more implied than stated compared to Yoder. The back cover suggests that "This account of the church" can "inspire us to faithfulness to Christ and His teaching in our day." That such faithfulness is to be understood on Anabaptist terms emerges gradually from the text. Mainstream Protestant and Catholic historians will quibble with some of his interpretations. Catholics and Orthodox will stumble over Crider's judgment that "it is far more important to hear and obey" our own Christians leaders "than it is to go back to the church fathers and try to do as they did" (46). The book rues the development of sacramentalism (85), and the first subtitle of the chapter on "The Development of the Papacy" declares that "The early church departed from the truth in a number of areas" (151). Crider notes how Christian leaders in the east "considered the worship of statues or images as wrong, but considered venerating an icon as good," and then claims that "the common people often had trouble making such a distinction" (234 and 235). I am unsure how historians would know how commonly people a thousand years ago mistook icon veneration for idol worship. Overall, even as an Anabaptist myself, I do not think the Middle Ages were quite as bleak as Crider depicts them. Crider writes respectfully of Protestant reformers, but Calvinists will probably not appreciate his statement that Calvin "emphasized the same false doctrines Augustine had taught over a millennium before" that "have often led to moral laxity in those who hold them" (360). Note, however, that all of these quibbles are over Crider's historical and theological interpretations. There is much to commend in this book, and most of it will not strike the most partisan of Protestants as particularly controversial.

Both books are beautiful to look at, with quality printing, attractive covers, and crisp graphics. Yoder's book includes full-cover maps and pictures. The clear Anabaptist orientation of the authors pleased this Anabaptist reader, but it is likely any Protestant will enjoy them (Catholic and Orthodox perhaps less so). While scholars of church history may not find much new in them, that is not their purpose. Either book should serve well any Christian interested in his or her spiritual family history through the Protestant Reformation.

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