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## **The Naked Anabaptist: The Bare Essentials of a Radical Faith**

Stuart Murray

Herald Press, 2010

300 pages

What is Anabaptism really all about? What does it mean to be Anabaptist today? What can Anabaptist thought and practice contribute to the wider church? These are the kinds of questions behind *The Naked Anabaptist*, Stuart Murray's account of Anabaptism "stripped down to its bare essentials."

Murray did not grow up Anabaptist, yet he has undoubtedly earned the right to speak on the subject: he has self-identified as an Anabaptist for nearly 30 years, completed a doctorate on Anabaptist hermeneutics, and chairs the Anabaptist Network in the U.K. (the organization which provided much of the impetus for the book).

The opening and concluding sections of *The Naked Anabaptist* offer much that is good and useful, including a survey of Anabaptism's origins, an appendix of resources on Anabaptism, and a study guide for reflection and discussion. But the middle chapters of the book are where its centre of gravity is found: a discussion of seven core Anabaptist convictions in four chapters entitled "Following Jesus," "After Christendom," "Community and Discipleship," and "Justice and Peace." Each of these chapters states the relevant core conviction, provides a brief historical overview of the issue, gives real-life examples of Anabaptist thought and practice on the matter, and discusses the conviction's importance and relevance.

The book is well-written, with a patient, if occasionally repetitious, teaching style. Historians and theologians may wish for a more nuanced and referenced discussion of some topics, but such detail might distract the intended audience from the message of the book.

Undoubtedly, some readers will question the choice of the seven core Anabaptist convictions Murray offers or the way they are described; Murray himself says that the book "makes no claim to be the only or most authentic interpretation of the Anabaptist tradition." However, all readers should appreciate the book's balanced and honest approach. Murray does not exalt Anabaptism as the only legitimate way to be a follower of Jesus, nor does he gloss over the faults and failures of Anabaptist history and heritage.

*The Naked Anabaptist* is an excellent resource on Anabaptism for churches or Christian leaders of any denominational stripe. It can provide a helpful starting point for

conversations about what it means to be a faithful follower of Jesus in the 21st century. But it can also be a useful launching pad for more specific conversations about what it means to be Anabaptist in today's world – a conversation many of us MBs need to have in our age of lowest-common-denominator, no-name-brand evangelicalism on one hand, and potentially divisive disputes over doctrine and practice on the other.

For those interested in entering these kinds of conversations, I heartily recommend *The Naked Anabaptist*.

–Michael Pahl