

CHILDREN OF WHO?

- by Duane Troyer

The apostle Peter wrote his second epistle to stir up the people's pure minds by way of remembrance (2 Pet. 3:1). That is my heart's intent as I begin to write this letter, to stir up the minds of God's people, especially the brethren among the amish and other anabaptist descendants who attempt to preserve the faith of our forefathers.

Man can nearly always recognize the people of God who lived in the past, but somehow to recognize the people of God today is not so easy. It has always been that way and it always will be. Nathaniel Howe phrased it well, "The way of the world is to praise dead saints, and persecute living ones."

Jesus found this problem among the religious leaders in his days on earth. In Mt. 23: 29-31 he says, "Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, and say if we had been in the days of our fathers we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets."

When the scribes and the Pharisees read the books of the old testament it was easy for them to identify the righteous people and the true prophets from the children of the devil who rejected them. And they were positive that they themselves would have been in one accord with the righteous ones. The scribes and Pharisees were sure that if the prophets of old could somehow step into their own present era they would surely give each other a right hand of fellowship. But the righteous people and the true prophets that were among them in person they could not identify, and thus rejected them.

Likewise when the leaders of the state church during the

dark ages and reformation era read the gospels and the book of Acts it was easy for them to see that Jesus was the Christ, and that John the Baptist was a true prophet, and that their disciples were righteous. They had no problem seeing that the scribes and Pharisees who rejected them were children of the devil. These leaders were positive that if they themselves would have lived in the days of the apostles that they would have lived in perfect unity with each other. They were sure that if the apostles could somehow step into their own present era that Peter, John, Paul, and all the others would surely give them a right hand of fellowship. But the righteous people and true prophets that were among them in person they could not identify, and thus rejected them.

When today's descendants of the anabaptists read about the revivals of the reformation it is easy for us to see that the anabaptists were the true church and righteous followers of the Lamb. We can easily see that the Catholics and Protestants who rejected and persecuted them were children of the devil. We are positive that if we would live at that time we would have been in one accord with them. We are sure that if the early anabaptists could somehow step into our present time here in America that Conrad Grebel, George Blaurock, Hans Hut, and all the others would surely give us a right hand of fellowship. But can we identify the righteous people and true prophets that are among us in person today? Or do we reject them?

This problem among man of having 20/20 vision when we look into the past, but totally blind to the present day situations is not a problem of certain people in certain areas at certain times. It is general, universal, and perpetual. In fact the more I look at what has happened and is happening, the more I believe that the more things change the more they stay the same!

Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel were mighty prophets of God. How could anyone miss it? But they did some very peculiar things. Imagine yourself living in their days, if you can. You would have seen one of these men walking about barefoot and naked for

three years. (Is. 20) Or maybe you would have seen one of these men build an illustration of Jerusalem with a tile, an iron pan, and some other objects. He then would lay down beside this odd array of objects. Everyday as you pass by this scene, there lay this man. He never turned from one side to the other. For 390 days he laid there on his left side. After that he rolls over on his right side and lays there for another 40 days. During this whole year and two month that he lay there in all kinds of weather he ate a muti-grain bread that he baked with manure. (Ez. 4)

Or perhaps you would have seen a young man standing at the gate where everyone walked by lifting up his voice and declaring the doom that was to come, weeping and lamenting. So dark and dreary were his words that the hands of the men of war were weakened. Even the most positive thinker could turn negative by listening to him. (Jer. & Lam.)

What kind of men are these? Radical, odd, eccentric, disrupters of quiet peace and order. where have they gotten their authority?

Also bear in mind that among those who rejected these prophets were many nice people, men that were level-headed and friendly. Men that would have helped you out if you were in need. Men that were much older than the prophets. Many of them would have preferred righteousness over iniquity.

I'll let you decide how easy it would have been to discern who the true and righteous ones were. Which side would you have identified yourself with?

We tend to think if we would have lived in Palestine two thousand years ago we would have been able to see that this man named Jesus was the Son of God, and that every word he spoke and every deed he did was right and holy. But are you sure? Remember that at the time you would not have known that he would die on the cross and be resurrected again. There was nothing about his form that caused you to desire him (Is. 53:2). There were times when he got visibly angry (Mk. 3:5, Mk. 8:12, Jn. 11:38). Many times his speech and rebukes to people were anything

but tactful (Mk.7:25, Mt.23, Lk.11:39-52). He called Herod a fox (Lk.13:32). One day he turned around and told his followers that they must hate their father, mother, wife, children, brethren, sister, and yourself, to be his disciple (Lk.14:26). He walked into the temple one day and with a mighty heave he overturned the seats and tables where the people sat. He made a scourge and drove the animals and people all out of the temple (Mt.21, Mk.11, Lk.19, Jn.2). This same man tells you that if you don't eat his flesh and drink his blood there's no life in you (Jn.6:53-58)

What kind of man was this? Radical, odd, one who stirs up all the people with his teaching. Where does he get his authority?

Also bear in mind that among those that rejected him were many nice people. Men that were level-headed and friendly. Men that would have helped you out if you were in need. Men that were much older than Jesus. Many of them would have preferred righteousness over iniquity.

If in this land today, yea right in our midst we would see a people zealous of good works and of fire for the truth. A people whose teachers would go about baptizing anyone who truly repents, sometimes by immersion, sometimes by pouring, anytime of the day and anytime of the night, and at any time of the year. These men would be found on the street corners and alleys of our small towns preaching the word of God to passersby. At times you might see one of them publicly singing and leaping, praising God. Even their women would witness of the truth and being constrained to do so could not keep silent.

Their meetings would be often and on any day of the week and at anytime of the day or night, and likewise their communions. The songs they sing would mostly be such as were written by one of their own members. On account of people present that only understood the english language, they would refuse to speak german. Any brother inspired by the holy spirit was permitted to speak in their meetings. These people would have no problem with working on Sundays and very little esteem for any holidays.

These people would send out young men for weeks and months at a time, leaving at home a wife and children, to preach the gospel to the lost.

These people would have a high regard for inner conviction (Gemüth), and a low regard for the voice of a church. They would reject the idea of "group conviction" and surrender all "personal conviction" and follow the only thing that was left, "inner conviction" (the light and inborn knowledge of truth within us).

Most of these people would be poor, and if they had been rich with money and possessions they would voluntarily become poor. The group would mostly consist of young people ages 15-35.

What would we think of such a people? I don't mean if they lived on the other side of the globe. I don't mean if they had lived sometime in the past. I mean if they lived right now! Right here in this land of ours! Right in the midst of our communities! Some of them would be of "unser Leit"! What would we think of them?

I think I know. These people would be called radical, odd, individualists, pietists, rebels, heretics, fanatics, stubborn, disrupters of quiet peace and order. Where have they gotten authority?

But wait a minute. That is exactly what the Catholics, Lutherans, Zwinglians, and Calvinists called our forefathers in the 1500's! And everyone of the characteristics that I have listed was found among them. Most of these characteristics brought fear and alarm to the state churches. I realize that most of the disputes between the early anabaptists and the children of the Pharisees revolved around baptism, sacraments, swearing oaths, holy oil, ect. But for the most part the anabaptists could have escaped persecution, and still been granted the privilege to keep their beliefs if only they would have agreed to remain silent and leave the preaching and teaching for the clergy of the state church.

we pray for revival in our land, but what would revival

look like? Are we sure we would recognize it? It might not look like we think it would. It might not begin with the people we think it would. For God is able to raise out of these stones children of the anabaptists, which are children of the apostles, which are children of the prophets, which are children of Abel, which are children of God. And as it has always been they will look odd, radical, eccentric, disrupting quiet peace and order to the world and religious leaders who are children of the Catholic priests, Luther, Zwingly, and Calvin, which are children of the scribes and Pharisees, Pilate, and Herod, which are children of Ahab, Joash, Zedekiah, and king Manasseh, which are the children of Cain which are the children of the devil.

By this time you might be thinking, why make all this ado on whether or not we can recognize the God's people? Didn't Jesus simply say, "By their fruits ye shall know them?" And aren't the fruits of the spirit love, joy, peace, ect.? Indeed that is true. But if we lean on our own understanding of what God's love, joy, and peace looks like when it is manifested through earthen vessels, we will most likely have another blind spot. Jesus is our perfect pattern. When he overturned the tables, called people serpents and a generation of vipers, and called Herod a fox, it was nothing short of perfect fruits of the spirit.

Or you may be asking does it all matter that much whether or not we can recognize the saints of today? I'll be the first to admit that we live in perilous times, and there are many false prophets and antichrists. But I submit to you by the authority of scripture that whoever rejects, avoids, forsakes, shuns, or excommunicates the children of God has done the same to the Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts 9:4-5, Mt. 25:40, Pr. 14:31, Heb. 6:10) We also have the striking account in 3 Jn. 9-11 of Diotrephes who loved preeminence and received not the apostle John nor the brethren. John simply calls it evil.

The early anabaptists saw the Catholics and reformers as the Babylonian Whore. For us to look back it is easy see that indeed it was. I do not claim to have perfect knowledge of the

book of Revelations, but I would like to give you something to think about. The Catholics and Reformers in the 1500's were not the Whore of Babylon because they baptized infants, swore oaths and worshipped idols. They were the Whore of Babylon because they were drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. The Babylonian Whore, according to Rev. 17 is a mother of harlots. That means she has children.

From the time of Cain and Abel, I have come to believe, to the second coming of Christ, every generation will have its dragon and beast and Babylon the Great making war against the Lamb and the woman and the remnant of her seed which keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. (Rev. 12)

Did you get that last part? And have the testimony of Jesus Christ. Those who walk the way that he walked. Those who are willing to drink of the cup that he drank and be baptized with the baptism that he was baptized with. Those who, like their Master, love righteousness and hate iniquity. The world is full of nice people, people that are level headed and friendly. But they are opposed to the cross of Christ.

If you find it hard to discern who the disciples of Jesus Christ are today then put on the armor of God. Set your eyes on Christ and press forward against unnumbered foes. Against the lust of the flesh, against the lust of the eye, against the pride of life, against self, against father, against mother, against brothers, against sisters, against wife, against children, against houses, against lands, against the world, against friends, against religious leaders, against theologians, against riches, against fame, against popular opinion, against positive thinking, against anxiety, without fear, without looking back, without glancing left, without glancing right, 'till your hand cleaves to the sword and every foe is vanquished.

You will quickly find out who the children of the serpent are that lay wait for your soul, and also who the followers of the Lamb are that bring you sweet fellowship.

And I will repeat the advice that Anna of Rotterdam gave

her son in 1539 "Where you find a poor, simple, cast-off little flock, which is despised and rejected by the world, join them; for where you hear of the cross, there is Christ; from there do not depart."

If this way sounds too narrow, too difficult, too rough, or too lonesome, then choose you this day whom you will serve, but think not to say within yourselves, we have the anabaptists to our fathers. For they were willing to take up the cross and walk this way. This way which is found by so few and walked by still far smaller number. The way, that was walked by our smitten, rejected, falsely-accused, and bleeding Lord, Jesus Christ. And he still beckons, "follow me."