

Reformers and Their Stepchildren

by John Bjorlie

John Bjorlie's sermon explores Leonard Verduin's insights on the Anabaptist movement and its historical significance in relation to personal faith and church-state dynamics.

Scripture: Proverbs 27:17, Ephesians 4:15, 2 Timothy 2:15, Hebrews 10:24, 1 Peter 2:9

Topics: "Church History", "Anabaptist Movement"

Description

John Bjorlie preaches about the enduring impact of Leonard Verduin's book, 'The Reformers and their Stepchildren,' which sheds light on the conflict between the church-state alliance and those emphasizing a personal commitment to Christ. Verduin's work uncovers the history of underground Christian fellowships in the Middle Ages and their resistance to the establishment in Christendom. The book's reprint in 1991 by Christian Hymnary Publishers, particularly for the 'plain people' like Old Order Mennonites, highlights its favorable portrayal of the Anabaptist movement and its significance as a bridge to the original apostolic church.

Transcript

Some books will not go away. They may not be bestsellers, but once a print run is exhausted, the book is soon being requested. They have a lasting appeal, they say something no one else is saying, or they say what everyone else is saying, only better.

Leonard Verduin's 1964 book, *The Reformers and their Stepchildren*, is like that. Verduin wrote his book to trace the conflict between the church-state alliance and those who believe that a personal, voluntary commitment to Christ is the door to membership into Christ's body. By the time the book was ready for publication in 1964, Verduin had uncovered a startling episode in history, and given clear insights into the church's true mission.

This book's personal voyage is like its theme. It tells the story of the underground church of the Middle Ages, and those unapproved, unrecognized, unannounced Christian fellowships who prefer to be known as believers, brothers and sisters, or saints. It moves among those posing a threat to the establishment in Christendom. Verduin himself broke rank with his upbringing in the Christian Reformed denomination. He was once insulted by a Christian Reformed clergyman when they met at a social function. The clergyman arched his eyebrow at Verduin and loudly announced, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" Instantly Leonard responded, "Remember who it was who first spoke those words, and to whom he said it."

Eerdman ran several editions before the Christian Hymnary Publishers received permission to reprint the volume in August of 1991. They cater to the "plain people," such as Old Order Mennonites. Since Verduin's book gives favorable press on the Anabaptist movement (which Mennonites, Amish and Hutterites all claim as their ancestors), the plain people are part of Verduin's cult following. "Anabaptist theology and conduct throughout the centuries--by a non-Anabaptist scholar!"

The Christian Hymnary catalog printed this rather partisan blurb: "In his brilliant volume, *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren*, the Reformed historian, Leonard Verduin, has impartially recorded the origin, beliefs, and continuity of the 'stepchildren' Anabaptists--the ancestors and forerunners of the Amish, and some Mennonites. (The Anabaptists are the only known historical bridge to the original apostolic N.T. church.)"

Verduin's outstanding volume continues where Mennonite historians left off--establishing that those known as Anabaptists were continuing what began in the first century and not in the 1520's.

Meeting the martyrs will endear this book to all likeminded readers. But beware, all state-church lovers, reconstructionists, and ecumenists. This is a hard pill to swallow, but a sure cure.

This book should be in our homes, alongside *The Anabaptist Story*, by William Estep, the old classic, *The Martyr's Mirror*, and of course, E. H. Broadbent's *The Pilgrim Church*. Broadbent follows the same theme with this difference: Broadbent believed in the principles of the New Testament church before he began his book; Verduin stumbled on them. Verduin did not even know there was such a person as E. H. Broadbent, until he saw a recent edition of *The Pilgrim Church*, with F. F. Bruce's foreword saying that Broadbent's theme had since been taken up by other writers, citing Verduin's book.

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