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THE HISTORY, DOCTRINES, AND CUSTOMS  
OF THE AMISH MENNONITE CHURCH

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Systematic Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Divinity

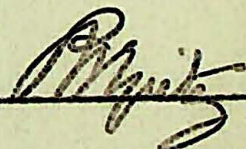
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by

Robert W. Esabe

June 1951

Approved by:



Advisor



Reader

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is an account of the conservative descendants of the party known during the Reformation as the Anabaptists. That group of people has been viciously denounced by practically every historian since the Reformation. Few people have dared to defend the Anabaptist party. Most of the criticism directed at them is undoubtedly authentic and unimpeachable. We are not trying to vindicate Anabaptist policies nor whitewash their faults.

We are presenting the beliefs of that group which has not only inherited the basic Anabaptist doctrines but also, perhaps, a certain amount of the same criticism and animosity their ancestors endured. We do not feel this criticism is justified. Most of it is probably derived from total ignorance of the Amish or Mennonite Church. Some people think that an Amishman paints his garden gate blue to tell the world that he has a daughter eligible for marriage; that he paints cabalistic symbols on his farm buildings to scare away the witches; that he is an ignorant and superstitious fool in a broadrim hat and bushy beard who mercilessly beats his family and quarrels with his neighbors. All of these assumptions and many more are false.

Careful investigation reveals a fascinating people intent on doing the most and the greatest good for neighbor and family. Their highest ambition is to serve God and their fellowmen in the only way they know, by applying Holy Scripture in a strict and literal sense. Therefore the second chapter describes their attitude toward the Bible and illustrates

their principles of literal interpretation. This is basic for a correct understanding of their doctrines and customs. The next chapter treats various doctrines which depend upon their method of exegesis. It will be noted that the Holy Spirit and His work are greatly emphasized in Mennonite theology. The fourth and fifth chapters discuss those doctrines which are distinctively Amish or Mennonite, namely, nonresistance, non-conformity, and separation.

Any careful study of Mennonite theology and life will convince one that these unassuming folk have much to give the world. Their theology is geared for the common man. Whether you agree with their doctrines, customs, and practices or not, you are bound to be impressed by their piety, sincerity, and consecration. If it were possible for man to achieve his own salvation by his moral righteousness, as they teach, the Amish and the Mennonites would certainly succeed.

## CHAPTER II

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MENNONITE CHURCH

#### European Background

The theology and practices of the modern Anish and Mennonite churches can be traced to the very beginning of the Reformation. The assumption that these churches, because of their striking similarity in faith and practice, were direct descendants of the Waldenses, is now generally discounted.<sup>1</sup> It was, however, shortly after 1520, during the Zwinglian Reformation in Switzerland, that the Swiss Brethren gained prominence principally through their doctrine of adult baptism. It was this doctrine which set them apart from other reform movements in Germany and Switzerland. It was this doctrine which gave these conscientious Christians their name, "Anabaptists".<sup>2</sup>

While these people were generally described as fanatics and reactionaries and were often viciously denounced by their contemporaries, their doctrines and zeal appealed to a certain promising Roman Catholic priest named Menno Simons (1492-1559). Menno served the Roman Church as a parish priest from 1516 to 1536 but, by his own admission, he had spent his days

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<sup>1</sup>John Horsch, "Mennonites in Europe", Mennonite History. (Scottsdale, Penn.: Mennonite Publishing House, 1942), I, 9.

<sup>2</sup>C. Henry Smith, The Story of the Mennonites (Berne, Ind.: Mennonite Book Concern, c.1941), p. 18 f.

in "playing, drinking, and all manner of frivolous diversions."<sup>3</sup> Finally the seeds of doubt were sown in his mind by Luther whose writings had been surreptitiously circulated among the Dutch priests. The execution of an Anabaptist drove him deeper into Scripture itself but he could find no justification for infant baptism there.<sup>4</sup> An appeal to Luther gave him no satisfaction. Convinced of Rome's error, he renounced the Catholic faith in 1536 and "chose instead a life of uncertainty, misery, and poverty, constantly threatened with imprisonment, persecution, and death."<sup>5</sup>

Shortly after his renunciation of Romanism Menno was baptized in Groningen, Switzerland by Obbe Philips, a leader of the Anabaptists. Under his leadership congregations grew with rapidity but "as soon as proselytes became numerous, the leader was hunted like a criminal, a price being put upon his head, and a person being put to death for giving him shelter without knowing it to be a crime."<sup>6</sup> Menno's faith, however, re-

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>4</sup>Barthinius Wick, The Amish Mennonites. A Sketch of Their Origin and of Their Settlement in Iowa (Iowa City, Ia.: State Historical Society, 1894) p. 6.

<sup>5</sup>Smith, op. cit., p. 99.

<sup>6</sup>Martyr's Mirror (Scottsdale, Pa.: Mennonite Publishing House, 1938), p. 382.

mained unshaken. At one time he witnessed the execution of a large number of Anabaptists who had taken refuge in a monastery at Bolswert, Holland. One of those executed was his brother Simon. In spite of personal danger he carried out the work of organizing these scattered people into congregations with even greater vigor. He did much to develop and expand the church's influence. His place in Anabaptist history as one of their greatest and most fearless leaders is unchallenged.

A creed formulated by Menno and Dirck Philip at Buchhold, Westphalia in 1538 is still considered authoritative.<sup>7</sup> More and more people of Central Europe came to look upon him as their spiritual leader. Among his followers could be counted thousands who were dissatisfied with Catholic, Lutheran, and Calvinistic doctrines and practices. Some objected to the state church set-up of other Protestants; others objected to various doctrines. All of them followed the path of non-resistance.

Gradually these "nonresistant" people became associated with the word Mennonite. At one time the word Menist was used as a distinguishing term between the peaceful and revolutionary Anabaptist parties. A variety of names had been given the peaceful followers of Menno, some of which were Wederdoopers (rebaptizers), Doopsgezinde (Baptist minded), and in Germany, Wiedertäufer. Soon, however, the name Mennonite was applied to all those of the Netherlands, Northern and Southern Germany, and Switzerland who were

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<sup>7</sup>Wick, *op. cit.*, p. 8.



once known as the Swiss Brethren.<sup>8</sup> Like the terms Calvinist and Lutheran it was to designate, not the opinions of an individual, but the religious doctrines of the person whose name it bore, as an outstanding expounder.

The character of Menno's work is best given by an American author, Barthinius Wick:

He felt religion had become a mere formality. Menno wished to make religion less a matter of external forms and more an affair of the inner life, to strike at the root of the evil by making the ministry free; to establish a free altar where all could worship in spirit and in truth, without the reading of mass, or the listening to sermons delivered by a paid hierarchy.<sup>9</sup>

In order to foster his "religion of the inner life" Menno taught several doctrines which became the cause of severe friction among his adherents long after his death. They were in disagreement as to the correct application of a fundamental doctrine called *Meidung* (shunning). *Meidung* meant complete avoidance of any member of the church placed under the ban of excommunication because of infraction of church rules or doctrines. It caused untold confusion and bitterness among the faithful during the latter part of Menno's life. He was greatly disturbed by these events in his declining years and traveled extensively in the interest of harmony, but to no avail. Near the close of his life it is said he regretted having agreed to the strict interpretation of the ban; and to

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<sup>8</sup> Smith, op. cit., p. 123 f.

<sup>9</sup> Wick, op. cit., p. 7.

have advised his friends not be a "slave of men" as he had been.<sup>10</sup>

Following the death of Menno the Swiss Brethren of the upper Rhineland and the Mennonites of the lower Rhineland gradually merged interests and cooperated. Conferences were held to establish greater unity but once again that thorn in the flesh, the Meidung, appeared to make further cooperation impossible.<sup>11</sup> The controversies usually revolved about the question of the degree of strictness with which the Meidung should be applied. Temporary cooperation was effected in 1632 at the Synod of Dortrecht, Holland. At this convention the Dortrecht Confession of Faith, the confession generally recognized and used by conservative Mennonites in America, was drawn up by a bishop of the Flemish Mennonite Church. It was signed by fifty-two Mennonite preachers at Dort and on February 14, 1660, it was approved and signed by thirteen ministers of Alsace.<sup>12</sup>

Although Menno had misgivings about his strict interpretation of the ban, it remained for another Mennonite bishop who lived a century and a half later to accuse Menno, the patriarch of his church, of liberal tendencies. This man was Jacob Ammann (Amen, Ammon) a Mennonite preacher of Amenthal, Switzerland.<sup>13</sup> This first great disruption in the Mennonite

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<sup>10</sup>Smith, op. cit., p. 120.

<sup>11</sup>Chas. S. Rice and John B. Shenk, Meet the Amish, A Pictorial Study of the Amish People (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1947), p. 5.

<sup>12</sup>Horsch, op. cit., p. 246 f.

<sup>13</sup>C. Henry Smith, The Mennonites (Berne, Ind.: Mennonite Book Concern, 1920), p. 237 f.

Church was based on a literalistic interpretation of I Cor. 5:9-11 where it reads in part: "... if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator, or a railor, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with such an one not to eat."<sup>14</sup> It was Ammann's contention that the Apostle Paul wanted excommunication to extend to every form of contact, social as well as religious. In opposition to Amman's conservative party, Bishop Hans Roist of Obertal, Switzerland maintained that excommunication referred only to the communion table.<sup>15</sup> Ammann's position was based solely on the word "eat" but he was determined to purge the church of error.

In 1693 Bishop Ammann, with his brother Ulrich and several other ministers, visited all Mennonite churches of Switzerland and the Alsace to determine the viewpoints of others on the question of the Meidung.<sup>16</sup> Several other points of doctrine and practice caused Ammann much concern for the welfare of the church. It was found that many ministers considered "treuhersiger" (truehearted) persons as saved. Ammann was offended that such people who merely approved of Henno's teachings but were unwilling to make public confession of their faith should be considered saved. To their

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<sup>14</sup>Th. Engelder, W. Armit, Th. Graebner, and F. E. Mayer, editors, Popular Symbolics (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, c.1934), p. 259.

<sup>15</sup>Horsch, op. cit., p. 262.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 263.

credit it must be said that the treuherziger were persons who, in the persecutions of the Mennonite people, had rendered them every possible service by giving them food and lodging, and, contrary to the orders of the authorities, had warned them of approaching danger from their pursuers. These people were also called Halbtäufer (Halfway-Anabaptists).<sup>17</sup>

Determined to eradicate error, Ammann invited Bishop Reist to a conference for a discussion of their views on Meidung and the treuherziger. When Reist failed to appear, Ammann excommunicated him and six other ministers who held similar views.<sup>18</sup> Thus the threatened disruption, first in a long series of them, became a fact. Various other attempts at reconciliation were made, however. In 1698 Ammann's party confessed that they had acted too rashly in pronouncing the ban without the consent of the congregation and declared themselves as, in fact, excommunicated. This was a complete reversal of form in the hope that the other party would also confess its mistakes and effect a reconciliation.<sup>19</sup> Bishop Reist and his party, however, remained adamant.

Other attempts to reconcile matters also proved unsuccessful. In time, the breach was widened to include the teachings regarding attendance at the services of state churches and the question of whether a wilful untruth was grounds for excommunication. Although the issues on these and other points were not as sharply drawn as the doctrine of Meidung, Jacob

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 264.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 265.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

Amann and his followers were never again accepted as bona fide members of the Mennonite Church. Henceforth his followers were called "Amish" after the person who, in a great measure, materially reestablished their form of belief.<sup>20</sup> Since 1693 the Amish branch of the Mennonite Church has always been the most conservative of all Mennonites. The remainder of this paper will be devoted to a discussion of the history, doctrines, and customs of the American Mennonites, with particular reference to its Amish branch.

#### The Amish in America

The followers of Jacob Amann first made their appearance in America in 1709. The first sizeable contingent arrived in 1717 and settled in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.<sup>21</sup> These hardy agrarian folk from the Palatinate established a stable and compact community which remains today much as it was in colonial days. Most of the immigrants settled in the eastern section of the county along the picturesque Conestoga River. Their little villages received colorful names such as, Blue Ball, Bird - in - Hand, Intercourse, Smoketown, Bareville, and Churchtown. This picturesque colony of Amish comprising nearly three thousand souls, mostly of the Old Order, but including also about all the varieties of

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<sup>20</sup> Wick, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>21</sup> Berenice Steinfeldt, The Amish of Lancaster County (Lancaster, Pa.: Arthur G. Steinfeldt, c.1940), p. 4.

Amish known.<sup>22</sup>

In 1718 these people addressed a petition to William Penn asking to be excused from attending courts of law, from taking part in elections, and from holding office, civil or military. Penn granted this request and materially helped the colonists in other ways, one of which was to protect them from marauding Indians. After Penn's death, the Amish sent a memorial to the government which reads:

We were invited to come to this land of Pennsylvania. We came to Pennsylvania to seek an asylum from persecution to which we were subjected in Europe. We knew the character of William Penn and rejoiced that God had made such a man.<sup>23</sup>

Many of the Amish who arrived in America between 1727 and 1750 moved westward from the Pennsylvania colonies and settled in Ohio. In the second quarter of the nineteenth century larger groups of Amish came from Alsace-Lorraine, Bavaria, and Hussia-Darstadt to settle in Butler, Fulton, and Wayne counties, Ohio.<sup>24</sup> Their reasons for moving westward from the established communities of Pennsylvania were partly economic and partly religious. The lure of cheaper lands beckoned the simple agrarian folk and it was thought that better opportunities existed in the undeveloped West "to form communities wherein worship could be better observed and where labor could be carried out on the community plan."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, p. 563.

<sup>23</sup>Wick, op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>24</sup>Edmund G. Kaufman, The Development of the Missionary and Philanthropic Interest among the Mennonites of North America (Berne, Ind.: Mennonite Book Concern, 1931), p. 15.

<sup>25</sup>Wick, op. cit., p. 39.

Those who settled in Ohio found frontier life disagreeable. By 1840 the westward tide had reached Indiana.<sup>26</sup> They had taken the steamboat down the Ohio River, had visited Iowa and Chicago, and had finally decided to locate near Elkhart and Goshen, Indiana where some of the largest and most prosperous Amish settlements are found today. Numerous other Amish settlements were established during these years in Waterloo County, Ontario; in Lee, Henry, and Johnson Counties, Iowa; and in Woodford, Tazewell, and Bureau Counties, Illinois. In more recent years the lure of cheap lands has called many Amish from these original settlements to practically every Midwestern state.<sup>27</sup>

In general, the Amish brought with them their European religious practices and social customs, most of which were decidedly more conservative than their Mennonite brethren. Their dress regulations seem particularly narrow and stringent to an outsider. It was a matter of church doctrine to retain their long hair, beards, obsolete styles of clothing, hooks and eyes, and broad-rimmed hats. The Amish scrupulously avoided changing the social customs of the day.<sup>28</sup> Their dresses, clothing, and trousers were not to be "proud", that is, in conformity with current styles. All "new" things invented by the world were to be excluded from

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<sup>26</sup> Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, p. 579.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 580.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 556.

the church and its members. The discipline of 1865, for instance, prohibited the wearing of oilcloth and rubber raincoats.<sup>29</sup> Shaving, trimming the beard, swearing an oath, and jury service were all condemned; coats with lapels, high hats, combs in the hair, and other such worldly customs were to be *gar nicht geduldet* (strictly prohibited). When, however, an Amishman acquired certain "city ways", the powerful ban was promptly applied. One such a man, says the tradition, was expelled from a Sunday meeting because he had the audacity to part his hair and to wear a starched shirt front.<sup>30</sup>

When an Amishman rebels against some feature of his church's doctrines of non-conformity or nonresistance, it is a simple matter to cope with the situation, for the threat of excommunication is a powerful weapon. When, however, powerful outside forces threaten their ancient customs and practices, the Amish are forced to migrate rather than relinquish any of their convictions. One such migration took place in 1940 from Pennsylvania to Maryland. Their principle motive in leaving the comfortable existence of Lancaster County was to find a place where they would "be hindered by no one in the exercise of their religion."<sup>31</sup>

In recent years they have been forced to migrate to other countries as well. Some have left the United States to live in Canada or South

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<sup>29</sup>John C. Wenger, Glimpses of Mennonite History and Doctrine (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1947), p. 121.

<sup>30</sup>Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, p. 593 f.

<sup>31</sup>Dieter Guns, The Maryland Germans, A History (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1948), p. 417.



America where more freedom is granted them. One group of Mennonites obtained a charter from the government of Paraguay in 1927 providing

freedom from military service as combatants and non-combatants in time of peace or war, to practice their religion and worship with absolute liberty; to make affirmation without oath in courts of justice; to administer their own schools and churches; to use their own language, which is German.<sup>32</sup>

Generally speaking, their new freedom in America has tended to maintain conservative practices and has allowed the Amish to separate themselves more completely from the world. When, however, deviations or aberrations from the traditional doctrines became apparent, the offenders were promptly excommunicated. It is not surprising that such internal dissensions should develop in a church which has always been extremely individualistic and unorganized. Occasionally these differences reached serious proportions. Toward the middle of the last century one group became more liberal and progressive. When it was no longer considered a part of the Amish Church, it merged with other liberal elements of the Mennonite Church and became known as the Conservative or Church Amish. This merger took place in 1850.<sup>33</sup>

The Church or High Amish are known for several important innovations. Their main departure from the time-honored practices of the fathers occurred in a controversy over the correct procedure in baptism. The liberal element, taking its cue from the story of Jesus' baptism (Matthew 3:16) and Philip's baptism of the eunuch (Acts 8:38), maintained

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<sup>32</sup>Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, p. 722 ff.

<sup>33</sup>Kaufman, op. cit., p. 280.

that both preacher and convert must stand in a stream. When the rupture between the two parties became complete, the Conservatives built meeting-houses, for convenience sake, near or on streams, hence the term Church Amish.<sup>34</sup> The strict disciples of Jacob Ammann still have no churches or meeting-houses.

When other differences threatened to disrupt the Amish, a general council of all Amish churches was called in a spacious barn in Wayne County, Ohio in 1862 for the purpose of restoring harmony. Annual conferences were held for a period of twelve years without accomplishing their purpose. The last meeting was held at Eureka, Illinois in 1873.<sup>35</sup> The differences were accentuated instead of settled so that several new groups were formed.<sup>36</sup> One such split occurred in 1870 when certain dissatisfied members broke away. These groups have been given a variety of names such as Wild Hickory Amish and Wild Amish. Most liberal branches are not looked upon with favor by their fellow religionists because they are too "worldly".<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Wenger, op. cit., p. 121.

<sup>35</sup> Kaufman, op. cit., p. 279 f.

<sup>36</sup> Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, p. 628 ff.

<sup>37</sup> Steinfeldt, op. cit., p. 5.

A list of Amish divisions and defections always leaves the main trunk of the conservatives with religious beliefs and social customs almost as they were in Switzerland, the land of their origin, several centuries ago. This group, known as the Old Order Amish, has a membership of approximately ten thousand souls in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa. Their religious tenets are much the same as those of other Amish and Mennonites except for a much stricter interpretation of the ban. Their religious and social customs, however, are distinctly different.<sup>38</sup> Both the doctrines and the customs of the Old Order Amish will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters.

All types and divisions of American Mennonites can be classified under three general heads: the conservative wing, the liberal element, and the central party. The most conservative group is popularly known as the Old Order Amish. The most liberal element among the American followers of Menno Simons is officially known as The General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America. Somewhere between these two extremes we find The Mennonite Church, a fusion of the original Mennonites and the main body of the Amish movement, including the Church of Conservative Amish and other smaller groups who were dissatisfied with the conservative views of the Old Order.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, p. 632 ff.

<sup>39</sup>Engelder, op. cit., p. 259.

## CHAPTER III

### THE AMISH MENNONITES AND HOLY SCRIPTURES

Any attempt at presenting a logical exposition of early Anabaptist and Mennonite doctrines will prove to be a very confusing task. The people gathered under the one term "Anabaptist" confessed the same basic doctrines but represented a wide variety of applications of these doctrines. Not a few of their leaders were talented and erudite but few, if any, took it upon themselves to systematize the doctrines of the movement. Perhaps it was an impossible task. On one extreme wing of Anabaptism could be found the superradicals who established their "heavenly city on earth" in Münster. This was a "half-political, half-religious experiment which collapsed in 1535 after a few months of a reign of terror, confusion, and intolerance."<sup>1</sup>

Those who became known as the most conservative of all the Anabaptists followed the leadership of the Philips brothers, Dirk and Obbe, and became known by the name of Obbenites after their chief leader. This group launched a vigorous protest against the sympathizers of the Münster movement and maintained instead a peaceful and Biblical approach to theology.<sup>2</sup> None of the various groups of Anabaptists, forerunners of the modern Mennonites, however, had a definite doctrinal standard by which their ideologies could be evaluated. Their chief characteristic was their

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<sup>1</sup>Dieter Gunz, The Maryland Germans, A History (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1948), p. 418.

<sup>2</sup>C. Henry Smith, The Story of the Mennonites (Berne, Ind.: Mennonite Book Concern, c.1941), p. 87 ff.

extreme subjectivism or enthusiasm which led to a vigorous protest against the chief doctrines of other protestants and the dead formalism of Rome. This enthusiasm culminated in a position which was the exact antithesis of the cornerstone of Luther's theology, justification by faith without the deeds of the law. In many points we can find close similarities between Anabaptism of the sixteenth century and Roman Catholic theology.<sup>3</sup>

A different emphasis was placed upon the importance and person of the Holy Spirit. He became the cornerstone of a theology which absorbed many of the ascetic and mystical tendencies of the Middle Ages. It was the Holy Spirit who made possible man's communion with God the Father and His Son by a certain inner inspiration. The Father reveals Himself to man, mediately and immediately, because the Spirit works directly upon the heart. These tendencies were put to practical application by the Anabaptists with generally greater success than similar efforts of the previous centuries.<sup>4</sup> This distinguishing feature of Anabaptism and Mennonitism will be considered in greater detail in the discussion of several of their doctrines.

The Anabaptist movement was essentially a concentrated effort at forcing a complete and absolute obedience to the letter of Holy Scripture. Other basic tenets such as extreme opposition to the state-church organizations of the Lutheran and Calvinistic Reformations were based largely on their "strictest adherence to the Scriptures which were interpreted literally and taken as a guide even for the details of everyday life."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Th. Engelder, W. Arndt, Th. Graebner, and F. B. Mayer, Popular Symbolics (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, c.1934), p. 256.

<sup>4</sup>John C. Wenger, Glimpses of Mennonite History and Doctrine (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1947), p. 137.

<sup>5</sup>Ganz, op. cit., p. 420.

By observing Scripture to the letter, they were able to find proof for the "inner light" doctrine and a host of other lesser doctrines and practices. It led not only to their fundamental distrust of the other reform movements but also to a corresponding distrust of their movement by Luther, Calvin, and other contemporary leaders.

This approach to Holy Scripture resulted in an attitude which Mennonites describe as the "practical" method of examining the Bible. They made it "function in the salvation and the sanctification of men, rather than placing much stress on systems of thought or entering into the speculative problems of theology."<sup>6</sup> Thus Mennonites have always refrained from taking part in theological discussions of the doctrines of predestination, election, free will, and other great mysteries of the faith. These, they felt, could lead to no practical results. The philosophical aspects of theology usually produced ill-feeling and hatred; empty theories rarely produced a knowledge of sin in the heart. "Bring men immediately to Christ" has been the Mennonite watchword.<sup>7</sup>

In order to bring salvation to the greatest number, all Mennonites and their antecedents have felt that a proper distinction between the Old and the New Covenant in Scripture must be maintained. The New Covenant, ushered in at the death of Jesus, is accorded the finality in all matters of faith and life. Jesus, "the Mediator of the New Testament" (Heb. 9:15,16), abolished the Old Testament as a religious system and bo

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<sup>6</sup>Wenger, op. cit., p. 147.

<sup>7</sup>Barthinius L. Wick, The Amish Mennonites, A Sketch of Their Origin and of Their Settlement in Iowa (Iowa City, Ia.: State Historical Society, 1894), p. 12.

came the New Testament Lawgiver. The ethical teachings of Jesus are more than a mere set of ideals whose observance is optional with believers. They must be accepted as practical standards for Christians regardless of the consequences.<sup>8</sup> They cannot be disobeyed by loyal believers because the words of Jesus are God's words as He Himself testifies:

For I have not spoken of Myself; but the Father which sent Me, He gave Me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak.... Whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto Me, so I speak. (John 12:49,50).

That believers under the old dispensation anticipated the coming of a new law is proved from the prophet Jeremiah who gives additional proof in this way:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand out of the land of Egypt.... (Jer. 31:31-34).<sup>9</sup>

The Old Covenant was not perfect in the sense that its blessings were inferior to those of the New. The Old Testament prophets looked forward to the glory of the New Covenant with its deeper blessings, the New Covenant being less nationalistic or external and more personal and spiritual in character. Therefore all of God's dealing with man before Christ were in preparation for the redemption wrought through Christ, who stands at the center of time.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Sanford G. Yoder, "For Conscience Sake," Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History (Goshen, Ind.: The Mennonite Historical Society, 1940), IV. 25 f.

<sup>9</sup>Of. Heb. 8:7-13.

<sup>10</sup>Wenger, op. cit., p. 162.

In Christ we see the fullest development of the Old Testament Law for it was fulfilled in Him as He testifies: "Think not that I am come to destroy the Law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy but to fulfill." (Matt. 5:17). For instance, under the Old Covenant murder was forbidden but in the New Testament Jesus also expounded the doctrine that anger, even hatred, are tantamount to murder (Matt. 5:21). This is substantiated by the testimony of the Apostle John (1 John 3:15). Whereas under the old dispensation people were ignorant of the fact that evil thoughts constitute adultery, Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount, taught His followers that principle (Matt. 5:27). The evangelist Mark also testifies, "Out of the heart of Men proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders....." (Mark 7:21).

Jesus, the new Lawgiver, also extended the Mosaic teaching on divorce by giving fornication as the only cause for divorce (Matt. 5:31,32; Matt. 19:9). The Israelites under the Old Covenant were permitted to swear but Jesus abolished all swearing:

...Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne; Nor by the earth; for it is His footstool; neither by Jerusalem...But let your communication be, Yea, yes; Nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.  
(Matt. 5:33-37).<sup>11</sup>

Henne Simons, patriarch of the Mennonite Church, has this to say:

We are aware that the magistracy claim and say we are allowed to swear when justice is on our side. This we simply answer with the Word of God. To swear was truly

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<sup>11</sup>Cf. Jas. 5:12.



allowed to the Jews under the Law; but the Gospel forbids this to Christians.<sup>12</sup>

In a familiar passage Jesus also positively forbids all retaliation:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. (Matt. 5:38,39).

In this connection Jesus is supported by Paul, another great New Testament lawgiver, when he writes, "... Live peaceably with all men... give place unto wrath... vengeance is mine, saith the Lord..." (Rom. 12:17-21). All of these injunctions are to be understood in their literal sense. Nothing is more binding on the Christian, not even the laws of the nation. Thus Jesus built upon the essential moral principles of the Old Testament and made them more penetrating and extensive.<sup>13</sup>

In view of these literalistic interpretations of the New Testament the Gospel and the Law must be understood as essentially one and the same thing. Both the apostles and the Lord Jesus proved and confirmed the truth of the Gospel with sayings and testimonies of the Law and the prophets. He thereby proved that the truths of the Gospel are embodied in the Law and the prophets. Dirck Philip, an outstanding theologian of the early Mennonite movement, states that the "signification, purport, and real meaning of the Law accords and agrees in every way with the Gospel, yea, that it is one and the same truth. For there is but

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<sup>12</sup>The Complete Works of Menno Simons (Elkhart, Ind.: Mennonite Publishing Company, 1871), II, 273.

<sup>13</sup>Wenger, op. cit., p. 162 f.

one God so there is but one truth, for God Himself is the truth.<sup>14</sup>

All words and testimonies of Jesus and the evangelists and apostles are to be equated with the law and the prophets. Whenever an apostle, for instance, gives an injunction, it must be obeyed to the very letter. This literalistic method of interpretation provides material for the many doctrines, customs, and practices of the Mennonite Church which are totally foreign to the majority of other Protestant bodies. An example can be found in the story of the Last Supper when Jesus spoke these words to His disciples, "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you." (John 13:14,15). Since Jesus is the Lord of the Church, all conscientious Christians will follow His example. Consequently, Mennonites follow this precept as faithfully as other believers obey the Decalogue. They celebrate the ordinance of footwashing at every communion service, meaning twice a year.

An edifying result of fulfilling the Lord's command is the fact that pride, greatest of all Mennonite sins, is replaced by genuine humility.<sup>15</sup> Mennonite theologians usually find two reasons why Jesus instituted the ordinance of footwashing and instructed His followers to do likewise.

Birck Philip, a contemporary of Menno Simons, writes:

...He would have us to know that He Himself must cleanse us after the inner man, and that we must allow Him to wash

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<sup>14</sup>Dietrich Philip, Enchiridion or Handbook of the Christian Doctrine and Religion (Elkhart, Ind.: Mennonite Publishing Company, 1910), p. 260 f.

<sup>15</sup>John F. Funk, The Mennonite Church and Her Accusers (Elkhart, Ind.: Mennonite Publishing Co., 1876), p. 51.

away the sins that beset us....The second reason...is that we shall humble ourselves among one another...and that we hold our fellow believers in the highest respect for the reason that they are the saints of God and members of the body of Christ, and that the Holy Ghost dwells in them.<sup>16</sup>

Mennonites apply this literalistic method of interpretation to every possible passage in the New Testament. They are unequivocally opposed to secret societies, for instance, not only because they believe Christians are forbidden to swear but also because membership in fraternal organizations is often used as a substitute for church membership. It is the church which is to be the brotherhood of Christians. Mennonites, however, also find another reason for their unwavering opposition to secret societies. The very principle of organized secrecy is unchristian. When Jesus testified of His doctrine before the high priest, He said, "I spake openly to the world...in secret have I said nothing" (John 18:19,20). For a Christian to unite with a fraternal organization, especially when some members are not even professing Christians, and to "share with this mixed body certain information which he may not divulge to his fellow believers in Christ's church, is utterly out of the question."<sup>17</sup>

Mennonites also find Scriptural basis for their doctrine of laying on of hands in ordination. They point to 1 Tim. 4:14 where Paul admonishes the young minister, "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery."<sup>18</sup> This rite is extended to all who are called to serve in the church: the

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<sup>16</sup>Philip, op. cit., p. 388 f.

<sup>17</sup>Wenger, op. cit., p. 158.

<sup>18</sup>Gf. Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5.

elders or bishops, each of whom is the chief pastor of one or more congregations; the ministers who serve as teachers of God's Word and as assistant pastors of the congregation; the deacons who assist the elders in administering the ordinances and who have charge of administering the alms of the church. Mennonites also point to Heb. 6:2 where the doctrine of laying on of hands is placed on an equal basis with those of baptism, resurrection, and eternal judgment.<sup>19</sup>

It is also forbidden by Holy Scripture for Christians to go to the courts of the land to gain their "rights". The New Testament advises it is better for Christians to suffer injustice than to achieve their rights by resorting to litigation.<sup>20</sup> This position results in a particular application of the broad principle of love and nonresistance which are basic in the Mennonite churches. The Scriptural proof is 1 Cor. 6:1-7.

The Mennonite Church also accepts literally the familiar words of Paul "Greet ye one another with an holy kiss." (1 Cor. 16:20). Similar admonitions are found in Rom. 16:16; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26; and 1 Pet. 5:14. All of these are considered binding for Christians today since the holy kiss is a symbol of fervent Christian love in the fellowship of saints. Many examples can be quoted from the ancient literature of the church showing that it must have been quite a common custom.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Wenger, op. cit., p. 152.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>21</sup>Martyr's Mirror (Scottsdale, Pa.: Mennonite Publishing House, 1938), pp. 471, 581, 591, etc.

Menno Simons urged adoption of this custom and warned his followers not to greet apostates in this way "lest we have communion with them."<sup>22</sup>

Mennonites also follow the admonition of James 5:14: "Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord." The practice of anointing with oil, however, is not to be confused with the Roman Catholic doctrine of extreme unction. The modern Mennonite custom symbolizes the power of God to heal the body.<sup>23</sup>

It is considered a sinful practice for women to cut their hair or to enter a church without the proper head covering. Proof for this doctrine is found in 1 Cor. 11:2-16:

For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn; but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered....Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered?...But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering.

The unnatural and unscriptural practice of women cutting their hair is condemned on the basis of their exegesis of the verb, *dedotai*, which is in the perfect tense, denoting a permanent blessing. Thus long hair should be a natural covering to accompany the prayer veiling, a symbol of the "preeminence of man in administration and function though not necessarily in importance or personal gifts."<sup>24</sup>

Subsequent chapters will show that Mennonite theologians apply the same methods of interpretation to support and establish all doctrines and customs of their church.

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<sup>22</sup>Works, II, 278.

<sup>23</sup>Wenger, op. cit., p. 151.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 160.

## CHAPTER IV

### VARIOUS DOCTRINES OF THE AMISH MENNONITE CHURCH

The doctrinal position of the modern Amish Mennonite Church can be learned from the Confession of Dortrecht drawn up in 1632 and the writings of two outstanding Anabaptist leaders, Menno Simons and Dietrich Philip (d. 1568). The latter wrote numerous tracts and treatises on fundamental doctrines, the most extensive being his Enchiridion. This remains perhaps the most typical exposition of conservative Anabaptist theology to the present day. Dirk Philip is particularly popular among the Old Order Amish of America because of his great stress on two doctrines, Meidung and footwashing, both of which are scrupulously observed to this day by these people.

Mennonites also acknowledge the Confession of Waterland, drawn up in the Dutch language by two of their ministers, John Ris (Hans de Rys) and Lubbert Gerardi (Gerritsz). This confession contains forty articles having in addition to the common doctrines of Protestant theology, those which are peculiarly Mennonite or Amish.<sup>1</sup> This chapter will discuss from a Mennonite standpoint those doctrines which are, to a certain extent, common in most branches of Protestantism today.

Except for a small party of Anabaptists labeled Antitrinitarian, all the Amish and Mennonites have consistently confessed the Triune God. There can be no doubt that Jesus, the Son, was understood by early

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<sup>1</sup>Philip Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1899), I, 844.

followers of Menno as well as the modern, to be the true God, begotten of the Father, divine and incomprehensible, spiritual, eternal, and inexpressible, "the first born of every creature, the eternal Wisdom, the power of God, the everlasting Light, the eternal Truth, the everlasting Life,...the eternal Word."<sup>2</sup> They believed and officially taught the plain testimony of the prophets, evangelists, and apostles that Jesus Christ, with His heavenly Father, was truly God. In order to maintain this doctrine against heretical teachings, the Obbanites, even before Menno joined them, proposed a view of Christ's incarnation which must have seemed peculiar to their contemporaries. According to this view it was held that Christ did not receive His flesh and blood from Mary, His mother, but that the whole Christ, God and Man, Man and God, is the Son of God and is in heaven. They wanted to guard against the view that Jesus could not have been God's Son if He had assumed human flesh and blood. But in their eagerness to uphold the doctrine of the deity of Christ they denied His true humanity.<sup>3</sup>

Mennonite confessions also acknowledge the Holy Spirit as divine with divine attributes, "going forth from the Father and the Son, although He ever remains with God and in God, and is never separated from the being

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<sup>2</sup>The Complete Works of Menno Simons. (Elkhart, Ind.: Mennonite Publishing Co., 1871), II, 183.

<sup>3</sup>E.H.Klotsche and J.T.Mueller, The History of Christian Doctrine (Burlington, Ia.: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1945), p. 222.

of the Father and the Son."<sup>4</sup> Menno came to his doctrine of the Holy Spirit by the testimony of Scripture in the story of Jesus' baptism, the appearance of the Spirit on Pentecost, and the fact that prophets saw visions and performed miracles through His power. According to Mennonite theology He is the Distributor of divine gifts, a mystery to all mankind, but divine in essence.

According to the theology of Menno Simons natural man can comprehend no spiritual truths for he is basically a stranger to God, destitute, and without communion with God. His mind is blinded and overcome by his depravity. In no sense can he approach God for there is nothing of a divine nature dwelling in him.<sup>5</sup> His conception of natural man, however, was radically different from the doctrine of complete corruption and guilt which Luther taught.

Menno distinguished between four different kinds of sin. The first category, according to Menno, is the corrupt nature or inherent sin, that which alienates man from God and renders him a complete stranger to God. This kind of sin, however, is not condemnatory since, for Christ's sake, it is not actually counted as sin.<sup>6</sup> Article IV of the Waterland Confession also admits hereditary sin but denies its guilt.

The second classification of sin includes the acts of sin such as adultery, fornication, avarice, debauchery, hatred, envy, lying, theft,

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<sup>4</sup>Works, II, 186 f.

<sup>5</sup>Works, I, 232.

<sup>6</sup>John C. Wenger, Glimpses of Mennonite History and Doctrine (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1947), p. 172.



murder, and idolatry. All men are susceptible to these sins but the regenerate, by true repentance, have been renewed and can resist these sins. There are, however, occasions when even the redeemed will fall into error. Therefore a third classification includes the human frailties, the mistakes and stumblings which even Christians commit. This group includes the hasty, angry words, the licentious thoughts, and the untempered actions. All of these are sins, even when the unregenerate are guilty, but the Lord will not condemn these unintentional shortcomings committed contrary to the will, "out of mere thoughtlessness and frailty."<sup>7</sup> Article VII of the Waterland Confession also agrees with this doctrine of Menno. The fourth kind of sin is that of becoming an apostate, that is, of a Mennonite leaving the Mennonite Church. This doctrine has, of course, contributed greatly to the solidarity of the Mennonite Church.

The whole doctrine of sin is summarized by Menno in this way: "If this inherent sin is to lose its effect and actual sins be forgiven, then we must believe the Word of the Lord, be regenerated by faith, and thus by virtue of the new birth, by true repentance resist the inherent sin, die unto actual sin and be pious."<sup>8</sup> From this and similar statements it is evident that salvation is dependent upon man himself and upon his repentance or condition of heart. It is true that Article VII of the Waterland Confession teaches that God predestined and created all men for

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<sup>7</sup>Works, II, 312.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 314.

for salvation (omnes decrevit et creavit ad salutem), that He provided the remedy for all, that Christ died for all, and that God saves all who believe and persevere. Apparently, however, Mennonites of the present generation interpret the Waterland Confession differently.

Mennonite theologians have always held that it is impossible to attain the favor of God without the forgiveness of sins. But they also believe that forgiveness of sins is just as impossible without the repentance which Scripture requires throughout the Old and the New Testaments. Although the Mennonites teach New Testament finality and the abolition of the Old Covenant, they resort to Joel 2:12-14 where it reads in part: "...Render your heart and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger...." The Old Testament is quoted profusely to prove that repentance precedes forgiveness.<sup>9</sup> This position of the Amish Mennonite Church is summarized by the eminent Mennonite writer, John F. Funk:

Forgiveness of sins can only be granted to him who sincerely repents and becomes willing to forsake all that is opposed to the will of God and to do all that God commands him to do...When a person, by the grace of God and the cooperating influence of the Holy Spirit, is brought into this state of mind, he is converted....God has given him a new heart, a clean heart, and renewed a right spirit within him. He is now no longer under the condemnation of sin.<sup>10</sup>

This regeneration is effected in people's hearts by the Holy Spirit who renews, pierces, and converts the heart. Mennonites apply John 3

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<sup>9</sup>Cf. Job 42:6; 1 Kings 8:47-50.

<sup>10</sup>John F. Funk, The Mennonite Church and Her Accusers (Elkhart, Ind.: Mennonite Publishing Co., 1878), p. 151 f.

in this way:

It is evident that we become the children of God by a spiritual birth; but we surely cannot be born of the Spirit without becoming partakers of or possessing the Spirit.... Every man is prompted or moved and led by some power or motive; some inward, hidden principle, and this hidden or unseen power in man is called the spirit of man.<sup>11</sup>

It is God who speaks through His Holy Spirit to convince the souls of men of their sin and after their repentance to comfort them. Thus, in the final analysis, the indwelling of the third person of the Godhead plus the cooperation of man's corrupt will causes man's salvation. Jesus and His atonement are, in effect, given the second place. In this way man is changed from the wicked nature of Adam into the good nature of Christ.<sup>12</sup>

It is of utmost importance that man attain this nature of Christ through repentance because renewal of the mind was the first commandment of Jesus as we see from Matthew 4:17. Not only was this His first order of direction but also His last as we learn from Luke 24:46,47. This repentance was to be preached in all the world by the apostles (Acts 17:30) in order to produce "fruits meet for repentance." (Matt. 3:8). In other words, it was to be a preaching whereby an entire change for the best takes place; whereby the corruption of the heart is replaced by fervent love. When a man is transformed in his heart by the Spirit of God, he is changed from "pride to humility; from incontinence to chastity; from hatred to love; from covetousness to liberality; from the habit of lying and cheating to truth and honesty. He is transformed from darkness to

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>12</sup>Works, II, 215.

light; rescued from the power of Satan and converted to God."<sup>13</sup>

By this spiritual birth we participate in the spirit of Christ and consequently partake of His holy nature. The new life or discipleship, not faith, is considered the very essence of Christianity. (Matt. 11:29). All faithful Christians or disciples are described as a faithful "following after" (Nachfolge) of Christ, who demands a resolute obedience to the ethical demands of the New Testament. Works are given the preeminence over faith for "where there is no discipleship, there is no saving faith."<sup>14</sup> Thus the essence of Christianity is the realization of God's will in the lives of Christian disciples. The new life must be in evidence for the glory of God and the salvation of the lost.

It was because of this conception of church membership as a personal commitment to an earnest Christian life that the Mennonites insisted on believers' baptism. Since infants could make no commitment to Christ or assume the obligations of church membership, it was considered useless to baptize them.<sup>15</sup> Mennonite theologians also see no reason for infant baptism because they do not believe the damnability of original sin. They do not deny that inherent sin exists but it goes unpunished by a merciful God. According to Menno Simons, the baptism of infants is the baptism of the antichrist but "the promise of Jesus Christ assures us of the sal-

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<sup>13</sup>Funk, op. cit., p. 64.

<sup>14</sup>Wenger, op. cit., p. 174 f.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 167.

vation of our little children if they die and depart from here. . When they understand God's Word and believe it, Scripture directs them to be baptized." (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:16).<sup>16</sup>

There is no divine efficacy in the ceremony of baptism. It is merely the sign of a new covenant established between the new disciple and God or the external seal and symbol of discipleship. Baptism is merely another New Testament command of our Lord which must be obeyed. No special powers or salutary effects are bestowed upon the recipient as Menno writes:

Not that we believe in the remission of sins through baptism; by no means. Because by baptism we cannot obtain faith and repentance; neither do we receive the forgiveness of sins, nor peace, nor liberty of conscience. But we testify thereby that we have repented, received pardon and faith in Christ. In short, had we forgiveness of sins and peace of conscience through outward ceremonies and elements then the reality would be superceded and His merits made of no effect.<sup>17</sup>

While the outward ceremony is absolutely worthless, it is the inward baptism with heavenly fire and the Holy Spirit by which we are renewed and quickened unto a life of obedience to God. The outward ceremony is nothing more than an evidence of the obedience which is of faith. Baptism symbolizes the convert's faith in the power of Christ to cleanse from the guilt of sin though the sinner receives no forgiveness from baptism.

The Lord's Supper is also described in a symbolic way. It has been ordained by Christ for the penitent, believing, and regenerate child of God in order to symbolize his faith in Christ as the One who has given His

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<sup>16</sup>Works, II, 318.

<sup>17</sup>Works, I, 28.

life for the redemption of his sins. It is a memorial to Christ by which

We are to put ourselves in remembrance of the mercy and merits of Christ, with bread and wine, which represents the communion of believers; for as the bread, from many particles through the fire, is made unto one bread, so also are the believers, by the power of the fire of the love of God...made to be members of the body of Christ.<sup>18</sup>

Mennonites believe that the Lord instituted the two symbols of baptism and the Lord's Supper in order that they might be encouraged and admonished to lead a godly life. Baptism is to remind them that the Lord baptizes within and accepts sinners in His mercy; Holy Communion symbolizes Jesus' redemption and their acceptance by God.

All those who have made a personal commitment to Christ are considered chosen people of God. They are His saints and children, influenced and guided into all truth by the Spirit of God. Thus all who live in accordance with the divine will and who walk according to the requirements of the divine law are favored by God and counted acceptable to Him. Such people receive the promises of God.<sup>19</sup> In accordance with their doctrine of the church it is taught by Mennonites that the first church on earth was formed by Adam and Eve in the Garden. "The relation existing between God and man in the Garden would seem to countenance the idea that it might be called a church."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Funk, op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>20</sup>Works, II, 83.

Menno Simons taught that the true church of Christ had six marks to distinguish it from all sects and false churches. They are as follows:

...an unadulterated pure doctrine...a Scriptural use of the sacramental signs...the obedience to the Word...unfeigned brotherly love...an unreserved confession of God and Christ...oppression and tribulation for the sake of the Lord's Word.<sup>21</sup>

It is the duty of all those who are united in the brotherhood of the Church to admonish those in danger of falling from grace and to restore those who have. Every Christian is responsible for his neighbor according to Paul in Gal. 6:1: "If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." If the impenitent sinner continues in his sin, Mennonite Christians are to follow the injunction of Paul in 1 Cor. 5:13: "Put away from among yourselves that wicked person." This cardinal doctrine of Meidung or shunning has always sharply distinguished the Mennonites from all other churches. The Seventeenth Article of the Confession of Dort is very explicit on the purpose behind church discipline:

...we believe and confess that if anyone...is so far fallen as to be separated from God...he must also be shunned so that we may not become defiled...and that he may be ashamed.

Only those who sin openly are in danger of excommunication. Since offense can be given only when a person has become a manifest transgressor of the Law, private sinning is a matter of the conscience, between the

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 162.

sinner and God Himself. Mennonites actually excommunicate no one because "none is cut off or rejected by us or ejected from the communion of believers but those who have already ejected themselves either by false doctrine or by a blamable life away from Christ and His communion."<sup>22</sup>

All church discipline has a threefold purpose, the first of which is to make known to the obdurate sinner his true state before God. Excommunication on Scriptural principles has, of course, full divine sanction. (Matt. 16:18; 18:18). Church discipline is to warn others of the awful potentialities of unrepented sin. It should also make manifest the fact that continued fellowship with such an impenitent transgressor of divine law can influence the righteous to fall into the same error, just as "little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."<sup>23</sup> Finally, excommunication will protect the good name of the Church, the members of which are to glorify God by their sanctified lives.<sup>24</sup>

The doctrine of Meidung or excommunication has received a much greater emphasis among the Amish sects than among any of the other branches of the Mennonite Church. This is due in part to the translation of Dirck Philip's Enchiridion (published in 1910) where rigid and uncompromising regulations are prescribed concerning the ban. The very possibility of being placed under the ban helps the Amishman resist the

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 446.

<sup>23</sup>Gf. 1 Cor. 5:9,11; Rom. 16:17; 2 Thess. 3:14; Titus 3:10,11.

<sup>24</sup>Wenger, op. cit., p. 161.



temptations of the world, be they the lesser evils of attending the theater or smoking a cigarette or the more serious ones of speculating in the stock market, resorting to litigation, or of marrying a non-believer. Whenever an Amishman is unfortunate enough to suffer the force of the *Meidung*, it means complete ostracism in all business, social, religious, and domestic affairs. He becomes literally a heathen man and a publican. "None of his fellow church members may buy anything from him or sell anything to him....His wife and children may not sit at the same table with him."<sup>25</sup> The Church with its spiritual blessings and divine grace is completely closed to him.

Occasionally an Amishman with unusual courage or, perhaps, little regard for the doctrine of *Meidung*, will defy the church's regulations. Such a man was Andrew Yoder who purchased an automobile so that his daughter could be taken for the medical attention she required. This man became a social and religious outcast for a period of five and one half years because his automobile was evidence of his liberal tendencies. Finally Yoder filed suit (another sin) in Wayne County (Ohio) Common Pleas Court against the Bishop and his elders asking that the court force the church officials to discontinue the ban. The court upheld Yoder and ordered the Bishop to restore him to active membership. But God's Law is above court actions. "We ought to obey God rather than men," said the Bishop.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Fredric Klees, The Pennsylvania Dutch (New York, N.Y.: The MacMillan Company, 1950), p. 31 f.

<sup>26</sup>"Mited Man," Time Magazine, I (November 17, 1947), p. 26.

Through the use of the rigid laws of discipline the Mennonites have tried to establish and create a Christian society composed of individuals saved by Christ for the purpose of glorifying God by a life of Christian witnessing. The Church was to maintain its purity through discipline in order to keep it a unified corporate body achieving the will of God for society. This, of necessity, involved a certain withdrawal from the society of the ungodly in order that the Church might be that group in which Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords, could exercise His glorious Kingship.<sup>27</sup> The Kingdom of Christ, however, has no need of force and coercion for it is composed of redeemed Christians mutually concerned for the welfare of their fellow believers. Participation in the extension of that Kingdom was glorified as the highest possible achievement in this life.

The Mennonites teach that all Christians must submit to temporal power in so far as it does not conflict with God's Word. The temporal state conducts its affairs on a sub-Christian level, restraining unregenerate men by the use of authority. On government in the church and state Menno Simons writes:

We teach and confess that we know of no sword nor commotion in the Kingdom or Church of Christ other than the sharp sword of the Spirit, God's Word...which is sharper and more piercing than any two-edged sword....But the sword of worldly policy we leave to those to whom it is committed.<sup>28</sup>

In spite of Mennonite interest in the spiritual welfare of other people, they have been slow to establish missions among non-believers.

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<sup>27</sup>Wenger, op. cit., p. 170.

<sup>28</sup>Works, I, 83.

In general the idea of mission work was frowned upon as a dangerous experiment that might lead to worldliness. It was something new and therefore to be avoided. Some Mennonite leaders were of the opinion that the simplicity of the Gospel could not be maintained in the worldly cities of America.<sup>29</sup> Finally the majority of the Amish and Mennonites of the rural areas were forced to conduct active mission programs in various cities. This was prompted more from a basic need for self-preservation than from any great desire to follow the Great Commission. The first city mission was established in Chicago in 1893 over the protests of many venerable leaders of the Church.<sup>30</sup>

The development of mission interest was marked by bitter controversies and fierce opposition. Gradually interest was stimulated by church publications, relief-work among other Mennonites, aggressive evangelism, the Sunday School movement, and the colleges. This mission work had many salutary effects on the Mennonite Church. It was preserved from the self-centered and complacent attitudes of former years. Outside interests saved the group from further disintegration and obliterated many petty local differences. Generally speaking, missions, with its broadening effects, brought many new and beneficial methods into the Church.<sup>31</sup>

In spite of the general awakening among Mennonite churches, there is still little interest among the Amish groups in America. They have

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<sup>29</sup>J.S.Hartzler, Mennonite Church History (Scottsdale, Pa.: Mennonite Book and Tract Society, 1905), p. 348.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 371.

<sup>31</sup>Edmund G. Kaufman, The Development of the Missionary and Philanthropic Interest among the Mennonites of North America (Berne, Ind.: Mennonite Book Concern, 1931), p. 230 ff.

been content to keep their doctrines among themselves. Due to their violent reaction to the persecutions of an unfriendly world they have maintained severe isolationism and an uncompromising attitude that is to be regretted.<sup>32</sup> In spite of their exclusiveness, superior piety, rigid austerity, and constant vigilance to remain unspotted from the world rather than to save it, these unassuming people have many admirable traits and qualities which their fellow Americans would do well to emulate.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 285.

## CHAPTER V

### DOCTRINES PECULIAR TO THE AMISH MENNONITE CHURCH

The Mennonite Church and its various branches are known better during periods of national and international warfare than at any other time. It is then that these conscientious objectors receive generous publicity, some of it favorable but the greatest amount hostile and critical. This is largely due to a misunderstanding or complete ignorance of the underlying principles which motivate their actions. These peace-loving people derive their doctrine of nonresistance as they derive all of their doctrines, from a literalistic approach to Holy Scripture.

The words of Jesus in Luke 6:27-36 are basic: "...Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, bless them that curse you,...unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other...."<sup>1</sup> Paul agrees with this doctrine when he writes: "See that none render evil for evil unto any man...." (1 Thess. 5:15). Again, when he writes to Timothy, he says, "The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle to all men." (2 Tim. 2:24). The apostle Peter also writes of this doctrine:

For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable to God. For even hereunto were ye called: because also Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an ex-

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Matt. 5:38-48.

ample, that ye should follow His steps. (1 Pet. 2:20,21).

They quote many other passages in support of their doctrine of non-resistance.<sup>2</sup>

Mennonites have always conscientiously followed the Confession of Dortrecht which was one of the first public documents to devote considerable space to the question of defense by force. Since that time non-resistant people the world over have conscientiously submitted to its precepts. Article XIV states:

Regarding revenge and resisting our enemies with the sword we believe and confess that the Lord Jesus Christ has forbidden His disciples and followers all retaliation and revenge, and has commended them not to "return evil for evil railing for railing," but to "put up the sword into the sheath," or as the prophets foretold, "bent them into plow-shares." (Matt. 5:39-44; Is. 2:4; Micah 4:3).

Mennonites also point to their antecedents, the Swiss Brethren Church, and particularly to its founder, Conrad Grebel, for evidence that their doctrine is scripturally sound. Grebel compared his adherents to sheep in the midst of wolves as, indeed, those non-resistant and helpless folk apparently were. "They used neither the worldly sword nor engaged in war since among them taking human life had ceased entirely, for they were no longer under the Old Covenant."<sup>3</sup> Other leaders of similar convictions usually described the Christian's weapons for warfare

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Rom. 12:17-21; John 18:36; Heb. 12:24; 1 Pet. 3:8,9,13,17.

<sup>3</sup> John C. Wenger, Glimpses of Mennonite History and Doctrine (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1947), p. 153.

as virtue, morality, or noble character. They were to studiously avoid the carnal weapons of the world and arm themselves instead with the "armor of God, with the weapons of righteousness... and with Christian patience."<sup>4</sup> Only in that way was victory over the enemy possible.

Outstanding leaders of the Anabaptist and Mennonite movements have asked how a man could possibly serve in military camps, either in peace or war, when the Lord Himself had taken away the sword. In disarming Peter, Jesus forbade all disciples to engage in actual combat. A characteristic statement of Menno Simons, a prolific writer on the subject, is as follows:

The regenerated do not go to war, nor engage in strife.  
They are the children of peace...and know of no war....  
Their sword is the sword of the Spirit which they wield  
with a good conscience through the Holy Ghost.<sup>5</sup>

This attitude toward resistance and aggression typifies the prevailing one down through the centuries. A catechism of the Friesian Mennonites of Holland, published in 1747, devotes a special section comprising fifty-two questions to the subject of vengeance and war. It is commonly taught in this and other catechisms that the Savior prescribed complete and entire nonresistance, that even the use of force for self-protection was strictly forbidden to everyone who lives under the New Covenant. All Christians, therefore, are to follow these precepts of the Lord literally, that is, when someone has mistreated or

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

abused them, Christians are to "turn the other cheek." The Friesian catechism also enumerates many practical lessons to be derived from such a procedure, some of which are:

That I should in my patience possess my soul (Luke 21:9) and follow my Savior in "a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (1 Pet. 3:4); that if I am reviled, I revile not again; if I suffer, I threaten not, but commit myself to Him that judgeth righteously. (1 Pet. 2:22,23).<sup>6</sup>

This has been the Mennonite policy in peace and war. It is to their credit that they have taken such a firm stand in the face of overwhelming odds and frightening opposition. Many other thinking Christians have sought to solve the problems involved but few are willing to cling to their beliefs with the tenacity and courage characteristic of the Mennonites and Anish. For then it is not so much "how far to take" the New Testament verses on nonresistance but rather, "if one seeks to obey and follow Jesus' words at all, can one participate in warfare at any time?" Mennonites believe that there cannot be a more brazen or presumptuous violation of the law of love than the waging of modern warfare.

On many occasions Mennonites have suffered shameful indignities, brutal hardships, and unspeakable tortures, both mental and physical, rather than sacrificing one iota of their beliefs. Publicity was particularly unfavorable during World War I when the creeds of nonresistant churches first came to the attention of the American public because of complete mobilization. It has been said that the "most charitable epithet applied to them was that of religious fanatics."<sup>7</sup> When it be-

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<sup>6</sup>Eric Miller, "Our Peace Policy", Mennonite Quarterly Review, III (January 1929), 26-33.

<sup>7</sup>W. Henry Smith, The Story of the Mennonites (Berne, Ind.: Mennonite Book Concern, c.1911), p. 806.



came evident that Quakers, Mennonites, and others of a similar nature, were steadfast in their beliefs, Congress enacted a conscription law on May 18, 1917 which had an exemption clause in it. It stipulated exemption on purely religious grounds but added that "no person shall be exempted from service in any capacity that the President shall declare non-combatant."<sup>8</sup> Those of the peace churches who were more liberal in their views were drafted and sent to detention camps for work which was military only in the sense that it contributed to the training of other soldiers. Many conservative Mennonites, however, considered such membership in the military machine as sinful as actual combat because it also committed such a person to killing as much as if he had entered battle as an active participant.<sup>9</sup>

Strong pressure was exerted on the nonresistant churches to support various drives throughout the nation, such as Liberty Bond campaigns, Red Cross and YMCA fund drives. Leading theologians of the peace churches finally declared this inconsistent with true Mennonite policies established by the fathers. They wanted to remain unspotted and uncontaminated from the world in every possible way. Ultimately Mennonites agreed to accept any service which was entirely separate from the military organization. For this purpose the government created Civilian Public Service camps and units for Mennonites and other conscientious objectors. The

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 795.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 808.

church itself also organized its own relief program. In these latter endeavors the nonresistant churches of America acquitted themselves admirably. Their annual contributions amounted to many thousands of dollars.

These conscientious objectors have had comparatively few disagreements with the secular authorities in non-militaristic countries like the United States and Canada. Usually there is disagreement only in time of war. Since nations like Paraguay and Canada guarantee them complete military exemption also during wartime, there have, in recent years, been rather large migrations to these countries from the United States. There are also instances when Mennonites have forsaken their traditional doctrines because of extreme pressure from secular authorities. This has been known to happen in Brazil and Argentine where military training is compulsory.<sup>10</sup>

Although nonresistant churches have consistently maintained their doctrines in a passive way, content to absorb the jibes and insults of an unfriendly world, they have just as consistently worked for the cause of world peace, sparing neither time nor expense. Many of these people became interested in a World Alliance for International Friendship organized in 1914 on a non-denominational basis. Its chief purpose was to advance the cause of peace by enlisting the support of the churches and awakening the consciences of the public and the government against war. Definite strides were taken toward the complete outlawry of war. The organization believes that "war is morally wrong and that it always was wrong

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<sup>10</sup>Wenger, op. cit., p. 157.

because it is in violation of God's Moral Law....the individual actually sins when he takes any part in war.<sup>11</sup>

All steps to outlaw war have, of course, ended in failure. People have been content to hurl vicious names at these peace-loving people, especially when America is fighting tyranny and dictatorship. The Amish, in particular, have been attacked for their principles despite the fact that the government recognizes their doctrine, legally and constitutionally. It has been suggested that one should point out to these people that it would be to their advantage to defend our democracy against tyranny since their way of life could not exist under another form of government as well as it can in America.<sup>12</sup> This type of appeal will fall on deaf Amish and Mennonite ears. The martyrdom and sacrifices of their forefathers has been glorified to such a degree that they would count it a privilege to suffer for their faith. They care for this life and what it offers only in the degree to which it prepares them for life in the Heavenly City above. They might possibly consider it a blessing to suffer persecution under an adverse regime for it would provide them the opportunity to prove their faith and confidence in God.

The nonresistant churches have also maintained their principles in the sphere of church-state relations. In brief, their position has always been complete separation of church and state. This does not mean that Mennonites favor complete withdrawal from all forms of contact with

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<sup>11</sup>Guy F. Hershberger, "Report on Peace Conference", Mennonite Quarterly Review, II (April 1928), 152 ff.

<sup>12</sup>Dieter Cunz, The Maryland Germans, A History (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1948), p. 422.

non-believers as the monastics believe. It means withdrawal from participation in the non-Christian practices of the evil society surrounding them. They definitely feel that all fellowship with organizations associated with the state in any way should be avoided. This includes any church under the auspices of a civil government. This doctrine developed from bitter memories of former relations with state-churches who "instigated much of the persecution to which they were subjected during and following the Reformation."<sup>13</sup> Their doctrine of separatism excludes all fellowships and friendships which develop out of business relations, secret orders, and social activities. Christians are to avoid such fellowship lest their spiritual life be weakened and their loyalty to God destroyed.

Mennonites believe that state governments are necessary only because non-believers (those who are not Mennonites) exist in the state. The state has been ordained by God to curb the coarse outbursts of sin in a society of evil doers. The Schleithem Confession of Faith declares, "The state is ordained of God outside the perfection of Christ." They believe that if all members of society were Christian, God would not have ordained civil government nor would it be necessary. Therefore there is no room for government, as such, in the Church of Christ.<sup>14</sup> But since the vast majority of the human race is still unconverted, civil governments are necessary to society. In spite of cogent arguments to the effect that

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<sup>13</sup>Sanford C. Yoder, "For Conscience Sake," Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History (Goshen, Ind.: The Mennonite Historical Society, 1940), IV, 27.

<sup>14</sup>Wenger, op. cit., p. 153.

Amish-Mennonite beliefs could not exist without the protection of a benevolent government, they apparently consider the state only as a necessary evil. Their attitude toward the government is usually characterized by a certain other-worldliness consistent of their perspective of life in general.

The Waterland Confession of 1610 presents the Mennonite case for and against civil government. The article on the Office of the Civil Magistracy or Government reads in part:

The worldly authority, or civil magistracy is a necessary ordinance of God....The Lord Jesus did not institute the office of the magistracy in His spiritual kingdom, the Church of the New Testament, nor has He included it in the offices peculiar to His Church. (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11). He did not call His disciples or followers to be worldly kings, princes, rulers, or authorities. (Matt. 20:25-28; Luke 22:25-27)....But He, whom they were bidden by a voice from heaven to hear, has called them to follow His non-resistant life. (Heb. 12:2,3; 1 Pet. 2:21-23).<sup>15</sup>

It is significant to note that this confession, written by the most liberal element of seventeenth century Mennonitism, agrees in substance with the most conservative. On the doctrine of separation Amish and Mennonites are in close harmony.

The non-resistant people cannot be accused of poor citizenship despite their aversion to civil authority. Nevertheless, the Amish cannot be said to possess what men usually call civic virtues. It is a rare occasion when they participate in political affairs on a local or national scale. The most conservative feel that any participation in politics would be inconsistent with true religion. Only when an important

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<sup>15</sup>H.S.Bender, "Church and State", Mennonite Quarterly Review, I (October 1927), 3.

moral question is involved in the campaign will they vote or try to influence others. The prohibition is a case in point. "Nearly every Amishman felt it his duty to cast his vote in favor of the law."<sup>16</sup>

It is also contrary to genuine religion to assume the duties of public office although several Amishman have been known to serve on county school boards. Their strict and uncompromising attitude on swearing has, on occasion, given them trouble with civil authorities. They have always insisted on the right of affirmation. This privilege was granted to the Quakers of the colonies but the Mennonites had to petition for it. The first real problem was introduced by the Declaration of Independence which severed all connections between the colony and England. The Pennsylvania Assembly

passed an act on June 13, 1777 demanding all inhabitants of the former province to take an oath of allegiance to the new sovereign state. Refusal to take the oath before the next July meant imprisonment and/or fine. Continued refusal meant exile from the state and confiscation of property. Petitions were circulated, however, in 1778, which finally convinced the government that the hesitancy of these "Plain People" to take the prescribed oath was due more to their religious convictions than to any disaffection to the present government.<sup>17</sup>

Some neutral observers have detected signs that the traditional isolationism of the Amish Mennonite groups is breaking down. They feel that the seeds of liberalism have begun to grow and that time will bring them around to the prevailing views on war, nonresistance, government, and the like. Such statements are made on the basis of world conferences

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<sup>16</sup>Barthinius Wick, The Amish Mennonites, A Sketch of Their Origin and of Their Settlement in Iowa (Iowa City, Ia.: State Historical Society, 1892), p. 48.

<sup>17</sup>Smith, op. cit., p. 787 f.

these people have held in recent years. Such a convention in 1948 was attended by representatives from Europe, Asia, and North and South America. Indications are that many leaders of the Mennonite Church are wrestling with the problems of labor-management relations, state supremacy, entertainment, leisure time, and war. Apparently they discuss these problems with the view toward making a contribution to the American way of life. At any rate, it seems probable that modern Mennonites will show greater cooperation with other Christians than they have in the past.<sup>18</sup>

Although recent movements within the Amish Mennonite Church tend to eliminate barriers which have existed since the Reformation, their whole theology must be examined in the light of their doctrine of Bearing the Cross of Christ. These people view life entirely different from other people. Life is only a preparation for a more glorious existence in the Temple above. Some have characterized them as having an unhealthy desire for martyrdom. Impartial observers would certainly find such an impression inescapable. Menno Simons thoroughly imbued his followers with that philosophy of life. This is one of Menno's typical statements:

Yea, this is and remains the only narrow and straight way and door through which we must all enter, neither can we desire in any other way to enter with the saints into eternal life, rest, and peace...Yes, my brethren, would you be the people and disciples of the Lord you must also bear the cross of Christ.<sup>19</sup>

It has always been a source of pride to Mennonites that their ancestors have been eager to endure hunger, affliction, persecution, the

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<sup>18</sup>C. Krahn, "Mennonites Hold World Conference," The Christian Century, LXV (September 1, 1948), 886-8.

<sup>19</sup>The Complete Works of Menno Simons (Elkhart, Ind.: Mennonite Publishing Co., 1871), I, 192.

cross and death for the testimony of Jesus. "They desire to bury the flesh with its lusts, and arise with Christ to newness of life, even as Paul says in Romans 6...."<sup>20</sup> This philosophy has become so thoroughly implanted in all Mennonite hearts that persecution became the earmark of the true children of God. "Only those who were truly saints excited the opposition of the world. And only those who were born of the Spirit were willing to bear the Cross."<sup>21</sup>

Their isolationism might be disintegrating but it will surely be a long process. As long as the only way to glory is the way of the cross, Mennonites will hold fast to their distinctive doctrines. They know, as well as other Christians, that the abandonment of nonresistance, non-conformity, and complete separation will also eliminate their doctrine of the Cross or suffering. And that, according to their theology, would eliminate their "way to glory".

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>21</sup> Wenger, op. cit., p. 178.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE DOCTRINE OF NON-CONFORMITY AND DAILY LIFE

The most distinctive and characteristic doctrine of the Amish Mennonite Church is their rigid conformity to the principles of non-conformity prescribed by all bishops and leaders of the church since Menno Simons. On the basis of this doctrine non-believers have hurled their most stinging epithets on these people. This is the doctrine which sets them apart from all other people who inhabit the Christian world. Non-conformity affects and controls every detail of daily life. It is grounded, not only on the strictest literalistic interpretation of Scripture, but also on a profound fear of the sin of worldliness. This, together with pride, constitute the cardinal sins in the Mennonite vocabulary. Consequently, there is abnormal stress on the virtue of humility and unusual emphasis on non-conformity to the world or mass of unregenerate people.

The Amish Mennonite doctrine of non-conformity must be understood on the basis of the total perspective through which they view temporal life. This life on earth is certain to bring hardships to God's people therefore the regenerate resign themselves to persecution knowing that eternity with its greater blessings lies before them. The Amish regard changes as declension not progress, as conformity to the worldliness and spirit of the times. They identify the culture and civilization of sixteenth century Europe as the kind recommended by Scripture. Only through a legalistic observance of the cultural standards established by Menno Simons can the blight of worldliness be overcome. Christianity must be identified with the outmoded culture and the ancient customs of

the Old World. That was the way to achieve the will of God in society and in the lives of Christians. "Their distinctive life patterns are not sociological aids for the perpetuation of their way of life; they are believed to be the concrete application of a Biblical separation from the world."<sup>1</sup>

The general attitude of the Amish-Mennonite people has been to consider anything and anybody outside their communion as worldly and therefore dangerous. The sin of worldliness as well as pride has been identified with fashionable clothing, fashionably furnished houses, light frivolous talking, and worldly amusements. They believe that Christians should earn their living by farming or in work directly related to the soil. True Christians will conscientiously avoid all signs of becoming "worldly or liberal." When the situation needed correction, the General Conference of Mennonites advised its ministers to regularly point out from the pulpit those sins which constitute worldliness. This was to be done "that there may be no misunderstanding as to what is meant by modest apparel or worldly conformity."<sup>2</sup>

The Amish and Mennonites also derive their doctrine of nonconformity from Scripture. One of the principle passages is 1 Pet. 3:3,4:

Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>John C. Wenger, Glimpses of Mennonite History and Doctrine (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1947), p. 122.

<sup>2</sup>Edmund G. Kaufman, The Development of the Missionary and Philanthropic Interest among the Mennonites of North America (Berns, Ind.: Mennonite Book Concern, 1931), p. 185.

<sup>3</sup>cf. Matt. 6:28-31; 1 Tim. 2:9,10.

Menno describes any interpretation of these verses beside the literal one as "earthly mindedness." Such a person is impure, sensual, and disobedient to the Word. All New Testament passages which give any kind of command are binding on believers today just as in Jesus' day.<sup>4</sup>

Menno comments on the passage from Paul's epistle in this way:

They say that they believe, and yet there are no limits nor bounds to their accursed wantonness, foolish pomp, show of silks, velvet, costly clothes, gold rings, chains, silver bells, pins, buttons, curiously adorned shirts, handkerchiefs, collars, veils, aprons, velvet shoes, slippers, and such like foolish finery; never regarding that the enlightened apostles, Peter and Paul, have in plain and express words forbidden this to all Christian women. If this is forbidden to women, how much more then should men abstain from it, who are the leaders and heads of their women, notwithstanding all this they still want to be called the Christian Church.<sup>5</sup>

In the kingdom of Christ no display is made of expensive clothing or jewelry as is done by the proud, wicked world. Mennonite Christians consider their outward display of simplicity and restraint as an indication of a corresponding inner simplicity of heart pleasing to God. They frown upon any exhibition of outward finery and ornamentation as a concession to the proud world.

It is remarkable that the Amish and Mennonites have been able to maintain such close conformity in practice and application of this doctrine. Today people of these churches still wear buttonless coats because buttons are places where the "devil can hang something on."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>The Complete Works of Menno Simons (Elkhart, Ind.: Mennonite Publishing Co., 1871), I, 71.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 144.

<sup>6</sup>Ammon Monroe Aurand, Jr., Little Known Facts about the Amish and the Mennonites (Harrisburg, Pa.: The Aurand Press, 1938), p. 5.

This is described as a revolt against the culture of seventeenth century Europe where the button was a conspicuous ornament on military uniforms. Also because of their doctrine of nonresistance the Mennonites eliminated the button from their clothing.<sup>7</sup> This custom is still followed by many conservative Amish in America while the liberal element of the Mennonite Church has generally adopted the American style of dress. In modern times it has become more and more difficult to maintain this separation from the world because their young people have more contact with outsiders. Since many were lost to the Amish Church, a Dress Committee was appointed as late as 1911.<sup>8</sup>

Their picturesque clothing is an outward symbol of the simple, plain life they wish to lead. The Amish women wear outer garments of identical styling and pattern, all of which are completely devoid of ornamentation. According to the ordinance of 1 Cor. 11:2-16 Amish women are required to wear prayer caps as a special head covering. All young women are required to begin wearing this prayer cap when they join the church. All kinds of jewelry, even wedding rings, are strictly forbidden. Women are forbidden to cut their hair on the basis of Paul's injunction to the Corinthians. According to Lev. 19:27 men are not permitted to trim their hair except for the mustache which is shaved for the purpose of cleanliness. The passage reads, "Ye shall not round the corners of thy head, neither shalt thou mar the corners of thy beard."

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<sup>7</sup>Dieter Cuns, The Maryland Germans. A History (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1948), p. 420.

<sup>8</sup>Kaufman, op. cit., p. 184 f.

Style changes occur only when certain materials are impossible to acquire and the bishops of the church have given the matter proper consideration. Thus certain innovations have crept into the church but they are rare and hardly noticeable to an outsider. Some have said that these "Plain People" dress themselves like the clergy of the Middle Ages. The first leaders of the Mennonites are said to have imitated the Catholic clergymen in discipline as well as in dress. "There is no doubt that illustrations of the clergy of that day would look very much like the Mennonites and Amish of today."<sup>9</sup>

The Amish doctrine of non-conformity, of course, reaches every detail of life in the Amish communities. In general, the church laws forbid everything which was not used or invented by their Anabaptist forefathers. There are exceptions to this statement among the liberal Mennonites but those known for their conservatism still cling to their simple way of life. Owning an automobile, for instance, is strictly forbidden although an Amishman may ride in his unbelieving neighbor's machine, providing he uses it for business not pleasure. The Amish may own old fashioned buggies or carriages provided they are stripped of needless affectations, such as dashboards.<sup>10</sup>

Amish homes are models of cleanliness but they are almost completely barren. The little furniture allowed must not be upholstered because too much comfort would tend to increase laziness, the besetting sin of the non-believing world. Large windowpanes, curtains and draperies,

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<sup>9</sup>Lurand, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>10</sup>Berenice Steinfeldt, The Amish of Lancaster County (Lancaster, Pa.: Arthur G. Steinfeldt, c.1940), p. 21.

furnaces and all types of ornaments are not permitted in the Amish home. A lightning rod on the building would indicate a lack of faith in God. All photographs and portraits are condemned as worldly because the Bible forbids them in Ex. 20:4: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath...." All life and fire insurance is regarded with suspicion because it "does not become us to mitigate a punishment that the Almighty may have chosen to put upon us."<sup>11</sup> Church ordinances do not as yet cover all situations that might confront an Amishman. They are, for instance, undecided whether gas and electricity should be permitted in the home. These modern conveniences are generally condemned, however, since there are no Biblical ordinances which condone their use.

Some Amish ordinances lead to amusing inconsistencies. Telephones are regarded as too worldly if they are installed on an Amishman's property. But the Plain People may use them if they are located on public property or if they can persuade an unbelieving neighbor to install one on his. An Amishman has even been known to contribute to a more worldly neighbor to convince him of the value of a telephone.<sup>12</sup> It is proper to attend circuses because God made the animals. An Amishman is not at fault if he buys a ticket to see the animals and has to watch the whole performance. Under other circumstances such entertainment would be forbidden. The Amish officials neither grant permission in

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<sup>11</sup>Guns, *op. cit.*, p. 420.

<sup>12</sup>Fredric Klees, The Pennsylvania Dutch (New York, N.Y.: The MacMillan Company, 1950), p. 43.

these cases nor do they refuse it.

The Amish and Mennonites have encountered serious difficulties in their efforts to counteract the inroads modern amusements have made on their way of life. Their ingenuity has been taxed to the limit to devise means of keeping the young people away from worldly entertainment. Large numbers of them have been lost to the church because of strict non-conformity on these points. It is still true, however, that "only a back-sliding Amishman will be seen at theaters, moving pictures, county fairs, amusement parks, dances or sporting events. Swimming is the only sport not frowned upon by the church."<sup>13</sup> Their general principles regarding worldly recreation are governed by 1 John 2:15,16:

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.<sup>14</sup>

A leading historian and domestician of the Mennonite Church summarizes the church's view toward motion pictures in this way:

... the motion picture industry with its sensuous starts divorcing and remarrying continually, caters to those human desires which are not spiritual. Commercial motion pictures, by gratifying the carnal mind, deaden spiritual life and draw the human heart away from God and His Word. Moving pictures create in young people false standards of life in general. Particularly do they portray impossible economic standards and an utterly unchristian view of courtship and of home life.<sup>15</sup>

In order to meet the problems the world presents, the Amish and Mennonites have blended together social activities and recreation with their regular

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<sup>13</sup>Steinfeldt, op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>14</sup>Cf. Rom. 8:12,13.

<sup>15</sup>Wenger, op. cit., p. 160.

church meetings on Sunday evenings. These meetings usually begin immediately after services and last for several hours. Here the young people conduct their Sunday evening "singings" or fellowship hours. Since these are practically the only opportunities Amish young people have for social life, it is not surprising that the church, in recent years, has lost heavily to outside influences. Another social event of the season is the public sale or auction. Although very popular, they do not substitute for the more exciting entertainment and recreation offered by the unbelieving world. Amish young people are endowed with as much human nature and the same evil inclinations as their more worldly neighbors.

The Amish have more or less successfully resisted the invasion of worldly customs by limiting the contacts of their children and young people with outsiders. This has been effectively done by maintaining the German language in home, church, and school. The doctrines of separation and non-conformity have influenced Amish leaders to strongly oppose state-sponsored schools. They believe that eight years of education is sufficient for any person who intends to live according to the Biblical ideal of life, namely, by farming. More education would lead the young people away from the true source of life. For that reason higher education is virtually unknown among the more conservative Amish. They do not want their children to learn to wish for anything more than that prescribed by the Amish Church. Excessive contact with unbelieving children might destroy those beliefs and customs their elders have worked so hard to preserve.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Guns, op. cit., p. 419.



The doctrine of non-conformity has given the Amish a profound distrust of all human learning. "The wisdom of the world is foolishness before God."<sup>17</sup> These objections to education have led to disputes with the government on several occasions. In 1936 the state of Pennsylvania borrowed money (violation of another Amish principle) for a new consolidated school building in East Lampeter Township in the heart of the Amish district. In addition to federal aid and education beyond grade eight, this proposal included the evil of sending children to school in buses and what they feared most, intimate contacts with children of other faiths. In order to preserve their way of life, the Amish migrated to Maryland where no more than seven years of education was required by the state.<sup>18</sup>

In order to preserve their religion, the Amish and Hennonites have tenaciously clung to farming as their way of life. They have thus far resisted the lure of an urban existence realizing that their principles of non-conformity can be carried out better where they have fewer contacts with strangers. This is perhaps a superficial reason for their emphasis on rural life. Much deeper is the realization that "their rural existence gives them a greater possibility of leading a life on Biblical principles....they know that the group will dissolve if they loosen their bonds with the soil."<sup>19</sup> These simple people are known throughout the country as the best farmers of the land. It has become

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<sup>17</sup>Kloes, op. cit., p. 294.

<sup>18</sup>Steinfeldt, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>19</sup>Guns, op. cit., p. 419.

proverbial to refer to Amish districts as "garden spots." They are indeed industrious and conscientious workers as they would be in anything they might undertake. There are good reasons why these people are unusually successful. One reason is, of course, that laziness is a cardinal sin of the Amish religion. Another is that the persecutions which they have been forced to endure have driven them from the better lands to poorer sections. Their ingenuity and industry have been thoroughly tested. If they had failed, they would have lost their lives. Therefore constant experimentation brought them outstanding success although they achieved that success with considerably less modern machinery than their worldly neighbors. In all of this, their deep-seated religious ties and convictions bound them together with commendable spirit and fortitude. The tenets of their faith were applied to every detail of daily life in such a way that the greatest number were benefited.

The Amish have the social security the government wants to give the citizens of our country. They have achieved complete independence without any assistance from outside agencies or persons. Their belief in the brotherhood of man is successfully carried out in daily life. When a calamity strikes, other members of the parish unite to help absorb the loss. Charity is a religious duty to such an extent that the Amish take entire care of their aged and sick. None of them is permitted to be enrolled in any public agency. Although they are traditionally opposed to all forms of insurance, the Amish and Mennonites have formed their own Mutual Aid Plan whereby any unfortunate member of the church is guaranteed help and protection equal to that offered by any similar organization of the country. In many respects their way of life

is the nearest thing to Utopia in the world today.

### THE ASIAN CHURCH AND THE FUTURE

The Asian people have many exemplary characteristics which will always be a source of credit to their fellow Americans. They are Christians with the highest kind of moral standards and unusual moral convictions. They are entirely obedient of the Lord's will and His function in their own redemption. Their consciences agonize both social evil and personal sin in kind and discerning. It does not surprise them that other virtuous of America have never fully accepted them for their citizenship is in heaven. As genuine Christians they feel they will never be fully understood. In fact, the Asian people prefer to remain in the world as strangers and pilgrims. Therefore they have never realized their responsibility toward people within their countries. Until recent years interest in missions was negligible among the Romanists while the more conservative Asian have yet to engage in mission work. Not only could they offer something worthwhile to the world but they would also be strengthened from within through mission work.

All Asian people are staunch supporters of their church. A strong bond unites every member to his neighbor in the same spirit of fellowship. The laity are well informed and well indoctrinated. Every believer feels duty bound to master the doctrine of his church so that he can be prepared to give a scriptural answer to any who would question his beliefs. A typical layman understands the distinctive doctrines of his church because he feels he has verified them by constant study

## CHAPTER VII

### THE AMISH CHURCH AND THE FUTURE

The Amish people have many exemplary characteristics which will always be a source of credit to them among their fellow Americans. They are Christians with the highest kind of moral standards and unusual moral earnestness. They are acutely conscious of the Lord's will and its function in their own communities. Their conscience against both social evil and personal sin is keen and discerning. It does not surprise them that other citizens of America have never fully accepted them for their citizenship is in heaven. As genuine Christians they feel they will never be fully understood. In fact, the Amish people prefer to sojourn in the world as strangers and pilgrims. Therefore they have never realized their responsibility toward people outside their communion. Until recent years interest in missions was negligible among the Mennonites while the more conservative Amish have yet to engage in mission work. Not only could they offer something worthwhile to the world but they would also be strengthened from within through mission work.

All Amish people are staunch supporters of their church. A strong bond unites every member to his neighbor in the warm spirit of fellowship. The laity are well informed and well indoctrinated. Every believer feels duty bound to master the doctrines of his church so that he can be prepared to give a scriptural answer to any who would question his beliefs. A typical layman understands the distinctive doctrines of his church because he feels he has verified them by constant study

of the Word. His church, the center of his life, has provided him the strength to overcome his daily problems. In return the Amishman has learned to contribute liberally to its maintenance and support. In recent years the Plain People have acquired a deep sense of responsibility as stewards of all they possess. The general level of spiritual intelligence is very high among the Amish in spite of the fact that they have received little or no education beyond the elementary school. This would seem to guarantee an intelligent and informed laity of the future.

Another strong point in the Amish and Mennonite culture is the home. Being a homemaker and establishing a happy and prosperous home is for them the highest calling on earth. It is a sacred trust from the Lord. The husband takes particular pride in his calling as the head of the home. He regularly conducts family devotion and keeps a watchful eye on the spiritual development of his children. Amish women have no desire to follow a career; their calling as wives and mothers is also a sacred trust from the Lord. When Amish parents succeed in enforcing their principles of non-conformity, the children are perfectly satisfied with life in the Amish community. Thus family life is usually very attractive. The ties between children and parents are rarely dissolved. Cases of unfaithfulness and divorce among the Amish are conspicuous by their absence.

All of this speaks well of the Amish people. Their deep consecration, genuine piety, and sincere Christianity are characteristic of all those who can be classified as Plain People. They have earnestly tried to apply the doctrines of Christ and the New Covenant in their communities. This has been accomplished with considerable success although it

has not been without its uncomfortable moments and bitter battles against the worldliness surrounding them. Extreme pressure through radio and press, in recent years, has given Amish fathers and bishops new problems to solve. The glory of simplicity of life has been challenged by their young people who have discovered the temptations and attractions of the world. As contacts with worldly people and customs increase, Amish elders find it increasingly difficult to preserve their traditional doctrines.

A partial solution might be to delegate greater responsibility to the Amish young people in church work. This would tend to develop the more aggressive spirit which was characteristic of the founders of their religion. Through the development of this initiative the Amish Church of tomorrow need not sacrifice the quiet, inner poety which characterizes them now. Due to the inroads of secular influences they are in danger of losing their independent existence. Greater aggressiveness would assume the obligations of Christian discipleship in the face of a hostile and unfriendly world. The Amish and Mennonites of the future will have to solve more adequately the problem of being in the world without conforming to the spirit of the world.

Liberal elements in the Mennonite Church have criticized those conservative parties in the Amish Church who want to maintain their distinctive doctrine, such as *Meidung*, nonresistance, non-conformity, and separation. More liberal-minded Mennonites believe that "the grounds for Christian fellowship should be widened; unity in essentials

and liberty in non-essentials should be maintained and then let charity prevail over all."<sup>1</sup>

If these principles are applied, there will certainly be a gradual breakdown of the Amish sect. They cannot maintain their strength or develop the leadership in their young people to carry forward their distinctive traditions if they relax these doctrines. From the very beginning these doctrines have been the source of Amish and Mennonite strength. Without them they will slowly and surely disintegrate. It remains to be seen if those people in authority meet the challenge and responsibility of overcoming the threat of secularization.

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<sup>1</sup>Barthinius L. Wick, The Amish Mennonites. A Sketch of Their Origin and of Their Settlement in Iowa (Iowa City, Ia.: State Historical Society, 1894), p. 40 f.

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