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The Bible in the Mennonite Brethren Church

A. J. Klassen

INTRODUCTION

The significance of the Bible in the life of the church has often been taken for granted. However, few issues in recent church history have become as problematic as the specific role of the Bible in the church.

Historically the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament were the product of the acts of God to create a people of God. Today the relationship of Bible and church is often debated on the premise that the reverse is true: namely, that the Bible existed before the people of God. Another false presupposition is that a proper use of the Bible automatically follows from a high view of Scripture. The concern is therefore to be able to say the right things about the Bible rather than to ask how it is to be read and applied. The history of the Mennonite Brethren church has not been free from these tensions and problems.

When the first Mennonite Brethren signed the Founding Document in 1860 they gave as their reason that “the preachers do not deal according to God’s Word.”¹ In their desire to obey Jesus Christ as Lord, they stood in the tradition of the disciples in Acts who desired to “continue steadfastly in the teachings of the apostles” (2:42); and the Berean Christians who “searched the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so” (17:11).

I. THE BIBLE IN ANABAPTIST-MENNONITE HISTORY

In the centuries that followed the Book of Acts, “searching the Scriptures” had become the prerogative of the ecclesiastical elite. Even ordinary priests hesitated to study the Bible lest they stray into private, erroneous interpretations. But in 1517 a new day dawned for the church when Martin Luther rediscovered Romans 1:17, “The just shall live by faith,” and formulated the *sola scriptura* principle of the Reformation.

The Zwinglian Circle

However, the new light was not limited to Germany. About the same time, Huldreich Zwingli, a young priest and chaplain of the Swiss papal armies had become disillusioned with church-state entanglements and papal prohibitions. His study of Erasmus’ Greek New Testament led him to propose a reform of the church based on New Testament preaching. He organized small Bible study groups that focused on the Teachings of Jesus. This “Zwinglian Circle” of young humanist scholars came to the conclusion that the New Testament pattern should find expression in the contemporary church.²

Soon Zwingli drafted 67 theses dealing with the papacy, mass, and purgatory, and called for radical reform. However, to avoid violent upheavals, he was willing to allow the city council to adopt a gradual change. This led to dissension within the Zwinglian circle. The dissenters insisted on prompt implementation of the biblical injunctions since their study of Scripture had led them to regard the Bible as the final authority for faith and life. They reminded him that the biblical church was a voluntary association of believers, separate from the state. When Zwingli refused to “listen to the clear words of Scripture” the “radicals” withdrew from the {35} Zwinglian Circle. They agreed with Zwingli’s assumptions regarding the authority of Scripture and Luther’s



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formal principle. However, they insisted on a radical application of Scripture³ which would necessitate a complete break between church and state.⁴ When they saw that he was compromising the authority of the Bible by his policy of relegating responsibility to the state, they renounced it as “the adulteration of the divine Word by the admixture of human notions and prudential considerations.”⁵

Radical Bible Readers

The first “Anabaptist” fellowship was born on January 21, 1525, when George Blaurock asked Conrad Grebel for believer’s baptism and subsequently baptized his brothers in Christ on their confession of faith as had been the practice in the New Testament church.⁶ Now they met independently and organized their own “Bible schools” or conventicles where the primary question was to understand “what the Scriptures say.”⁷ To them the Bible was an open book with a clear, unmistakable message. They studied it diligently in the original languages. Felix Mantz lectured from the Hebrew, while Conrad Grebel expounded Matthew from the Greek.⁸ The “Prophets” of the *Wormser Bible*, translated from the original languages by the Anabaptists, appeared before Luther’s translation of the prophets.⁹

C. A. Cornelius described the early Swiss Brethren as “a church of the radical Bible readers.”¹⁰ Direct Bible study was the hallmark of their theology. In the various disputations¹¹ with the Zwinglian reformers, they seldom quoted from extra-biblical sources, although the Apocrypha was held in high esteem. Their defenses showed an amazing knowledge of Scripture. So overwhelming and aggravating was this proficiency in Scripture that their persecutors tried to explain it as demon possession.¹²

The Scriptures also permeated their devotional writings. A common approach was to cite numerous passages of Scripture on a given topic followed by an extensive commentary. Thus Ridemann’s *Rechenschaft* cites no fewer than 800 references and maintains that Scripture cannot be interpreted according to human reason.¹³

This appeal to the finality of Scripture has been widely documented in the Täuferakten which record that the reading of Scripture was a common charge against the Anabaptists.¹⁴ Instead of asking for food, incarcerated Anabaptists sometimes requested that Bibles be sent.¹⁵ In various disputations, the opponents accused the Anabaptists of being bound by “the letter of Scripture.”¹⁶ The celebration of the Lord’s Supper in the evening illustrates their insistence on the literal and rather rigid application of Scripture in matters of form, as does adult baptism, nonresistance, and the ethics of love.

Furthermore, the Anabaptists regarded the teachings of Jesus, and particularly the Sermon on the Mount, as the guide for Christian action. The Great Commission was fundamental to their thinking, even though the leading reformers ignored it and denied its relevance.¹⁷ The Anabaptists firmly believed that all Scripture was inspired of God and that “nothing should be added or subtracted from it.”¹⁸ At the same time they held to the principle of progressive revelation, stating that the Old Testament was related to the New as “that of promise and fulfillment, of type and shadow to reality, of the groundwork of the building to the building itself.”¹⁹ The New Testament “law of Christ” is more perfect than the Old Testament Law and teaches whatever is essential in the Old. The application of mutual {36} aid according to Acts,²⁰ the ethic of suffering love in the Sermon on the Mount, and the redemptive discipline of Matthew 18 are indicative of this difference.

The Anabaptist understanding of the relation of the covenants surpassed that of the more prominent Reformers,²¹ and became a major issue of debate between them. Zwingli expounded one unchanging covenant between God and man, beginning with the promise to Abraham and its fulfillment in Christ. This allowed an emphasis on a strong continuity with the Old Testament people of God, membership of infants in the community of faith, and a close alignment of church and state. In contrast, the Anabaptists insisted on a sequence of covenants which rejected the Old Testament as a final authority for the New Testament church.²² Since there was no clear teaching to advocate it, infants should not be baptized. Church membership should be limited

strictly to those who “have accepted Christ, are obedient to his word and follow after him.”²³ Conrad Grebel therefore took sharp issue with Zwingli for “mixing God’s Word with that of man.”²⁴

When Zwingli accused him of rejecting the Abrahamic covenant, Grebel argued that God’s promise to Abraham found its fulfillment in Christ and that those who accept this promise should now listen to the Teaching of Jesus. The sword and the oath were authoritative Old Testament provisions, but were given “outside the perfection of Christ.”²⁵ Christ had fulfilled Old Testament prophecy in his life and death; now the old “rule of law” had been replaced by the new “command of love” that must include the enemy.²⁶ Thus the Anabaptists contended that the unity of the two covenants and the continuity of the people of God could only be understood from a Christological perspective. The simple words of Jesus, “You have heard it said...but I say to you” (Matt. 5:43-44), provided the model for their understanding of the Old and the New.²⁷

The theological differences between Anabaptism and Lutheranism, based on a misunderstanding of testamental relationships, finally led Pilgram Marpeck to write his *Testamenterleuterung*.²⁸ He was convinced that the law of Moses was no basis for introducing the use of the sword into the New Testament church, where the law of love should rule.²⁹

This Anabaptist interpretation of the Old Testament was understood as a complete rejection by the Reformers, who countered with the thesis that whatever enhanced faith and love in the Old should also apply in the New.³⁰ Since the Old Testament used the sword to promote faith and love, it should serve the same purpose in the New Testament church.³¹ However, the Anabaptists accepted the authority of the Old Testament only up to the point “where Christ had not supplanted it with the New.” In the Netherlands, Menno Simons, a young Catholic priest, searched the Scriptures for a biblical basis for infant baptism and transubstantiation. After his conversion in 1535 he left the Catholic church, insisting that all doctrine and practice be measured by one infallible rule, the Bible. The Scriptures were to provide all final answers. Now his greatest concern was to set forth their clear teachings.³²

His writings abound in statements such as “Word of Christ,” “Word of God,” “the Word of the Lord,” “Holy Scripture,” “the Scriptures say,” “Scriptures testify abundantly,” “prove by the Scriptures,” “so clear is the Scripture.³³ The framework of his writings consists of references to and quotations from the Bible. Part One of his *Foundation* contains some 290 Old Testament and 740 New Testament Scriptures.³⁴ Menno held that {37}

It is impossible for the Word of God to prove untrue.³⁵ [The Scriptures are] the true witness of the Holy Ghost and the plummet of our consciences.³⁶ The whole Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testaments, were written for our instruction, admonition and correction; and...they are the true scepter and rule by which the Lord’s kingdom, house, church and congregation must be governed and adjusted.... Everything contrary to Scripture, whether it be in doctrines, faith, sacraments, worship or conduct, should be measured by this infallible rule, and demolished by this just and divine scepter, without any respect to persons, and brought to nothing.³⁷ The Word of Christ alone is sufficient for Me.³⁸

Menno’s hermeneutical approach to the Scriptures has aptly been summarized as follows:

1. The nucleus around which the biblical materials are arranged is the living Christ: Christ, the Head of the congregation, demands our obedience and as the Suffering Christ He evokes our loving response. This brings in the church concept, discipline, etc.
2. Scripture is an organic unity, yet the New Testament becomes definitive and Christ is normative for our faith.
3. Scripture interprets Scripture.
4. The Holy Spirit is the Interpreter of the Word.
5. He who interprets must enter into the experiences of those who wrote.

6. The believing fellowship must serve as a check against personal interpretation.
7. The Bible is not a book of riddles. It has a message for man's practical life and eternal destiny.³⁹

The teachings of Jesus, however, superseded the Old Testament. In his "Epistle to Martin Micron," Menno Simons wrote:

I will let you teach and counsel...to fight and retaliate as did Moses and the patriarchs...to punish, scatter, imprison, and destroy their enemies.... But I shall and will by the grace of God faithfully teach and counsel all truly regenerated children of God and followers of Christ, both rulers and subjects, according to the sure word of the holy gospel, to use no other sword than the one Christ Jesus and His holy apostles used.⁴⁰

Every book and pamphlet that Menno Simons wrote began with his motto "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11). He saw Christ to be the focal point of all biblical revelation. Menno believed that the Scriptures taught the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ, His power to do supernatural miracles, His vicarious and substitutionary death, His bodily resurrection, and His second coming in glory and triumph.⁴¹

The Holy Spirit he regards as the guide in relating the living Word to the life of the church. In the circle of prayer or the dialog of a meeting He makes the will of God known to His people.⁴²

In 1556 Menno wrote that "the new birth consists, verily, not in water nor in words, but it is the heavenly, living and quickening power of God in our hearts which comes from God, and which by the preaching of {38} the divine Word, if we accept it by faith, quickens, renews, pierces, and converts our hearts, so that we are changed and converted...."⁴³

Menno described the Christian life as one of following the Lord: The chosen of God are the church of Christ..., who are born of God, influenced by the Spirit of Christ; who are in Christ and He in them, who hear and believe His word, who follow Him in their weakness, in His commandments, walk in His footsteps with all patience and humility, hate the evil, and love the good, earnestly desiring to apprehend Christ as they are apprehended of Him, for all who are in Christ are new creatures...⁴⁴

"The community of God," as he calls the church, consists of those who accepted His word in sincerity of heart, follow His example, are led by His Spirit and who trust in His promise in the Scriptures."⁴⁵ From the New Testament, largely Acts and the Pauline writings, he gleaned six marks of the true church: 1) unadulterated, pure doctrine, 2) scriptural use of the sacramental signs, 3) obedience to the Word, 4) unfeigned brotherly love, 5) unreserved confession of God and Christ, 6) oppression and tribulation for the sake of the Lord's Word.⁴⁶ However, for Menno the church of God did not have its beginning with the coming of Christ, but originated in God's covenant with His people in the Old Testament.⁴⁷

Menno also held high scriptural ideals for the preachers of the Word: The Scriptures teach plainly that a preacher rightly called must teach the Word of God without perverting glosses,...let him speak the oracles of God.... To preach the Word correctly and beneficially is the highest and greatest command enjoined upon a preacher by Christ.... He does not say, Preach the doctrines and commands of men, preach councils and customs, preach glosses and opinions of the learned.... All the true servants of God in the Old as well as in the New Testament taught nothing but God's Word, as may be seen and read in many and diverse places in the Scriptures.⁴⁸

It is indeed remarkable that the evangelical Anabaptists were singularly free of radical eschatology. Menno agreed with the other evangelical Anabaptists that the personal return of

Christ would usher in the eternal state.

The Scripture clearly testifies that the Lord Christ must first come again before all His enemies are punished. And how Christ will come again He Himself testifies...“as the lightning,” “with power,” “take account with his servants,” “take vengeance on them that know not God,” “in the day of judgment,” “sit upon the throne of his glory,” “gather all nations” and “separate...the sheep on the right...and the goats on the left.

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Apparently the Anabaptists did not believe that Christ would establish a literal earthly kingdom, nor did they indulge in far-fetched eschatological speculations, for the words of Scripture were “as clear as the sun.”[50](#)

Shortly after his public confession of faith through baptism, Hans Denck, another Anabaptist champion for the practical application of Scripture, set down his motto for Christian living in the following words: “No one can know Christ unless he follows Him in life.”[51](#) Denck held that Scripture can reveal God’s will, but it is an “outer testimony” and therefore not perfect. However, it is a preparation for the work of the {39} Spirit in the heart. God’s Spirit does not contradict Scripture, it testifies of Him. Scripture, Denck said, is a “lamp that illumines the darkness...but it is written with human hands, spoken by a human voice, seen with human eyes and heard with human ears. Therefore it cannot dispel all the darkness.” “Thus each one must have the interpretation of the spirit.”[52](#) Denck further explicated his understanding of Scripture in his defense of 1528. “I place the Scriptures above every human possession, but not as high as the Word of God, which is living, powerful and eternal and free from all worldly elements;...it is spirit and not letter, written without pen and paper, so that it can never be blotted out.”[53](#) In proclaiming the Word, the preacher uses the “outer word” in exhorting his hearers to obey the instruction of the “inner word” of Scripture. The “outer Word” remains a dead letter until it is personally appropriated through the “inner Word.”[54](#) It is not enough that the Word became flesh in the first century, it must also become flesh in the sixteenth century.[55](#)

Such insistence on a concrete continuity between the way of the Jesus of history and the life of his disciple in history inevitably involves obedience even unto death, “for whoever thinks he belongs to Christ must walk the way that Christ has walked, for thus one enters the eternal dwelling of God.”[56](#) In its “Thorough Instructions” to Nurenburg pastors the city council warns against the primary Anabaptist error that a “Christian must walk in the footsteps of Christ and follow His example and that of His apostles; what He has done he must do also, what He has left he must also leave.”[57](#)

This emphasis on the practical application of Scripture led to the accusation that the Anabaptists relied on the Spirit to the exclusion of Scripture.[58](#) Bullinger was particularly effective in building the case. He charged the Anabaptists with enthusiasm (*Schwärmerei*) and a false separation between Spirit and Scripture that placed the Spirit above the Word as the Montanists had done before them.[59](#) A similar charge is found in Melancthon’s “unchristlichen Artikeln” of 1536,[60](#) asserting that Anabaptism had its roots in Muenster.[61](#) Ernst Troeltsch,[62](#) however, clearly established that the teaching of Jesus, especially the Sermon on the Mount, which they quoted more than any other, was the final authority of Anabaptist life and thought. They did not rule out the possibility of a direct revelation through the Spirit of God and they often claimed to be led by the Spirit. However, such divine illumination must be closely related to God’s Word written.

The Hermeneutic Community

The Anabaptists applied the theology of the Bible as they understood it in such a way that their movement may be regarded as “the culmination of the Reformation, the fulfillment of the original vision of Luther and Zwingli,...a consistent evangelical Protestantism seeking to recreate without compromise the original New Testament church, the vision of Christ and the Apostles.”[63](#) In contrast to the Classical Reformers, they insisted that following Christ must find practical

application to life here and now. The “inseparability of belief and practice, faith and life” was characteristic of Anabaptist theology.⁶⁴ For them, the objective in Christian nurture was not to get knowledge into the mind but rather to obey the truth by following Christ. Only he who was committed to obeying Christ could really know the truth of the Scriptures as God intended them to be understood.⁶⁵{40}

This correlation of obedience and knowledge had far-reaching implications or a biblical hermeneutic. When the Classical Reformers abandoned their vision of a visible church,⁶⁶ they were forced to emphasize the infallibility of the inspired text as interpreted by the qualified theologian. In sharp contrast, the Evangelical Anabaptists insisted on the obedience of the listening disciple in the hermeneutic community. They were not satisfied with the assertion that Scripture is inspired by God and therefore contains the truth of God. Access to correct knowledge is specifically limited to those who are willing to obey the Word no matter what the cost. As Conrad Grebel explained in a letter to Thomas Müntzer, we listened to Zwingli’s sermons and writings, but one day we took the Bible and were better instructed.... We act only according to the Word....⁶⁷

Although the Anabaptists learned to be definite and dogmatic in their disputations, their understanding of Scripture was the fruition of a process in the hermeneutic community, the gathered congregation. When Balthasar Hubmaier challenged his former colleague, John Eck, to a debate in 1524, he proposed the adoption of 1 Corinthians 14:29 as the basic ground rule. He intended to place the disputation in the context of the gathered congregation where each spokesman would present his case and then allow the congregation to make its decision on the basis of Scripture. Although Zwingli originally advocated this “Rule of Paul,” the Anabaptists continued to uphold it even after the leading Reformers abandoned it. They were prepared to take decisive action on the basis of congregational consensus.

To insist that Scripture can best be understood in the hermeneutic community is to suggest that the Spirit can only reveal its true meaning when Christians are gathered to listen and obey. This does not rule out the need for biblical scholarship to clarify technical detail and provide accurate translation, but it does underline the significance of the common man in the gathered congregation. It also tends to undermine the role of creedal tradition and governmental authority. The Anabaptists had inherited this concept of congregational authority to hear and interpret the Word of God from Luther⁶⁸ and Zwingli.⁶⁹ However, the Anabaptists went beyond the Reformers in rejecting the right of the state to determine the work of the church.⁷⁰ When Melancthon called the appointment of certain Anabaptist leaders without state sanction into question, they justified it by referring to the teaching of Scripture as understood by the consensus of the congregation.⁷¹

Confessions of Faith

Various Anabaptist communities eventually published their consensus as confessions of faith. Although the confessions never achieved the prominence they received in the larger Protestant churches and were seldom given any binding power, they claimed to be mutually agreeable expressions of a commonly held faith. However, since no human formulation in matters of faith was regarded as authoritative, various groups freely drafted their own confessions rather than adopt a formulation common to the entire movement.⁷² In stating their objectives, Anabaptist-Mennonite confessions most frequently mention bringing unity among the brethren. This is followed by evangelism, church discipline, defense of the faith and the authority of Scripture.

Although not all of the confessions have a separate article on the Bible, they are consistently based on it and regard it as the final authority {41} in matters of faith and practice. When Lutheranism lost its founder’s emphasis on faith as acceptance of God’s grace and stressed the formulation of correct doctrine, its theological statements stressed the infallibility and inerrancy of the biblical text.⁷³ For the Anabaptists, faith in Christ implied accepting the Bible as authority for life rather than subscribing to authoritative doctrine. Rather than espousing an

inspiration theory that eliminates the effects of human cooperation, as did the Lutherans, they rested scriptural authority on the fact that it was God's covenant with man. This authority demanded obedience rather than definition.⁷⁴

In his article on "the written Word of God"⁷⁵ Peter Jansz Twisck (1565-1636) delineates the relative authority of the two covenants. The old covenant was suitable for those who lived before Christ, but the "new law of Jesus Christ" regulated the conduct of all Christians.⁷⁶ He makes no attempt to spell out the mechanics of inerrancy or the nature of inspiration. Scripture is simply accepted as God's trustworthy instrument for disclosing his will, to which all Christians must obediently submit.

The Dordrecht Confession (1632), though it has no article on Scripture, also emphasizes the covenant rather than the tool, and the proclamation of the gospel rather than the canon. This implies that the New Testament authority rests on the authentic proclamation of the gospel.

The Cornelius Ris confession, formulated over a period of nearly twenty years, states that "These Scriptures we call holy because they are inspired by God and written by holy men of God as they are moved by the Holy Spirit, 2 Peter 1:21. We accept them, therefore, not as man's word but God's Word; as the only infallible and sufficient rule of faith and conduct to which we owe supreme reverence and obedience."⁷⁷ Again there is no mention of scholastic inerrancy or verbal inspiration. Most writers of Mennonite confessions speak of inspiration by quoting 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:21. The authority of Scripture is based on the authority of Christ and validated by faithful obedience.

II. THE BIBLE IN THE MENNONITE BRETHERN CHURCH

We have already referred to the rediscovery of the Bible in the time of the Reformation. In Calvin and Zwingli's Bible discussion hours (*Bibelbesprechstunden*) the pastor lectured on Scripture and dialoged with his listeners. Among the Dutch Mennonites of the sixteenth century, Hans de Ries, the compiler of a confession (1580-1610) and a hymnal (1582), attributed his preparation for the ministry to the "Bible hours" (*Bibelstunden*). During the eighteenth century, S.F. Rues reported that during Bible studies in the Mennonite churches Scriptures were being searched and believers were sharing the gospel and their joy in the Lord. In the early nineteenth century G. J. Ryswyck claimed that the Bible study hours served as the major educational institutions or the preparation of ministers.⁷⁸

However, as church members began to neglect the Bible study hours and ceased to search the Scriptures for themselves, they became satisfied to have their ministers lecture about various facets of faith. Ministers, lacking the religious perception they might have gained through Bible study, no longer based their presentations on the Word of God, gleaning them, instead, from the writers of other confessions. In many Mennonite churches of West Prussia and Russia, the mutual inspiration of the Christian community came into complete disuse, and those who sought to recover these religious exercises were condemned for introducing such a {42} novelty and refuted on the basis of Luke 11:52.⁷⁹ However, when the New Testament and sixteenth century practice of Bible study had largely been lost in Mennonite history, a recovery of the Bible was in progress in Pietist groups.

Pietism and Russian Stundism

As a distinct movement, Pietism was born in the midst of seventeenth century Reformed and Lutheran orthodoxy. In contrast to a rigid adherence to a doctrinal and confessional heritage, it emphasized a practical religion of the heart, brought about by "piety" or living faith made active and manifest in upright conduct. Ritschl described it as a Protestant "monasticism" and "salvation by works."⁸⁰ A. L. Drummond defined it as

an eager desire to preach a simple religion of the heart, the expression of immediate feeling rather than the result of study and reflexion; emphasis on the Second Birth and fellowship created between all who shared this experience; the distinction

between the quality of life produced by “the converted” and “the worldly” (whether members of the church or not). Pietism stressed the devotional reading of the Bible. Where religion was a matter of rote, they called for spiritual intelligence.”⁸¹

In 1689 Joachim Feller, a professor at Leipzig, coined a succinct definition of Pietism, asking: “What is a Pietist? One who studies God’s Word and leads a holy life in accord with it.”⁸² Robert Friedmann summarized it as “a quiet conventicle Christianity, which is primarily concerned with the inner experience of salvation and only secondarily with the expression of love toward the brotherhood, and not at all toward a radical world transformation.”⁸³

In *Wahres Christentum*, Johann Arndt, the “precursor of Pietism”⁸⁴ made an urgent and powerful plea for the individual’s personal communion with God. He expressed his deep concern as follows:

God did not reveal Holy Scripture that it might remain a dead letter, but that it might become a living power within us, and create an entirely new and spiritual nature.... All that Scripture teaches externally must be worked into man through Christ, in the spirit and in faith.... The living Christ is the book which must be read, and from it we must learn.⁸⁵

Philip Spener, the so-called “father of German Pietism,”⁸⁶ in his chief work, *Pia Desideria*, particularly emphasized 1) a personal use of the Bible, 2) the spiritual priesthood of all believers, including laymen, 3) reform of preaching, and 4) diligent study of theology. His group Bible studies, prayer meetings and children’s meetings soon found a warm acceptance by many Protestants.⁸⁷ For the furtherance of such genuine Christianity, he recommended household devotions, congregational singing, extemporaneous prayer and daily Bible reading.⁸⁸ To accomplish his purpose he revived the principle of the *ecclesiolae in ecclesia*, the little churches within the church, maintaining he was only following the tradition of Arndt and the earlier ideas of Luther. In the new university of Halle, which he founded in 1694, German pastors, Christian laymen, and religious teachers caught the spirit of Pietism. Small devotional groups arose both within and without organized churches.

August Hermann Francke brought the pietistic movement to its {43} climax in Germany. He too promoted special “meetings of believers,” adding that Christians should not miss any opportunity to study the Word, since fellowship strengthens believers.⁸⁹ Although the Lutheran element in Francke’s theology was dominant, he synthesized various religious aspects into a new theology which revitalized eighteenth century Protestantism in a remarkable way. His major contribution, however, lies in the practical application of his theology rather than in the originality of his thought, since he implemented what Spener had already initiated.⁹⁰ Among the institutions which Francke established at Halle was a Foreign Missions Society which in 1696 dispatched its first missionary to Moscow.

Count Zinzendorf became a Pietist during his studies under Francke and gave leadership to the rebirth of Pietism among the Moravian Brethren who had taken refuge on his estate at Herrnhut. The emigration of the Herrnhutter colony of Sarepta to South Russia in 1765 transplanted Pietism there.⁹¹

Meanwhile, Pietism continued to spread in Germany, especially in Wuerttemberg, under the dynamic leadership of Johann Bengel, “the father of modern propheticism.”⁹² A Mennonite author, Peter Jansz Twisck, tried to provide a counterbalance for this “prophetic” emphasis with his *Das Friedensreich Christi*, which presents an exposition of Revelation 20 in the Anabaptist framework of a spiritual kingdom of God rather than an imminent historical event.⁹³

In 1815 the Bible study movement (*Stundenbewegung*) was transplanted to the Black Sea area of South Russia by Johannes Bonekemper, a product of the pietistic Evangelical Mission School in Basel, who became known as the “Father of Russian Stundism.”⁹⁴ Two years later many Wuerttemberg Pietists trekked to South Russia, establishing a colony in Neu Hoffnung

(New Hope) in close proximity to the Mennonite colonies.⁹⁵

In addition, Pietist writings came to be widely used among Russian Mennonites. Among them was Johann Schabalie's *Die Wandelnde Seele*, a free paraphrase of Old and New Testament stories plus various additions from the author's own imagination. Other popular authors included Johann Arndt, Philip Spener, August Francke, Johann Bengel, Count Zinzendorf, and Ludwig Hofacker, "messengers from God in a dark hour," who brought "new light, warmth and food into the house of Menno" which "had become practically desolate, empty and cold."⁹⁶ Although Pietism had some weaknesses and could therefore serve only as a supplement to Mennonitism, it provided new power which was drawn from the Bible.⁹⁷

Church life among Mennonite immigrants to Russia during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was largely characterized by sterility. Pioneer hardships and dearth of spiritual leadership resulted in "ecclesiastical confusion" (Kirchliche Wirren).⁹⁸ Sermons, read from a manuscript in a monotone, were rarely the minister's own production. Few prayer meetings were held and instruction in the Scriptures was meager.⁹⁹ However, Bible studies for mutual inspiration (*Bibelstunden zur gegenseitigen Erbauung*) never completely disappeared within Prussian and Russian Mennonitism. In the South Russian Mennonite colonies, the Friesian group decided to support the Russian Bible Society. This aroused the jealousy and hatred of the more conservative Flemish faction, who mockingly nicknamed them *Bibler*.¹⁰⁰ Tobias Voth, who had been attracted to Pietism in Prussia, came to teach in the Mennonite high school in Ohrloff, South Russia, in 1822. The warm Christian spirit that {44} penetrated his classes as well as his evening Bible studies, mission classes, and reading society, made a great impact on the Mennonites, among them Heinrich Huebert, who later became the first elder of the Mennonite Brethren church.

The Prussian Mennonite congregation which settled in Gnadenfeld, South Russia, in 1835, became a major center of spiritual life among the Mennonites in the Molotschna colony.¹⁰¹ In addition to two Sunday services, a mid-week meeting, missions study hours and festivals, they conducted Bible study discussion hours (*Bibelstunden*) in private homes, which earned them the nickname of "meeting goers" (*Stundengänger*). In addition they conducted weekly "meetings for edification" in other villages where they found admittance. In order to accommodate those who desired to participate in more than one meeting per week, the Bible studies were staggered for different evenings in various villages.¹⁰²

A decade later Eduard Wuest, a Wuerttemberg Pietist, was called as the pastor of the "Separatist Evangelical Church of the Brethren" in Neuhoffnung, which already had cordial relations with the Gnadenfeld Mennonites. Once a month he met with a group of Mennonites for Bible study and prayer.¹⁰³

The Founding Document

In the context of such Bible study a number of Russian Mennonites became aware of the tension between the life and doctrine of their Mennonite churches and the New Testament ideal. After an unsuccessful attempt to reinstitute communion as a fellowship of believers, the "Brethren" were forced out of the larger Mennonite church. On January 6, 1860, they signed five articles of faith "according to our convictions from the Holy Scripture, (and) in agreement with our dear Menno."¹⁰⁴ In no way did they intend to break with historic Mennonitism. Rather, they proposed to reform it and return to its historic position as they understood it to be taught in the Bible and in the writings of Menno Simons.

"Because the leaders do not conduct the affairs of the church according to the Word of God, it is no longer possible for us to participate for conscience' sake, and we desire to organize our own church as Mennonites," they explained to the district court when they were called to account for their actions.¹⁰⁵ Repeatedly they reaffirmed that "our doctrines are derived from the Word of God and the teaching of the Reformer, Menno Simons."¹⁰⁶ They consciously identified with Menno Simons' motto: "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11).

When the council of church elders accused them of a one-sided conception, interpretation, and application of Scripture, and refusal to accept admonition and correction (March 11, 1860), [107](#) the Brethren replied that the elders had not been able to refute their allegations by Scriptural proof. They stated:

We hold absolutely no different cardinal doctrines and do not seek to organize a new religious society, but desire to live peaceably as Mennonites in accord with the confession of our fathers.

In our document of January 6, we have not seceded from the Mennonite Brotherhood, but only from the decadent church. If the teachers would take a determined stand against the evils in the church according to God's Word, we would even now, gladly join them, assist {45} them, and with God's gracious help, build and plant the church.[108](#) On December 27, 1860, they reaffirmed their scriptural foundations: We are not a newly established sect, as the council of elders likes to call us. On the contrary, we are the seed of the imperishable Word of God, which was preached to us by the apostles, explained through the Holy Spirit, and have become the fruit of the living faith of our dear forefather Menno Simons, who in all his church ordinances and confessions of faith practiced and established them even as we; therefore we can rightly call ourselves the genuine descendants of true Mennonitism.
[109](#)

The Einlage Mennonite Brethren church in the Chortitza colony grew out of a similar background as the Molotschna group, although quite independently of it. Ludwig Hofacker's sermons on the "new life in Christ" resulted in a religious awakening and the development of the "brotherhood" movement. Having obtained permission from the elders of the Chortitza Mennonite church, the "Brethren" began to conduct missions festivals and Bible studies, and a new church was formed.

What Does the Word Say?

In their effort to build a church after the New Testament pattern, the question "What does the Word say?" was paramount in Mennonite Brethren thinking. The Bible colporteurs they sponsored were so convinced of the primacy of Scripture that they refused to carry "rote" prayer books. However, this emphasis was common with the "rank and file" members as well. Although the early Brethren lacked formal theological training, they acquired biblical knowledge through the Bible study hours.[110](#)

Soon the Bible study hour (*Bibelstunde*) became an integral part of the spiritual life of the new church. Wherever Brethren lived in close proximity, even if it were only two families, they got together at least once a week for a simple discussion of the Word of God written. Dialog followed the reading of Scripture, participants understanding that they had the privilege and responsibility of contributing. The hour closed with prayer. The church so highly regarded the spiritual impact of these Bible studies that attendance became obligatory for all members.[111](#) Like many others, the early Mennonite Brethren were "biblicists" in the sense of insisting that questions regarding church life must be answered from the Bible. Many of the early fathers were known by their bulging coat pockets which contained a well-worn Bible,[112](#) much of which was being committed to memory.[113](#)

When the Mennonite Brethren encountered the question regarding the mode of baptism, intense study and prayer convinced them that immersion was not only recognized by Menno Simons but had actually been practiced in the New Testament church.[114](#)

When Elder Heinrich Huebert was asked to outline general church rules and regulations in 1868, the document, like other statements of the early Brethren, was permeated with Scripture.[115](#) A concluding appeal urged all readers to study the Scriptures carefully and thus be persuaded of the truth. Since Scripture provided spiritual nurture and solutions to problems, Bible reading

was accepted as part of daily family routine. Although critics berated this approach as simplistic, naive proof-texting, it served the Mennonite Brethren well.¹¹⁶{46}

However, as is the case with many commendable practices, some Mennonite Brethren assumed a narrow, authoritarian interpretation of Scripture rather than allowing the brotherhood to speak. Instead of saying, "This is how I understand that passage," they asserted, "Thus it is written" and refused to admit that another interpretation might also be valid. B.B. Janz clearly saw the nature of the problem: "In all their piety, our fathers developed an intolerant character in the interest of keeping the church pure. They saw that tolerance would involve ethical questions which would complicate church discipline. Thus the Mennonite Brethren church developed the character of a narrow-minded brother."¹¹⁷

Confessions of Faith

An interesting progression regarding the "doctrine" of Scripture can be observed in Mennonite Brethren confession. The *Confession oder Kurzes u. Einfältiges Glaubensbekenntnis derer so man nennt die Vereinigte Flämische, Friesische u. Hochdeutsche Taufgesinnte Mennonitengemeinde*¹¹⁸ was cited by the Mennonite Brethren founders as their official statement of faith. It begins with a reference to Scripture in its article on God, simply stating that "we believe with the heart and confess before everyone with the mouth according to the content of holy Scripture, the Word of God."¹¹⁹ Rather than attempting to spell out a theory of inspiration, Scriptural authority is assumed. In article 4, "obedience to the divine Word" is cited as a mark of the church of God.

The *Glaubens-Bekennntsis and Verfassung der Gläubiggetauften u. Vereinigten Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde im Südlichen Russland*, a revision of a Hamburg Baptist Confession published by Abraham Unger in 1876 but never endorsed by the entire Mennonite Brethren church, devotes an entire article to the "Word of God." It lists all books in the Old and New Testament canon and states that they are "truly inspired of the Holy Spirit, and must constitute the only true divine revelation to mankind, the only source of divine knowledge, as well as the sole rule of faith and life."¹²⁰

The 1902 Confession of Faith illustrates the early Mennonite Brethren reliance on Scripture. They stated their desire to recover the biblical concept of the church "as it was in the beginning, in the apostolic church."¹²¹ This "back to the beginning" emphasis must be seen in the light of the scriptural principle which governed their thinking. "We propagate no new teaching," they asserted. "Moreover, our teaching is based on one already in existence for over 1800 years, that of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, and His apostles and prophets. Hereupon we wish to establish and order our church."¹²² The confession purports to be "a brief summary of the most essential doctrines and teachings of the United Christian Anabaptist Mennonite Brethren Church, which are gleaned from the Holy Scriptures and the earlier confessional statements, which this church has in common with other Christian churches, or in which it differs from the same."¹²³ Rather than simply footnoting their confessional articles to Scripture, they inserted lengthy Bible quotations in the text and added long lists of references at the end of each section. In many cases the statements are largely a compilation of biblical phrases.

All three confessions adopted by the Mennonite Brethren, the earliest Mennonite confession of 1853, the Baptist translation of 1876, as well as the original Mennonite Brethren confession of 1902, subscribe to a high view of the Bible.¹²⁴ The introductory paragraph in the 1902 confession carefully describes the role of Scripture. It is said to be "the inspired Word of God" and the words of the confession are to be understood "as {47} described by the Scriptures cited."¹²⁵ The conclusion mentions the authority, inspiration and infallibility of the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments.¹²⁶

Bible Conferences

Itinerant Bible Conferences (*Bibelbesprechungen*), also known as Bible courses (*Bibelkurse*) or mission schools (*Missionsschulen*), developed in the early Mennonite Brethren

church under such ministering brethren as Jacob Reimer and David Duerksen.

Despite the intolerance of some, many early Mennonite Brethren leaders were sincere in their effort to recapture the Anabaptist vision of the church based on the teaching of Christ. Because they were open to new theological insights and religious practices which they considered to be in accord with biblical principles and the teachings of Menno, they related freely to Pietists and Baptists as well as Separatists, whose champion was Pastor Wuest. This "alliance" principle, as Friesen calls it, was based on a healthy recognition that the church of Jesus Christ is "one holy united Christian church, the fellowship of the saints."¹²⁷

However, government investigation regarding Mennonite Brethren-Baptist relations, which challenged the Mennonite Brethren stance regarding non-resistance and oath, resulted in a move toward closer fellowship with the Mennonites. In the fall of 1875 the concern for greater biblical unity within the Mennonite brotherhood led to the convening of several inter-Mennonite "faith conferences." Discussion centered on such questions as silent or audible prayer, the form of prayer, public prayer of sisters in the church, and baptism. Abraham Unger, a participant in these conferences, stated, "I see no danger for our church in such a fellowship, since truth will conquer in the way of love, and God's Word is the truth." Thus a better relationship gradually developed between the old and new groups, largely through dialogue concerning the application of Scripture in practical situations.¹²⁸

At the turn of the century the "alliance" movement gained momentum through the influence of the Blankenburg "faith conferences." These conferences, begun in Germany in 1885, were designed for the express purpose of uniting all true Christians into the one body of Christ. Leading Mennonite and especially Mennonite Brethren ministers, such as David Duerksen, Jacob Kroeker and Jacob W. Reimer, attended regularly, the latter two also serving as committee members and conference speakers. However, through this association, Reimer became a strong advocate of chiliasm and began to promote its teaching in the Mennonite Brethren Church.¹²⁹

Bible conferences of far-reaching consequences also took place on the congregational level. Several villages would invite Bible teachers to expound the Word in a central meeting place. As many as thirty to forty preachers from surrounding villages would join the visiting teachers in discussing the chosen portion of Scripture. The meetings were chaired by the local minister.¹³⁰ To encourage congregational participation the preachers usually sat in a semi-circle on the platform, facing the audience. After the Word had been read the preachers would in turn stand and comment on the meaning of the passage. The congregation was invited to ask questions and contribute to the discussion. These conferences usually lasted several days and did much to foster biblical interpretation and personal application of Scripture.¹³¹

In discussing this movement after World War I, B.B. Janz states that joint Bible conferences were held in all churches of the Mennonite Brethren (48) as well as in the Mennonite Church in a fine spirit of brotherhood. Following the great upheavals of the Russian Revolution serious tension had developed between the Mennonite Church and the Mennonite Brethren over the meaning of conversion.¹³² However, a government proscription against sectarianism provided an incentive to closer inter-Mennonite relationships. Thus the Mennonite Brethren adopted a resolution to open the fellowship of the Lord's Table to all true believers, regardless of denominational affiliation. An exchange of pulpits developed between Mennonite churches and joint attendance at the weekly *Bibelstunden* increased.¹³³

Meanwhile in America, Mennonite Brethren immigrants established a conference for the purpose of building the church "according to the directives of God's Word." In the effort to follow biblical principles the brethren continued to ask "What does the written Word say?" However, application was not always simple. At the 1880 American General Conference a resolution that women cover their heads not only during church meetings but also during family worship attempted to fulfill the letter of Scripture. Similarly, the 1927 conference decided that the cutting of women's hair was in direct contradiction to Scripture (1 Cor. 11:6). However, many women followed the current styles despite the conference resolution and were not disciplined. Thus,

theoretically, the Mennonite Brethren were biblicists who followed the letter, but uniform application was lacking.¹³⁴

Bible conferences in various congregations were continued in the New World. In Winnipeg, the tradition of an annual two or three day conference scheduled between Christmas and New Year featuring several leading Mennonite Brethren Bible expositors began as early as 1929. Although Mennonite Brethren fostered denominational Bible conferences in areas with a heavy concentration of their members, Bible conferences of inter-Mennonite sponsorship and participation became popular in more sparsely settled Canadian provinces such as Alberta. The *Mennonitische Rundschau* regularly carried the itinerary for such inter-Mennonite Bible conferences, giving the dates and Scripture passages to be discussed. The January 16, 1946, issue, for example, lists routes three, four, and five, each consisting of six congregations, scheduling two or three days' meetings at each place.¹³⁵ The impact of mutual Bible discussions fostered a spirit of brotherhood and tolerance that overlooked many differences and promoted cooperation.

A. H. Unruh assessed the value of these Bible conferences as follows: The free discussion of specific chapters of Scripture has proved to be of special blessing and direct consequences everywhere. In many places Bible discussions have been held on themes that meet the local needs. In the Crimea the discussion of the chapter has even been preceded by a lecture on the book from which the chapter was selected, which is of great benefit and to be warmly recommended. It would be desirable that everywhere such discussions of Scripture be emphasized more. But from them must be excluded everything divisive or personal, especially regarding the various camps of our Mennonite brotherhood. No other purpose but inspiration should determine the chapter or theme for discussion. Also, they should be characterized less as Bible explanations and more as Bible discussion where many participate through questions, sharing, explanation, examples, songs and suitable applications.¹³⁶

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Bible Studies (Bibelstunden)

The regular Bible studies in the framework of the local church came to be of great significance and abiding influence. Almost all of the brief histories of some 200 Mennonite Brethren congregations in Canada and the United States mention Bible studies as part of the weekly church calendar.¹³⁷ Although procedures varied from place to place, H. H. Janzen described a typical Bible study setting.

People are seated casually around a table, with the preacher as leader of the group. Only where the group becomes too large for a private home is the church used for Bible studies. A song is suggested and sung heartily. A simple prayer opens the hour. After each person present has read a verse of the Scripture portion at hand, the discussion begins. Each brother present may speak. The sisters are usually silent, unless they ask the occasional question.... The interest in the Word is especially lively when the love for the Savior is so warm that one cannot be silent about the things one discovers in God's Word. Naturally those who participate in the discussion must immerse themselves in the passage at home, prior to the meeting. In such a case, the preacher has only to guide the discussion and to watch that no error or false exposition creeps in. Usually a season of prayer concludes such a discussion, where brethren and sisters, stimulated by the discussed Word, pour out their hearts before the glorious Lord.¹³⁸

Janzen lauds the churches who still have weekly Bible studies or prayer meetings. However, he laments that many churches have abandoned them, and in cases where the mid-week meetings are observed, only a small segment of the church participates.¹³⁹ This seems to

indicate considerable digression from the vision of Menno Simons and the early Brethren.

Bible School Training

In addition to weekly Bible studies and occasional Bible conferences, Mennonite Brethren also established Bible schools for instruction of their youth. During the heyday of the Bible Institute movement in Fundamentalist Protestantism, the establishment of Mennonite Brethren Bible schools also reached its zenith. No fewer than twenty-one Bible schools were organized in the Canadian constituency between 1913 and 1955, although only five were in existence in 1963. The present work of the Mennonite Brethren church is largely dependent on the leadership and ministry of individuals with Bible school training.¹⁴⁰ Basic courses in introduction to Old and New Testament biblical exegesis exposition and analysis, as well as Scripture memorization benefited and inspired future ministers as well as Sunday school workers, church school instructors, and missionaries. J.B. Toews attributed the missionary dynamic of the Mennonite Brethren Church to the “central emphasis on the Word and its relation to the practical issues of life.” Bible school alumni concurred that “the Word of God which was taught to us has been our constant source of strength and sustenance.”¹⁴¹

A.H. Unruh, who had been involved in Bible schools both in Russia¹⁴² and Canada, expressed his concern and appreciation for the role of the Bible schools in keeping Scripture central in the Mennonite Brethren Church. “The loss of simplicity begins with an overemphasis on the secular education of the preacher, through which basic Bible knowledge is pushed into the background more and more, and many problems are treated philosophically instead of by the clear word of Holy Scripture.” Statements of faith of Mennonite Brethren schools take a positive stand for Scripture. If the Bible schools will continue to train the students to regard God’s Word as authoritative for all religious and ethical questions, and let it serve as the plumbline in all church situations, then the Mennonite Brethren Church, through its Bible schools, will make a worthwhile contribution to the education of youth.¹⁴³

Biblical Preaching and Teaching

In the tradition of their Anabaptist forefathers, most Mennonite Brethren ministers had no formal theological training, attaining their biblical knowledge through personal and corporate Bible study.

Jacob W. Reimer (d. 1948), a well-known Bible expositor, testified that he loved the Bible and that studying it was his favorite pastime. He especially liked to study it with his paternal friend Johann Fast of Rückenau, South Russia. For years they met daily, or even twice a day, to read God’s Word and study it together.¹⁴⁴

A high view and consistent use of Scripture is also evident in the preaching of David Duerksen (1850-1910), one of the first Mennonite Brethren itinerant evangelists. The texts of his one hundred extant sermons indicate that he may have covered almost the entire Bible in his preaching. The ratio of one Old Testament text to three texts from the New Testament suggest an emphasis on the New Testament teaching. The texts of Duerksen’s sermons were supplemented with numerous additional Scripture references, reflecting a thoroughly biblical preaching. The emphasis on preaching from the Gospels and Acts indicates a desire to “go back to the beginning,” “as it was in the early church,” as stressed by the early Mennonite Brethren. In a message entitled “The Cleansing Power of God’s Word” Duerksen probes for the source of the power of the Word in its absoluteness and truth. Its power is displayed when it reveals sin, cleanses from sin, and generates a holy life. Therefore the listeners are encouraged to apply the Word prayerfully.¹⁴⁵

B. B. Janz clearly identified certain basic characteristics of Mennonite Brethren as he perceived them after he joined the fellowship in 1897. In his visits to numerous churches he observed fraternal fellowship, fear of the Lord, a healthy appetite for the Word, heartfelt, vivid proclamation, disciplinary work, and church growth involving persons other than only children of members.¹⁴⁶

Throughout his lengthy service in the brotherhood, (d. 1964), Janz declares that his thinking was guided by two questions. Although he frequently asked “What did our forefathers teach?” the more weighty question was always, “What does the written Word say?”

In dealing with a 1943 disciplinary case involving a minister, Janz warned against using the example of King David’s sin for reinstating sinning New Testament preachers because six times Christ said, “But I say unto you,” thereby setting up norms that superseded Old Testament customs such as polygamy, revenge, enmity, divorce, oath and stoning. The New Testament does not give us the option of adopting Old Testament standards if they suit us better.¹⁴⁷ Thus Janz tried to maintain the {51} principle of progressive revelation in applying Scripture to practical situations.

In assessing the requirements for a healthy, ongoing Mennonite Brethren church, A. H. Unruh (1878-1961), a leading Mennonite Brethren preacher and theologian in his day, stressed the importance of God’s Word.

Only through feeding on the Word of God can our churches be sustained, nourished and strengthened. Therefore the Bible studies, Bible conferences and Bible courses are very important for the upbuilding of our church life. Other things being in order, the weekly inspiration of the Bible studies will meet a vital need in the church.... The written Word and the living Word are the food for the new nature in us, and their use may not be left to chance.¹⁴⁸

In describing the conference structure of the Mennonite Brethren Church, Unruh’s analysis strongly resembles the hermeneutic community of the evangelical Anabaptists. He says:

As desirable as it may be that every individual member of the church, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, come to a clear understanding of Scripture, it remains that we, with all the saints, comprehend the counsel of God. Therefore it remains our goal to grow into a unity of knowledge of the Son of God, and to a unified conviction so that we may stand firm amid various winds of doctrine. In all questions relating to church matters, the conference strives to find its way using the Word of God.... When we are occasionally confronted by a Word or a practical question, we ask...who shall give us an answer? Shall the Lutheran, Methodist or Baptist theologians? Or can we find counsel through the consensus of the Brethren?...Just as Timothy and Titus had need of Paul’s counsel, so we need brotherhood consensus, which ends all one-sided individualism and subjectivity.¹⁴⁹

He felt that the Mennonite Brethren Church could be an example for the wider Mennonite brotherhood in its use of Scripture.

The Mennonite Brethren Church has the principle of building the church according to the instructions of Holy Scripture in founding (Acts 2), as well as nurture (Ephesians 4), and in revival (Rev. 2:3) as well as separation from the world (2 Cor. 6)... Now the question remains whether the Mennonite Brethren Church is willing to serve wider circles with clear biblical thinking, biblically regulated congregational life and sane social intercourse.”¹⁵⁰

(To be continued)

FOOTNOTES

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2. Cf. A. J. Klassen, “The Mennonite Brethren Confessions of Faith,” (unpub. S.T.M. thesis), Vancouver: Union College, 1965, p. 10.
3. Beatrice Jenny, “Das Schleithemer Tduferbekenntnis 1527,” *Schaffhduser Beitrage zur*

vaterländischen Geschichte (Thayngen, 1950), XXVII, 42.

4. Christian Neff, "Konrad Grebel," *Gedenkschrift zum 400 jährigen Jubiläum {52} der Mennoniten oder Taufgesinnten 1525-1925* (Ludwigshafen a.Rh., 1925) p. 102-3.
5. Walter Rauschenbusch, "The Zurich Anabaptists and Thomas Müntzer," *American Journal of Theology*, IX:1 (January, 1905), 100.
6. Fritz Blanke, *Brüder in Christo* (Zurich: Zwingli Verlag, 1955), pp. 20ff.
7. Gunnar Westin, *The Free Church Through the Ages* (Nashville: Broadman, 1958) p. 54.
8. Leonard V. Mural, "Glaube and Lehre der schweizerischen Wiedertäufer in der Reformationszeit," *Neujahrsblatt zum Besten des Waisenhauses in Zurich*, CI (1938), 12.
9. David Ewert, "Reflections on Bible Reading in the Mennonite Brethren Church," *Voice*, IX:1 (Jan.-Feb., 1960), 3.
10. C. A. Cornelius, *Bericht der Augenzeugen über das münsterische Wiedertäuferreich*, II: Die Geschichtsquellen des Bistums Münster (1853), 14.
11. John H. Yoder, *Tdufertum and Reformation in der Schweiz, I: Die Gespräche zwischen Tdufern and Reformatoren 1528-1538*. Schriftenreihe des Mennonitischen Geschichtsvereins, Vol. VI (Karlsruhe, 1963). Hereafter referred to as *Gesprache*.
12. John C. Wenger in *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, edited by Guy F. Hershberger (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1957), p. 167.
13. Translated as *Account of Our Religion, Doctrine and Faith* (Wheathill, 1950), p. 216.
14. Manfred Krebs and Hans Georg Rott, Quellen zur Geschichte der Tdufer, Vol. VII: *Elsass*, Part I: *Stadt Strassburg 1522-1532* (Gutersloh, 1959), 36, 270. Hereafter referred to as *Quellen*.
15. Krebs and Rott, *Quellen*, VIII: *Elsass*, Part II: *Strassburg 1533-1535* (Gütersloh, 1960), 130, 145.
16. Sebastian Franck, *Chronica, Zeytbuch and geschychtbibel* (Strassburg: Balthasar Beck, 1531) XCCCCXIIa.
17. Franklin H. Littell, *A Tribute to Menno Simons* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1961), p. 38.
18. Leonard V. Mural and Walter S. Schmidt, *Quellen zur Geschichte der Taufer in der Schweiz*, Vol. I: *Zurich* (1952), 24.
19. John Horsch, "The Faith of the Swiss Brethren," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, V:1 (January, 1931), 21. Hereafter referred to as *MQR*.
20. Peter J. Klassen, *The Economics of Anabaptism* (The Hague: E. J. Brill, 1964).
21. John C. Wenger, "The Theology of Pilgram Marpeck," *MQR* XII (Oct. 1938), 210.
22. Jan J. Kiwiet, *Pilgram Marbeck* (Kassel, 1958), p. 63.
23. Mural and Schmidt, *Quellen*, I: *Zurich*, 216.
24. *Ibid.*, I, 16.
25. Yoder, *Gesprache*, 143ff.
26. John Hersch, *Die Biblische Lehre von der Wehrlosigkeit* (Scottsdale, 1920) p. 39.
27. Yoder, *Gesprache*, pp. 113ff.
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29. Johann Loserth, *Quellen and Forschungen zur Geschichte des oberdeutschen Tdufertums im 16. Jahrhundert. Pilgram Marbecks Antwort auf Kaspar Schwenckfelds Beurteilung des Buches der Bundesbezeugung von 1542* (Leipzig: Carl Fromm, 1929), p. 39.
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31. *Ibid.*, pp. 138ff.
32. Menno Simons, *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, trans. by L. Verduin and edited by John C. Wenger (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1956). Hereafter referred to as *CW*.
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34. *Mennonite Encyclopedia I*, 323. Hereafter referred to as *ME*.
35. *CW* II, 438.
36. *CW* I, 167.
37. *CW* I, 53f.
38. *CW* 11, 248.

39. Henry Poettcker, "Menno Simons Hermeneutical Approach to Scripture," *Proceedings of the Twelfth Conference on Mennonite Educational and {53} Cultural Problems* (Elkhart, Ind.: Council of Mennonite and Affiliated Colleges, 1959), p. 57.
40. CW II, 412.
41. CW II, 183.
42. F. H. Littell, "The Work of the Holy Spirit in Group Decision," *MQR*, XXXIV (April, 1960), 75-96; Wilhelm Wiswedel, "The Inner and Outer Word: A Study in the Anabaptist Doctrine of Scripture," *MQR*, XXVI (July, 1952), 171-191.
43. CW II, 215.
44. CW I, 161ff.
45. CW II, 177.
46. CW II, 83.
47. CW 735.
48. CW 164-165.
49. CW II, 438f.
50. CW II, 438f.
51. W. Fellmann, ed., *Hans Denck Schriften*, Part 2 (Gütersloh, 1956), 45; cf. A. J. Klassen, "Discipleship in a Secular World," *Consultation on Anabaptist Mennonite Theology* (Council of Mennonite Seminaries, 1970) pp. 105ff.
52. *Denck Schriften*, II, 61.
53. *Ibid.*, II, 106.
54. *Ibid.*, I, 21-22.
55. Lydia Müller, *Quellen zur Geschichte der Wiedertäufer*, Vol. III: *Glaubenszeugnisse oberdeutscher Taufgesinnter*. *Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationsgeschichte*, Vol. XX (1938), 215.
56. *Denck Schriften*, II, 50.
57. *Gründliche Unterrichtung* (Nuremberg: Jobst Gutknecht, 1528), folio D IV.
58. Gerhard H. Uhlhorn, "Urbanus Rhegius, Leben and ausgewählte Schriften," *Leben and ausgewählte Schriften der Vdter and Begründer der lutherischen Kirche* (Eberfeld, 1861), VII, 126.
59. Heinrich Bullinger, *Von dem unverschdmpften frdfel*, XI, a.
60. *Corpus Reformatorium*, edited by Emil Egli, et al. (Zurich, 1904-), II, 997. Hereafter referred to as CR.
61. CR, XXIV, 375.
62. Ernst Troeltsch, *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen and Gruppen, Gesammelte Schriften*, I (Tübingen, 1912), 800f., 863f.
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64. Harold S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Theology of Discipleship," *MQR*, XXIV (1950), 31.
65. cf. John H. Yoder, "The Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists," (manuscript).
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71. Wilhelm Wiswedel, *Bilder and Führungsgestalten aus dem Tdufertum: Ein Beitrag zur Reformationsgeschichte des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Kassel, 1928) I, 76.
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Dr. Klassen is Dean of the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, Fresno, California.

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