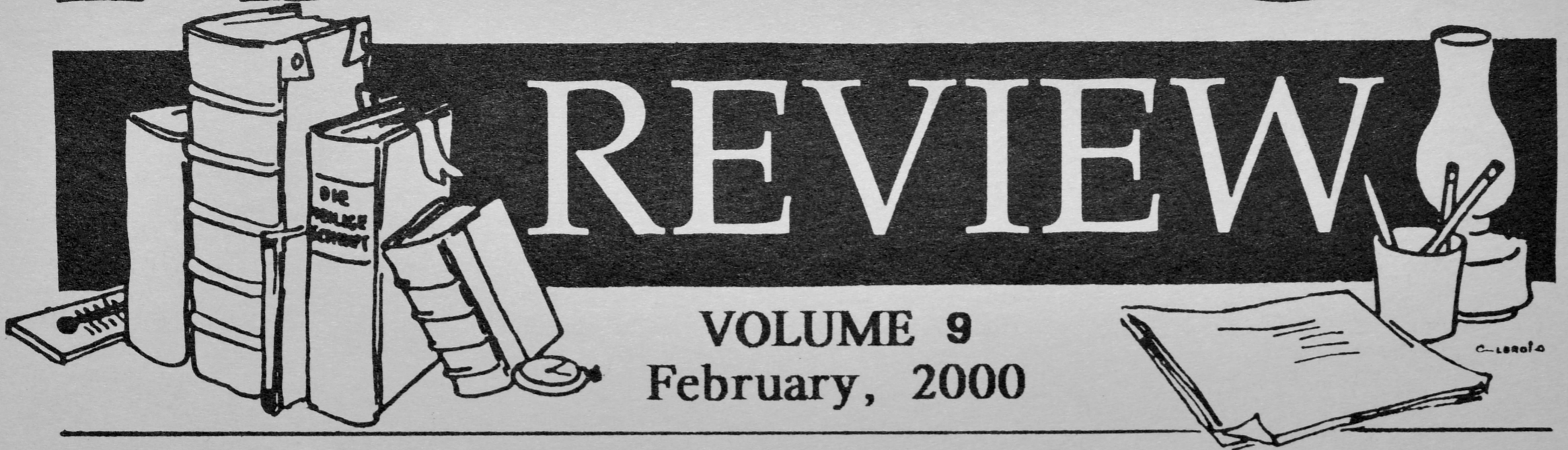


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COMMENTARY ON THE ANABAPTIST VISION

-by James W. Lowry

Harold Bender made a major statement on the essence of Anabaptism in 1943, when he addressed a small group of Protestant churchmen at a meeting at Columbia University in New York City. He called his address "The Anabaptist Vision." Since then, persons vitally interested in the subject because of personal commitment and persons whose interest is only academic have continued to discuss Bender's statement.

Briefly, here is what Bender said. There are three major points of Anabaptism:

1. Discipleship, fundamentally the essence of Christianity (Nachfolge Christi).
2. A new concept of the church: voluntary membership based on true conversion and commitment to holy living and discipleship.
3. The ethic of love and nonresistance in all human relationships.¹

Other Statements on Anabaptism

I would like to comment on Bender's "Vision." But first, in order to give background for my comments, I want to present some of the multiplicity of ideas on the subject which various thinkers have developed.² These are as follows:

1. Harold S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision" Mennonite Quarterly Review (April, 1944), pp.68-88. See especially pp.78,82, and 85. (Hereafter MQR= Mennonite Quarterly Review)

2. J. Denny Weaver, Becoming Anabaptist (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1987), pp.113 ff. has some helpful summaries. See also James R. Coggins, "Toward a Definition of Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism: Twentieth-Century Historiography of the Radical Reformation," Journal of Mennonite Studies, (1986), pp.183-207

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Commentary on The Anabaptist Vision

*Anabaptism is Protestantism carried out fully to its logical conclusion, Protestantism "taken all the way," the most consistent form of Protestantism. (Bender also expresses this idea.)

*Anabaptism is Catholicism with all the Medieval extras, added since the time of Constantine, shorn away; it is pre-Constantinian Christianity.

*Anabaptism is more than Protestantism.¹ It is Protestantism with some added teachings, such as nonresistance and nonconformity, which were neglected by the major Protestant Reformers.

*Anabaptism is both Catholic and Protestant,² joining the truest views of both parties.

*Anabaptism is neither Catholic, nor Protestant.

*Anabaptism is essentially a new approach to the Word of God.

*Anabaptism is whatever we happen to be or want to be. Some people use the term "Anabaptist" carelessly as an expression of approval and apply it to themselves. There is a little poem about this use of the term: In Mennonite Lore

We need not say more
One word is always the aptest:
Whate'er we construe
To be good and true

We name with the word Anabaptist.³

*Anabaptism is, as neither Catholic nor Protestant, a third way, which was a kind of forerunner of the Ecumenical movement destined to bring Protestant and Catholic churches together, as some European Mennonites have proposed.⁴

*Anabaptism was a forerunner of the Communist political movement.⁵

More Statements on the Essence of Anabaptism

*Anabaptism is a restitution, a primitivist movement, as John Horsch discusses it in the early chapters of Mennonites in Europe (1942), going back to the

1. William R. McGrath called a series of two articles, which he published in 1955 and 1956, "More Than Protestantism." Later in 1964 he published the articles in a booklet, which he called, The Anabaptists: neither Catholics nor Protestants, some years before Walter Klaassen's book with a similar title appeared in 1973. McGrath states that the Anabaptists were not Protestants.

2. Coggins, 192

3. Theron Schlabach quotes this in the Mennonite Quarterly Review, Feb. 19, 1987.

4. J. A. Oosterbaan, "The Reformation of the Reformation: Fundamentals of Anabaptist Theology," MQR (July 1977).p.176

5. Protestant religious writers of the sixteenth century disliked the Anabaptists because they claimed they were revolutionaries, but Marxist and liberal political writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have liked them for that very reason. Coggins, 185

New Testament sources to recapture what the early church had, just as the Renaissance at the same time was going back to the ancient classics of the Greeks and Romans to recapture their civilization. Anabaptism is a restitution of the New Testament church in contrast to the Reformation of the Medieval church that the Protestants were aiming at. Franklin Littell also proposes the importance of the idea of restitution.⁶

*Anabaptism is the "Left Wing of the Reformation" as Roland Bainton has called it.⁷

*Anabaptism is the "Radical Reformation" as George H. Williams termed it in his important book by that title in 1962. In this book Williams created a new picture of church history, seeing the Anabaptists as a kind of third way alongside the "magisterial" or normative Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation. In this view the Anabaptist movement followed its own inspiration and was not directly related to Reformed or Lutheran Protestantism.⁸

*Anabaptism is the stepchild of the Reformation, as the title of Leonard Verduin's book, The Reformers and their Stepchildren, in 1964 would suggest. That is, the Anabaptists were in the Protestant household, but not truly part of the household by blood relationship.

*Anabaptism is non-theological, with its emphasis on living and doing, to the neglect of talking and formulating theories about God, as Robert Friedmann suggests in The Theology of Anabaptism.

*Anabaptism is, at heart, the doctrine of the two worlds," as Friedmann further states. The two worlds or kingdoms are the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of the World, between which there is eternal warfare. The Kingdom of God cannot be entered except through rebirth through rebirth, separation from the world, a radical turn toward a life of brotherly purity. Not alone, as an individual, but only within the brotherhood, die Gma, can the life of discipleship be lived out. Instead of discipleship, Friedmann finds the Anabaptists used the expressions, "following Christ," or "obedience."⁹ Friedmann believed that the Anabaptists were quite distinct from the Catholics and the Protestants, a separate third party.¹⁰ That is, they were neither Protestant, nor Catholic.

* Anabaptism is an inseparable connection between faith and works, as some scholars are saying in part recently.

6. Franklin H. Littell, "The Anabaptist Doctrine of the Restitution of the True Church," MQR (Jan. 1950), pp. 33-52.

7. Robert Friedmann, The Theology of Anabaptism (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1973) p. 18

8. Friedmann, 18. Radical in the sense of dealing with the root of a problem. Radical comes from the Latin word for root, radix.

9. Friedmann, pp. 36-46.

10. J. A. Oosterbaan, "The Reformation of the Reformation: Fundamentals of Anabaptist Theology," MQR (July 1977), p. 174.

Commentary on The Anabaptist Vision

General Comments on Bender's "Vision"

From my own perspective, as a member of a plain Mennonite church, and with a very high regard for the Anabaptist movement and the parts of the movement which have remained faithful and not assimilated to the large, worldly society, I would like to comment on Bender's statement. I cannot say what all Anabaptists thought or held most important. (That would be impossible.) Rather, using the elements of the Anabaptist movement which seem most important from my stated perspective I will make my comments.

Anyone who is very familiar with Mennonites in Europe by John Horsch, Harold Bender's father-in-law will be immediately struck by similarities between "The Anabaptist Vision" and Horsch's book, which was published the year before Bender's article. In fact, Bender refers in "The Anabaptist Vision" to his father-in-law's writings eleven times. Leonard Gross believes that Bender was also indebted to Robert Friedmann and finds mention of Bender's three main points in some of Friedmann's early writings.¹ However, Friedmann had not been in the United States long and was not yet a recognized scholar in North America when Bender published his article. Bender does not mention him.

Although Bender used ideas that were under discussion among Mennonite historians, his wife, Elizabeth Horsch Bender, felt the synthesis of ideas was Bender's.²

Bender put his ideas together in great haste when called on to address the meeting of the American Society of Church History in New York City in December 1943. Only when he was ready to publish his speech as an essay did he go back to try to find sources and do footnotes. His speech has been republished a number of times.

We are indebted, of course, to Harold S. Bender for his clear statement of important issues, and we certainly agree with his three following points.

1. Fundamentally, the essence of Christianity is discipleship (Nachfolge Christi)
2. A new concept of the church: voluntary membership based on true conversion and commitment to holy living.
3. The ethic of love and nonresistance in all human relationships.

I would state them a little differently and arrange them in a different order.

1. Leonard Gross, "Recasting the Anabaptist Vision: the Longer view," MQR (July 1986), pp. 358-362.

2. Ibid.

To my view there are also some weaknesses in Bender's statement, and this maybe in part due to his situation in war time. In December 1943 the United States had completed only the second year of a bitter war, whose outcome was not at all clear. It is a little surprising that the leader of a nonresistant church was chosen to address this group of largely Protestant³ churchmen, at least some of whom would have supported the war effort with deadly earnestness as an effort to defend democracy.

Early in his speech Bender makes a point about how Anabaptism contributed to Protestantism and democracy. Of course, a sixteenth century Anabaptist would not have made such a point. If Bender tried to make his speech acceptable to any potentially hostile listener, it is not surprising. Still, Bender was courageous to make one point nonresistance, even though he saved it to be third and last. He was truly Anabaptist in this.⁴

The last three words of Bender's speech were "in His Steps," which can be interpreted to express the Anabaptist ideal of following Christ. But In His Steps is also the title of a popular Protestant book by Charles Sheldon from around the turn of the century.⁵ Bender used these words even though the content of the book is contrary to Anabaptism in some respects. The Protestant listeners in Bender's audience would have been familiar with the book, probably from their youth, and would have had warm, pleasant memories from having read it.⁶

Bender also presents the view that the Anabaptists merely completed the Reformation which Luther and

3. Harry W. Bowden, American Society of Church History, letter to the author, February 6, 1995

4. A lively discussion followed Bender's presentation of his speech, cut short only by his need to catch an airplane. It would be interesting to know if the discussion was about nonresistance. Albert N. Keim, "History of the Anabaptist Vision," Mennonite Historical Bulletin, (Oct. 1993): 2.

Eleven years later in December 1954, Bender again addressed the American Society of Church History, this time, on "The Pacifism of Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism." Robert Friedmann, "The Essence of Anabaptist Faith," MQR (Jan. 1967), p. 24, note 62

5. A best-selling book in its day, In His Steps ranks sixth on a list of all-time best sellers. When this religious book is compared with best-selling books today, we have a very clear sign of the secularization of American society. David Wallenchinsky and Irving Wallace, The People's Almanac (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1975), p. 1226.

6. Perhaps Bender did really want to be Protestant because of the influences of the Great Awakening prevailing generally in his part of the Mennonite Church. But he still would have been concerned with making his message receivable by his hearers.

Zwingli began, but failed to carry out in a consistent way,¹ and thus Bender would have identified himself in a measure with the Protestant descendants of Luther and Zwingli present at the meeting. So the Anabaptists as "perfected" Protestants would be more acceptable, even with their strange doctrine of nonresistance.

This is not my view. Both the Anabaptist and the New Testament models for the church are incompatible with a "reformed" Catholic Church and a "perfected" Protestantism. The Anabaptists (and the New Testament) were sectarian in nature in wanting to set up a new, and necessarily minority, society. "Narrow is the way...and few there be that find it.." Further, evidence seems to be lacking that either Luther or Zwingli planned to reject the use of the sword, or have their members carry out the "hard" teachings of Jesus, as found in the Sermon on the Mount.

I believe the Anabaptists aimed at something completely different from the Reformers in their attempt to sweep away the Medieval debris collected in the Catholic Church. I believe the Anabaptists did not attempt to sweep the church, they attempted no a Reformation,² but a Restitution of the New Testament church. The separation between the Anabaptists and the Reformers was complete, as it should be today between their descendants.

Nevertheless, there are Mennonites today who view themselves merely as Protestants with a few extra doctrines and practices. What these doctrines and practices are depends on how much the group has compromised on various issues, among which would be the following: church, nonresistance, nonconformity, separation of church and state, woman's head covering, and foot washing. It is easy to see if certain practices have been dropped, but "church," one of the most important Anabaptist distinctives is much harder to measure. "Church" does not have to do with how much time is spent sitting in meetings. It has to do with how much the church affects the life of members in their everyday lives. In the least assimilated Anabaptist groups, the church has much greater influence over members and commands much more respect and attention from members, forms a much greater part of the member's thinking.

I do appreciate Bender's distinction between mainline Anabaptists and marginal persons and groups who practiced adult baptism.³ He points out that the mainline groups have descendants existing today, whereas

the others do not.⁴ Current scholarship tends to be critical of Bender for his rejection of marginal groups

But for me, Bender's distinction is still quite valid. Of course, since the early Bender years researchers have brought to light much about the variety of the movement, various points of origin, and differing viewpoints of Anabaptist adherents.⁵ But as the Martyrs' Mirror points out, those warlike "Anabaptists" could as easily be called "Lutheran" because they had many views in common with Lutheran and other state church reformers in their willingness to use force, their failure to distinguish between the Old and New Testaments, etc. Bender's language hints slightly at the wording found in the Martyrs' Mirror.⁶

Researchers since Bender's time have brought to light much about the various religious movement at the time of the Reformation. During that time anyone whose religious opinions did not fit into the Catholic or Protestant state church groups was called "Anabaptist," a handy term of disapproval,⁷ but hardly a subtle or insightful way of dealing with the complex events occurring. Some modern researchers in dealing with the multiplicity of events have reverted to lumping all non-mainline groups into one category, throwing nonresistant and violent groups together again, calling them all "Anabaptists." Some have even revived the opinion of the sixteenth century opponents, that the nonresistant Anabaptists rejected the sword only because they had no opportunity to use it,⁸ that Anabaptists were revolutionaries and that when they were persecuted, they basically got what they deserved!⁹ Although much progress has been made in Anabaptist studies, or at least much has been learned, such a conclusion

4. Survival as a test of validity is given by Gamaliel in Acts 5:38-39.

5. I John 3:15 says, "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." This is quoted by Menno Simons Complete Writings, pp. 791, 1032, by Dirk Philips, Writings, p. 480, and Jacob van den Wege Martyrs' Mirror, p. 976.

6. Bender, top of p. 73. See the long note on page 17 of the Martyrs' Mirror.

7. Coggins, 184

8. This is the opinion of James Stayer in Anabaptist and the Sword (Lawrence, Kan.: Coronado Press, 1973). Coggins, 199.

9. Claus-Peter Clasen justifies the persecution of the Anabaptist in Anabaptism: A Social History, 1525-1618 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1972). Coggins, 204, note 48.

1. Bender, [p.10]

2. Bender, where he quotes Loserth on p.74 and Grebel on p.75

3. Bender, [p.10]

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does not seem like progress. When Bender tried to distinguish among Anabaptist groups, he naturally did it from his own perspective and would probably distinguish more subtly today. But we must give Bender credit, he did try to make distinctions.

Bender's Three Points

There is one further matter about Bender's statement of three points to mention before I try to discuss them. Bender later decided that there should be only two points, discipleship and love, and that church was a "derivative idea."¹ In contrast, John Howard Yoder also holds that there are two main concepts, but they are discipleship and church. Yoder holds that they are inseparably and equally important, and yet he tends to emphasize the church. Yoder views discipleship "not so much the action of the individual believer, but action of the members of the body of Christ."²

I would like to take Bender's three original points as given and discuss them as best as I can. Bender's synthesis rests on facts which he proves and annotates on his published article. Based on the same facts, I would propose a somewhat different synthesis. I especially appreciate Robert Friedmann's statements, as cited earlier, about the essence of Anabaptism.³ I would rename discipleship, a word which does not seem to be found in the original Anabaptist sources, as "obedience, yieldedness," terms the Anabaptists did use. I would reorganize the list as follows:

1. Church as a Christian brotherhood
2. Love and nonresistance
3. Obedience and yieldedness

Each of the above points have profound implications, beyond my ability to discuss fully. Yet I will try to make a few statements. Church I place first as the concept of greatest importance, and yet a concept which needs to be supported by the other two. Without love the church cannot exist as a loving brotherhood, fulfilling the New Testament description, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." Obedience makes it possible for the church to function in unity, where the

1. Harold S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Theology of Discipleship," *MQR* (Jan. 1950), pp. 26-27.

2. John H. Yoder, *Taeuferertum und Reformation im Gesprach* (Zuerich: EVZ Verlag, 1968), pp. 204-205, referred to in Oosterbaan, 179-180.

3. The series of starred statements in the first part of the article were given to illustrate the variety of thinking about the Anabaptist movement. Most of them give keen and valuable insights, but obviously not all of them.

members obey the church, carry out the rule of its discipline, the Ordnung. Yieldedness makes it possible for the church to have discipline and reduce friction among members.

Obedience (yieldedness) I place third; however, chronologically this point comes first. Here the repentant sinner yields himself to God, experiences the new birth, and receives spiritual life. Without the new birth and connection with God, there can be no true connection with the church. It is possible to appear to be connected with God and the church, and still not have a true connection. This is one major conflict of Christianity, that is, between what one appears to be and what one really is.

Another area of conflict is between points one and three. Point one focuses on each Christian as a disciple. The true Christian must have a vital connection with God and with the church. Ideally, these two connections strongly support one another, but human frailty sometimes hinders this.

Why should love be singled out as the second point from among the many Christian virtues taught by the New Testament? Love is the virtue of greatest importance. God Himself is love. Love is the motive for evangelism. Love in the Christian brotherhood includes not just sympathy for others in time of crisis, but mutual help and sharing one's material possessions. Love is put to its most difficult test when it comes to nonresistance, turning the other cheek, loving one's enemy, perhaps the hardest of Jesus' hard sayings.

Separation seems to be closely related to point three, obedience. Bender discusses separation, although perhaps not as fully as the subject deserves.⁴ Separation includes separation from war, government, worldly religion, carnal entertainment, worldly lusts and dress, from failure to keep the hard sayings of Jesus. Separation is also related to point one, the church. The church agrees on Christian practices, separate and different from those of the fallen society around it. As the member obey the practices, or Ordnung of the church, they achieve unity in their separation to God and to one another. The motive is both obedience to the authority of the church and love for the brotherhood. So the three points are all closely related.

The Anabaptist Vision Today

The foregoing meditations on the subject of Anabaptism touch almost all of the major issues, but they have not treated the matter exhaustively.

In conclusion, I want to ask, what does the "Anabaptist Vision" have to offer mankind today?

The "Anabaptist Vision," as it expresses basic Christianity, has everything to offer which the Christian religion has always offered: on a personal

4. Bender, "Anabaptist Vision," 83.

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level, forgiveness of sin, reconciliation with God, power to live a holy life, a living hope of heaven. But beyond these, it especially offers a solution to the evils which beset the human race at the end of the twentieth century, worse apparently than at most other times of human history.

How does the "Anabaptist Vision" relate to the following clusters of problems, 1.) to modernity, to the post-Christian present with its scientific world view, to the loss of traditional values in Western Civilization, also spreading throughout the world, 2.) to consumerism, materialism, "entertainmentism," carnality, worldliness, pride, and 3.) to individualism, to the breakdown of community in urban areas, the breakdown of families, ethnic hatreds, violence?

1.) Anabaptist primitivism which leaps from the corrupt present to the ideal past of the church is an answer to the first set of problems.

Western society now is similar to that of the first century where the tiny Christian church confronted pagan society with an unknown message. In spite of wide-spread education, modern man is ignorant of the content of the Word of God, of what the early church believed, and of how the early Christians lived. (Modern man substitutes new

"moral" values, personal freedom, equality, feminism, advocacy of unspeakable sins, murder of infants and the aged, intellectual liberty.) Anabaptism makes it possible to recover lost, forgotten values today as it did in Reformation times. Churches which have not compromised with worldly society, which have not forgotten traditional values maintain a living witness to these values. They are "a city that is set on a hill."

2.) The second set of problems, related to the abundance of things and pleasures, is answered by traditional Anabaptist commitment to self-denial and simplicity, by the rejection of worldly life styles and entertainment, by the principle of discipleship and obedience.

3.) The answer to violence, hatred, individualism, and the loss of community is the church, the colony of heaven, where the will of God is done on earth, the loving brotherhood. The church, the kingdom of God, is always at war with the kingdom of this world and suffers persecution. But here in the church, it is possible to live and grow in love, being transformed into the image of the Second Man, the Lord from heaven.

The Anabaptist Vision can answer the needs of man as he enters the new millennium.

"STREIT FÜR DIE WAHRHEIT,
SO WIRD GOTT
FÜR DICH STREITEN
BIS IN DEN TODT"

from "Liederbuch" by David Lachner
found in University of Budapest Archives
Codex Ab16
Friedmann, Robert, "Die Schriften der
Huterischen Täufergemeinschaften"

WE PRESENT HERE, FOR OUR READERS' CONSIDERATION, THE ADDRESS THE ANABAPTIST VISION BY HAROLD S. BENDER, WHICH IS THE SUBJECT OF THE FOREGOING COMMENTARY.

THE ANABAPTIST VISION

by Harold A. Bender

Judged by the reception it met at the hands of those in power, both in Church and State, equally in Roman Catholic and in Protestant countries, the Anabaptist movement was one of the most tragic in the history of Christianity; but, judged by the principles which were put into play by the men who bore this reproachful nickname, it must be pronounced one of the most momentous and significant undertakings in man's eventful religious struggle after the truth. It gathered up the gains of earlier movements, it is the spiritual soil out of which all nonconformist sects have sprung, and it is the first plain announcement in modern history of a programme for a new type of Christian society which the modern world, especially in America and England, has been slowly realizing - an absolutely free and independent religious society, and a State in which every man counts as a man, and has his share in shaping both Church and State.

These words of Rufus M. Jones² constitute one of the best characterizations of Anabaptism and its contribution to our modern Christian culture to be found in the English language. They were brave words when they were written thirty-five years ago, but they have been abundantly verified by a generation of Anabaptist research since that time.³ There can be no question but that the great principles of freedom of conscience, separation of church and state, and voluntarism in religion, so basic in American Protestantism and so essential to democracy, ultimately are derived from the Anabaptists of the Reformation period, who for the first time clearly enunciated them and challenged the Christian world to follow them in practice. The line of descent through the centuries since that time may not always be clear, and may have passed through other intermediate movements and groups, but the debt to original Anabaptism is unquestioned.

The sixteenth-century reformers understood the Anabaptist position on this point all too well, and deliberately rejected it. The best witness is Heinrich Bullinger, Zwingli's successor in Zurich, whose active life-span covers the first fifty years of the history of the Swiss Anabaptists and who knew them so well that he published two extensive treatises against them in 1531 and 1561. According to Bullinger, the Swiss Brethren taught that:

One cannot and should not use force to compel anyone to accept the faith, for faith is a free gift of God. It is wrong to compel anyone by force or coercion to embrace the faith, or to put to death anyone for the sake of his erring faith. It is an error that in the church any sword other than that of the divine Word should be used. The secular kingdom should be separated from the church, and no secular ruler should exercise authority in the church. The Lord has commanded simply to preach the Gospel, not to compel anyone by force to accept it. The true church of Christ has the characteristic that it suffers and endures persecution but does not inflict persecution on anyone.⁴

Bullinger reports these ideas, not in commendation but in condemnation, urging the need of rigid suppression. He attempts a point by point refutation of the Anabaptist teaching, closing with the assertion that to put to death Anabaptists is a necessary and commendable service.

But great as is the Anabaptist contribution to the development of religious liberty, this concept not only does not exhaust but actually fails to define the true essence of Anabaptism. In the last analysis freedom of religion is a purely formal concept, barren of content; it says nothing about the faith or the way of life of those who advocate it, not does it reveal their goals or program of action. And Anabaptism had not only clearly defined goals but also an action program of definiteness and power. In fact the more intimately one becomes acquainted with this group the more one becomes conscious of the great vision that shaped their course in history and for which they gladly gave their lives.

Before describing this vision it is well to note its attractiveness to the masses of Christians of the sixteenth century. Sebastian Franck, himself an opponent, wrote in 1531, scarcely seven years after the rise of the movement in Zurich:

The Anabaptists spread so rapidly that their teaching soon covered the land as it were. They soon gained a large following, and baptized thousands, drawing to themselves many sincere souls who had a zeal for God. . . They increased so rapidly that the world feared an uprising by them though I have learned that this fear had no justification whatsoever.⁵

In the same year Bullinger wrote that "the people

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were running after them as though they were living saints."⁶ Another contemporary writer asserts that "Anabaptism spread with such speed that there was reason to fear that the majority of the common people would unite with this sect."⁷ Zwingli was so frightened by the power of the movement that he complained that the struggle with the Catholic party was "but child's play" compared to the conflict with the Anabaptists.⁸

The dreadful severity of the persecution of the Anabaptist movement in the years 1527-60 not only in Switzerland, South Germany, and Thuringia, but in all the Austrian lands as well as in the Low Countries, testifies to the power of the movement and the desperate haste with which Catholic, Lutheran, and Zwinglian authorities alike strove to throttle it before it should be too late. The notorious decree issued in 1529 by the Diet of Spires (the same diet which protested the restriction of evangelical liberties) summarily passed the sentence of death upon all Anabaptists, ordering that every Anabaptist and rebaptized person of either sex should be put to death by fire, sword, or some other way."⁹ Repeatedly in subsequent sessions of the imperial diet this decree was reinvoked and intensified; and as late as in 1551 the diet of Augsburg issued a decree ordering that judges and jurors who had scruples against pronouncing the death sentence on Anabaptists be removed from office and punished by heavy fines and imprisonment.

The authorities had great difficulty in executing their program of suppression, for they soon discovered that the Anabaptists feared neither torture nor death, and gladly sealed their faith with their blood. In fact the joyful testimony of the Anabaptist martyrs was a great stimulus to new recruits, for it stirred the imagination of the populace as nothing else could have done.

Finding, therefore, that the customary method of individual trials and sentences was proving totally inadequate to stem the tide, the authorities resorted to the desperate expedient of sending out through the land companies of armed executioners and mounted soldiers to hunt down the Anabaptists and kill them on the spot singly or *en masse* without trial or sentence. The most atrocious application of this policy was made in Swabia where the original 400 special police of 1528 sent against the Anabaptists proved too small a force and had to be increased to 1,000. An imperial provost marshal, Berthold Aichele, served as chief administrator of this bloody program in Swabia and other regions until he finally broke down in terror and dismay, and after an execution at Brixon lifted his hands to heaven and swore a solemn oath never again to put to death an Anabaptist, which vow he kept.¹⁰ The Count of Alzey in the Palatinate, after 350 Anabaptists had been executed there, was heard

to exclaim, "What shall I do, the more I kill, the greater becomes their number!"

The extensive persecution and martyrdom of the Anabaptists testify not only of the great extent of the movement but also of the power of the vision that burned within them. This is most effectively presented in a moving account written in 1542 and taken from the ancient Hutterian chronicle where it is found at the close of a report of 2,173 brethren and sisters who gave their lives for their faith.¹¹

No human being was able to take away out of their hearts what they had experienced, such zealous lovers of God were they. The fire of God burned within them. They would die the bitterest death, yea, they would die ten deaths rather than forsake the divine truth which they had espoused. . . .

They had drunk of the waters which had flowed from God's sanctuary, yea, the water of life. They realized that God helped them to bear the cross and to overcome the bitterness of death. The fire of God burned within them. Their tent they had pitched not here upon earth, but in eternity, and of their faith they had a foundation and assurance. Their faith blossomed as a lily, their loyalty as a rose, their piety and sincerity as the flower of the garden of God. The angel of the Lord battled for them that they could not be deprived of the helmet of salvation. Therefore they bore all torture and agony without fear. The things of this world they counted in their holy mind only as shadows, having the assurance of greater things. They were so drawn unto God that they knew nothing, sought nothing, desired nothing, loved nothing but God alone. Therefore they had more patience in their suffering than their enemies in tormenting them.

. . . The persecutors thought they could dampen and extinguish the fire of God. But the prisoners sang in their prisons and rejoiced so that the enemies outside became much more fearful than the prisoners and did not know what to do with them. . . .

Many were talked to in wonderful ways, often day and night. They were argued with, with great cunning and cleverness, with many sweet and smooth words, by monks and priests, by doctors of theology, with much false testimony, with threats and scolding and mockery, yea, with lies and grievous slander against the brotherhood, but none of these things moved them or made them falter.

From the shedding of much innocent blood arose Christians everywhere, brothers all, for all this persecution did not take place without fruit. . . .

Perhaps this interpretation of the Anabaptist spirit should be discounted as too glowing, coming as it does from the group itself, but certainly it is nearer to the truth than the typical harsh nineteenth-century interpretation of the movement which is well represented by the opening sentence of *Ursula*, the notable historical novel on the Anabaptists published in 1878 by the Swiss Gottfried Keller, next to Goethe perhaps the greatest of all writers in the German language:

Times of religious change are like times when the mountains

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open up; for then not only do all the marvelous creatures of the human spirit come forth, the great golden dragons, magic beings and crystal spirits, but there also come to light all the hateful vermin of humanity, the host of rats and mice and pestiferous creation, and so it was at the time of the Reformation in the north east part of Switzerland.^{1 2}

Before defining the Anabaptist vision, it is essential to state clearly who is meant by the term "Anabaptist," since the name has come to be used in modern historiography to cover a wide variety of Reformation groups, sometimes thought of as the whole "left wing of the Reformation" (Roland Bainton), "the Bolsheviks of the Reformation" (Preserved Smith). Although the definitive history of Anabaptism had not yet been written, we know enough today to draw a clear line of demarcation between original evangelical and constructive Anabaptism on the one hand, which was born in the bosom of Zwinglianism in Zurich, Switzerland, in 1525, and established in the Low Countries in 1533, and the various mystical, spiritualistic, revolutionary, or even antinomian related and unrelated groups on the other hand, which came and went like the flowers of the field in those days of the great renovation. The former, Anabaptism proper, maintained an unbroken course in Switzerland, South Germany, Austria, and Holland throughout the sixteenth century, and has continued until the present day in the Mennonite movement, now almost 500,000 baptized members strong in Europe and America.^{1 3} There is no longer any excuse for permitting our understanding of the distinct character of this genuine Anabaptism to be obscured by Thomas Müntzer and the Peasants War, the Münsterites, or any other aberration of Protestantism in the sixteenth century.

There may be some excuse, however, for a failure on the part of the uninformed student to see clearly what the Anabaptist vision was, because of the varying interpretations placed upon the movement even by those who mean to appreciate and approve it. There are, for instance, the socialist writers, led by Kautsky, who would make Anabaptism either "the forerunner of the modern socialism" or the "culminating effort of medieval communism," and who in reality see it only as the external religious shell of a class movement.^{1 4} There are the sociologists with their partial socioeconomic determinism as reflected in Richard Niebuhr's approach to the social origin of religious denominations. There is Albert Ritschl, who sees in Anabaptism an ascetic semi-monastic continuation of the medieval Franciscan tertiaries, and locates the seventeenth-century Pietists in the same line;^{1 5} and Ludwig Keller, who finds Anabaptists throughout the pre-Reformation period in the guise of Waldenses and other similar groups whom he chooses to call "the

old-evangelical brotherhood,"^{1 6} and for whom he posits a continuity from earliest times. Related to Keller are the earlier Baptist historians (and certain Mennonites) who rejoice to find in the Anabaptists the missing link which keeps them in the apostolic succession of the true church back through the Waldenses, Bogomils, Cathari, Paulicans, and Donatists, to Pentecost. More recently there is Rufus M. Jones who is inclined to class the Anabaptists with the mystics, and Walter Koehler who finds an Erasmian humanist origin for them.

However, there is another line of interpretation, now almost 100 years old, which is being increasingly accepted and which is probably destined to dominate the field. It is the one which holds that Anabaptism is the culmination of the Reformation, the fulfillment of the original vision of Luther and Zwingli, and thus makes it a consistent evangelical Protestantism seeking to recreate without compromise the original New Testament church, the vision of Christ and the apostles. This line of interpretation begins in 1848 with Max Göbel's great *Geschichte des christlichen Lebens in der Rheinisch-Westfälischen Kirche*, continues with the epoch-making work of C. A. Cornelius, particularly in his *Geshichte des Münsterschen Aufruhrs* (1855-1860), follows in the work of men like Johann Loserth, Karl Rembert, and John Horsch, and is represented by such contemporaries as Ernst Correll of Washington and Fritz Blanke of Zurich. A quotation from Göbel may serve to illustrate this interpretation:

The essential and distinguishing characteristic of this church is its great emphasis upon the actual personal conversion and regeneration of every Christian through the Holy Spirit. . . . They aimed with special emphasis at carrying out and realizing the Christian church. Their aim was the bringing together of all the true believers out of the great degenerated national churches into a true Christian church. That which the Reformation was originally intended to accomplish they aimed to bring into full immediate realization.^{1 7}

And Johann Loserth says:

More radically than any other party for church reformation the Anabaptists strove to follow the footsteps of the church of the first century and to renew unadulterated original Christianity.^{1 8}

The evidence in support of this interpretation is overwhelming, and can be taken from the statements of the contemporary opponents of the Anabaptists as well as from the Anabaptists themselves. Conrad Grebel, the founder of the Swiss Brethren movement, states clearly this point of view in his letter to Thomas Müntzer of 1524, in words written on behalf of the entire group which constitute in effect the original Anabaptist pronunciamento:

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Just as our forebears (the Roman Catholic papal Church) fell away from the true God and the knowledge of Jesus Christ and of the right faith in him, and from the one true, common divine word, from the divine institutions, from Christian love and life, and lived without God's law and gospel in human, useless, un-Christian customs and ceremonies, and expected to attain salvation therein, yet fell far short of it, as the evangelical preachers (Luther, Zwingli, etc.) have declared, and to some extent are still declaring; so today, too, every man wants to be saved by superficial faith, without fruits of faith, without the baptism of test and probation, without love and hope, without right Christian practices, and wants to persist in all the old fashion of personal vices, and in the common ritualistic and anti-Christian customs of baptism and of the Lord's Supper, in disrespect for the divine word and in respect for the word of the pope and of the antipapal preachers, which yet is not equal to the divine word nor in harmony with it. In respecting persons and in manifold seduction there is grosser and more pernicious error now than ever has been since the beginning of the world. In the same error we, too, lingered as long as we heard and read only the evangelical preachers who are to blame for all this, in punishment for our sins. But after we took the Scriptures in hand, too, and consulted it on many points, we have been instructed somewhat and have discovered the great and hurtful error of the shepherds, of ours too, namely that we do not daily beseech God earnestly with constant groanings to be brought out of this destruction of all godly life and out of human abominations, and to attain to true faith and divine instruction.¹⁹

A similar statement was made in 1538, after fourteen years of persecution, by an Anabaptist leader who spoke on behalf of his group in the great colloquy at Berne with the leaders of the Reformed Church:

While yet in the national church, we obtained much instruction from the writings of Luther, Zwingli, and others, concerning the mass and other papal ceremonies, that they are vain. Yet we recognized a great lack as regards repentance, conversion, and the true Christian life. Upon these things my mind was bent. I waited and hoped for a year or two, since the minister had much to say of amendment of life, of giving to the poor, loving one another, and abstaining from evil. But I could not close my eyes to the fact that the doctrine which was preached and which was based on the Word of God, was not carried out. No beginning was made toward true Christian living, and there was no unison in the teaching concerning the things that were necessary. And although the mass and the images were finally abolished, true repentance and Christian love were not in evidence. Changes were made only as concerned external things. This gave me occasion to inquire further into these matters. Then God sent His messengers, Conrad Grebel and others, with whom I conferred about the fundamental teachings of the apostles and the Christian life practice. I found them men who had surrendered themselves to the doctrine of Christ by "Bussfertigkeit" (repentance evidenced by fruits). With their assistance we established a congregation in which repentance was

in evidence by newness of life in Christ.²⁰

It is evident from these statements that the Anabaptists were concerned most of all about "a true Christian life," that is, a life patterned after the teaching and example of Christ. The reformers, they believed, whatever their profession may have been, did not secure among the people true repentance, regeneration, and Christian living as a result of their preaching. The Reformation emphasis on faith was good but inadequate, for without newness of life, they held, faith is hypocritical.

This Anabaptist critique of the Reformation was a sharp one, but it was not unfair. There is abundant evidence that although the original goal sought by Luther and Zwingli was "an earnest Christianity" for all, the actual outcome was far less, for the level of Christian living among the Protestant population was frequently lower than it had been before under Catholicism. Luther himself was keenly conscious of the deficiency. In April 1522 he expressed the hope that, "We who at the present are well nigh heathen under a Christian name, may yet organize a Christian assembly."²¹ In December 1525 he had an important conversation with Caspar Schwenckfeld, concerning the establishment of the New Testament church. Schwenckfeld pointed out that the establishment of the new church had failed to result in spiritual and moral betterment of the people, a fact which Luther admitted, for Schwenckfeld states that "Luther regretted very much that no amendment of life was in evidence."²² Between 1522 and 1527 Luther repeatedly mentioned his concern to establish a true Christian church, and his desire to provide for earnest Christians ("*Die mit Ernst Christen sein wollen*") who would confess the gospel with their lives as well as with their tongues. He thought of entering the names of these "earnest Christians" in a special book and having them meet separately from the mass of nominal Christians, but concluding that he would not have sufficient of such people, he dropped the plan.^{22a} Zwingli faced the same problem; he was in fact specifically challenged by the Swiss Brethren to set up such a church, but he refused and followed Luther's course.²³ Both reformers decided that it was better to include the masses within the fold of the church than to form a fellowship of true Christians only. Both certainly expected the preaching of the Word and the ministrations of the sacraments to bear fruit in an earnest Christian life, at least among some, but they reckoned with a permanently large and indifferent mass. In taking this course, said the Anabaptists, the reformers surrendered their original purpose, and abandoned the divine intention. Others may say they were wise and statesmanlike leaders.²⁴

The Anabaptists, however, retained the original vision of Luther and Zwingli, enlarged it, gave it body

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and form, and set out to achieve it in actual practice. They proceeded to organize a church composed solely of earnest Christians, and actually found the people for it. They did not believe in any case that the size of the response should determine whether or not the truth of God should be applied, and they refused to compromise. They preferred to make a radical break with 1,000 years of history and culture if necessary rather than break with the New Testament.

May it not be said that the decision of Luther and Zwingli to surrender their original vision was the tragic turning point of the Reformation? Professor Karl Mueller, one of the keenest and fairest interpreters of the Reformation, evidently thinks so, for he says, "The aggressive, conquering power, which Lutheranism manifested in its first period was lost everywhere at the moment when the governments took matters in hand and established the Lutheran Creed,²⁵ that is to say, when Luther's mass church concept was put to practice. Luther in his later years expressed disappointment at the final outcome of the reformation, stating that the people had become more and more indifferent toward religion and the moral outlook was more deplorable than ever. His last years were embittered by the consciousness of partial failure, and his expressions of dejection are well known. Contrast this sense of defeat at the end of Luther's outwardly successful career with the sense of victory in the hearts of the Anabaptist martyrs who laid down their lives in what the world would call defeat, conscious of having kept the faith with their vision to the end.

Having defined genuine Anabaptism in its Reformation setting, we are ready to examine its central teachings. The Anabaptist vision included three major points of emphasis; first, a new conception of the essence of Christianity as discipleship; second, a new conception of the church as a brotherhood; and third, a new ethic of love and nonresistance. We turn now to an exposition of these points.

[Christianity as Discipleship]

First and fundamental in the Anabaptist vision was the conception of the essence of Christianity as discipleship. It was a concept which meant the transformation of the entire way of life of the individual believer and of society so that it would be fashioned after the teachings and example of Christ.²⁶ The Anabaptists could not understand a Christianity which made regeneration, holiness, and love primarily a matter of intellect, of doctrinal belief, or of subjective "experience," rather than one of the transformation of life. They demanded an outward expression of the inner experience. Repentance must be "evidenced" by newness of

behavior. "In evidence" is the keynote which rings through the testimonies and challenges of the early Swiss Brethren when they are called to give an account of themselves. The whole life was to be brought literally under the lordship of Christ in a covenant of discipleship, a covenant which the Anabaptist writers delighted to emphasize.²⁷ The focus of the Christian life was to be not so much the inward experience of the grace of God, as it was for Luther, but the outward application of that grace to all human conduct and the consequent Christianization of all human relationships. The true test of the Christian, they held, is discipleship. The great word of the Anabaptists was not "faith" as it was with the reformers, but "following" (*nachfolge Christi*). And baptism, the greatest of Christian symbols, was accordingly to be for them the "covenant of a good conscience toward God" (I Peter 3:21),²⁸ the pledge of a complete commitment to obey Christ, and not primarily the symbol of a past experience. The Anabaptists had faith, indeed, but they used it to produce a life. Theology was for them a means, not an end.

That the Anabaptists not only proclaimed the ideal of full Christian discipleship but achieved, in the eyes of their contemporaries and even of their opponents, a measurably higher level of performance than the average, is fully witnessed by the sources. The early Swiss and South German reformers were keenly aware of this achievement and its attractive power. Zwingli knew it best of all, but Bullinger, Capito, Vadian, and many others confirm his judgment that the Anabaptist Brethren were unusually sincere, devoted, and effective Christians. However, since the Brethren refused to accept the state church system which the reformers were building, and in addition made "radical" demands which might have changed the entire social order, the leaders of the reformation were completely baffled in their understanding of the movement, and professed to believe that the Anabaptists were of the darkest dye. Bullinger, for instance, calls them "devilish enemies and destroyers of the Church of God."²⁹ Nevertheless they had to admit the apparent superiority of their life. In Zwingli's last book against the Swiss Brethren (1527), for instance, the following is found:

If you investigate their life and conduct, it seems at first irreproachable, pious, unassuming, attractive, yea, above this world. Even those who are inclined to be critical will say that their lives are excellent.³⁰

Bullinger, himself, who wrote bitter diatribes against them, was compelled to admit of the early Swiss Brethren that:

Those who unite with them will by their ministers be received into their church by rebaptism and repentance and

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newness of life. They henceforth lead their lives under a semblance of a quite spiritual conduct. They denounce covetousness, pride, profanity, the lewd conversation and immorality of the world, drinking, and gluttony. In short, their hypocrisy is great and manifold.^{3 1}

Bullinger's lament (1531) that "the people are running after them as though they were the living saints" has been reported earlier. Vadian, the reformer of St. Gall, testified, that "none were more favorably inclined toward Anabaptism and more easily entangled with it than those who were of pious and honorable disposition."^{3 2} Capito, the reformer of Strassburg, wrote in 1527 concerning the Swiss Brethren:

I frankly confess that in most (Anabaptists) there is evidence piety and consecration and indeed a zeal which is beyond suspicion of insincerity. For what earthly advantage could they hope to win by enduring exile, torture, and unspeakable punishment of the flesh? I testify before God that I cannot say that on account of a lack of wisdom they are somewhat indifferent toward earthly things, but rather from divine motives.^{3 3}

The preachers of the Canton of Berne admitted in a letter to the Council of Berne in 1532 that

The Anabaptists have the semblance of outward piety to a far greater degree than we and all the churches which unitedly with us confess Christ, and they avoid offensive sins which are very common among us.^{3 4}

Walter Klarer, the Reformed chronicler of Appenzell, Switzerland, wrote:

Most of the Anabaptists are people who at first had been the best with us in promulgating the word of God.^{3 5}

And the Roman Catholic theologian, Franz Agricola, in his book of 1582, *Against the Terrible Errors of the Anabaptists*, says:

Among the existing heretical sects there is none which in appearance leads a more modest or pious life than the Anabaptist. As concerns their outward public life they are irreproachable. No lying, deception, swearing, strife, harsh language, no intemperate eating and drinking, no outward personal display, is found among them, but humility, patience, uprightness, neatness, honesty, temperance, straight-forwardness in such measure that one would suppose that they had the Holy Spirit of God.^{3 6}

A mandate against the Swiss Brethren published in 1585 by the Council of Berne states that offensive sins and vices were common among the preachers and the membership of the Reformed Church, adding, "And this is the greatest reason that many pious,

God-fearing people who seek Christ from their heart are offended and forsake our church [to unite with the Brethren].^{3 7}

One of the finest contemporary characterizations of the Anabaptists is that given in 1531 by Sebastian Franck, an objective and sympathetic witness, though an opponent of the Anabaptists, who wrote as follows:

The Anabaptists. . . soon gained a large following. . . drawing many sincere souls who had a zeal for God, for they taught nothing but love, faith, and the cross. They showed themselves humble, patient under much suffering; they brake bread with one another as an evidence of unity and love. They helped each other faithfully, and called each other brothers. . . They died as martyrs, patiently and humbly enduring all persecution.^{3 8}

A further confirmation of the above evaluation of the achievement of the Anabaptists is found in the fact that in many places those who lived a consistent life were in danger of falling under the suspicion of being guilty of Anabaptist heresy. Caspar Schwenckfeld, for instance, declared, "I am being maligned, by both preachers and others, with the charge of being Anabaptist, even as all others who lead a true, pious Christian life are now almost everywhere given this name."^{3 9} Bullinger himself complained that

. . . there are those who in reality are not Anabaptists but have a pronounced averseness to the sensuality and frivolity of the world and therefore reprove sin and vice and are consequently called or misnamed Anabaptists by petulant persons.^{4 0}

The great collection of Anabaptist source materials, commonly called the *Täufer-Akten*, now in its third volume, contains a number of specific illustrations of this. In 1562 a certain Caspar Zacher of Wailblingen in Württemberg was accused of being an Anabaptist, but the court record reports that since he was an envious man who could not get along with others, who often started quarrels, as well as being guilty of swearing and cursing and carrying a weapon, he was not considered to be an Anabaptist.^{4 1} On the other hand in 1570 a certain Hans Jäger of Vöhringen in Württemberg was brought before the court on suspicion of being an Anabaptist primarily because he did not curse but lived a irreproachable life.^{4 2}

[A New Concept of the Church]

As a second major element in the Anabaptist vision, a new concept of the church was created by the central principle of newness of life and applied Christianity. Voluntary church membership based upon true conversion and involving a commitment to holy living and discipleship was the absolutely essential heart of this concept. This vision stands in sharp contrast to the church concept of the reformers who retained the medieval idea of a mass church with

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membership of the entire population from birth to the grave compulsory by the law and force.

It is from the standpoint of this new conception of the church that the Anabaptists' opposition to infant baptism must be interpreted. Infant baptism was not the cause of their disavowal of the state church; it was only a symbol of the cause. How could infants give a commitment based upon a knowledge of what true Christianity means? They might conceivably passively experience the grace of God (though Anabaptists would question this), but they could not respond in pledging their lives to Christ. Such infant baptism, would not only be meaningless, but would in fact become a serious obstacle to a true understanding of the nature of Christianity and membership in the church. Only adult baptism could signify an intelligent life commitment.

An inevitable corollary of the concept of the church as a body committed and practicing Christians pledged to the highest standard of New Testament living was the insistence on the separation of the church from the world, that is nonconformity of the Christian principles in society, and the church could not tolerate the practice of worldly ways among its membership. Hence, the only way out was separation. ("*Absonderung*"), the gathering of true Christians into their own Christian society where Christ's way could and would be practiced. On this principle of separation Menno Simons says:

All the evangelical scriptures teach us that the church of Christ was and is, in doctrine, life, and worship, a people separated from the world.⁴³

In the great debate of 1532 at Zofingen, spokesmen of the Swiss Brethren said:

The true church is separated from the world and is conformed to the nature of Christ. If a church is yet at one with the world we cannot recognize it as a true church.⁴⁴

In a sense, this principle of nonconformity to the world is merely a negative expression of the positive requirement of discipleship, but it goes further in the sense that it represents a judgment on the contemporary social order, which the Anabaptists called "the world," as non-Christian, and sets up a line of demarcation between the Christian community and worldly society.

A logical outcome of the concept of nonconformity to the world was the concept of the suffering church. Conflict with the world was inevitable for those who endeavored to live an earnest Christian life. The Anabaptists expected opposition; they took literally the words of Jesus when he said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation," but they also took literally His words of encouragement, "But be of

good cheer; I have overcome the world." Conrad Grebel said in 1524:

True Christian believers are sheep among wolves, sheep for the slaughter; they must be baptized in anguish and affliction, tribulation, persecution, suffering, and death; they must be tried with fire and must reach the fatherland of eternal rest not by killing them bodily, but by mortifying their spiritual enemies.⁴⁵

Professor Ernest Staehelin of Basel, Switzerland, says:

Anabaptism by its earnest determination to follow in life and practice the primitive Christian Church has kept alive the conviction that he who is in Christ is a new creature and that those who are identified with his cause will necessarily encounter the opposition of the world.⁴⁶

Perhaps it was persecution that made the Anabaptists so acutely aware of the conflict between the church and the world, but this persecution was due to the fact that they refused to accept what they considered the sub-Christian way of life practiced in European Christendom. They could have avoided the persecution had they but conformed, or they could have suspended the practice of their faith to a more convenient time and sailed under false colors as did David Joris, but they chose with dauntless courage and simple honesty to live their faith, to defy the existing world order, and to suffer the consequences.

Basic to the Anabaptist vision of the church was the insistence on the practice of true brotherhood and love among the members of the church.⁴⁷ This principle was understood to mean not merely the expression of pious sentiments, but the actual practice of sharing possessions to meet the needs of others in the spirit of true mutual aid. Hans Leopold, a Swiss Brethren martyr of 1528, said of the Brethren:

If they know of anyone who is in need, whether or not he is a member of their church, they believe it their duty, out of love to God, to render help and aid.⁴⁸

Heinrich Seiler, a Swiss Brethren martyr of 1535, said:

I do not believe it wrong that a Christian has property of his own, but yet he is nothing more than a steward.⁴⁹

An early Hutterian book states that one of the questions addressed by the Swiss Brethren to applicants for baptism was: "Whether they would consecrate themselves with all their temporal possessions to the service of God and His people."⁵⁰ A Protestant of Strassburg, visitor at a Swiss Brethren baptismal service in that city in 1557, reports that a question addressed to all applicants for baptism was: "Whether they, if necessity require it, would devote all their possessions to the service of the brotherhood,

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and would not fail any member that is in need, if they were able to render aid."^{5 1} Heinrich Bullinger, the bitter enemy of the Brethren, states:

They teach that every Christian is under duty before God from motives of love, to use, if need be, all his possessions to supply the necessities of life to any of the brethren who are in need.^{5 2}

This principle of full brotherhood and stewardship was actually practiced, and not merely speculatively considered. In its absolute form of Christian communism, with the complete repudiation of private property, it became the way of life of the Hutterian Brotherhood in 1528 and has remained so to this day, for the Hutterites held that private property is the greatest enemy of Christian love. One of the inspiring stories of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is the successful practice of the full communal way of life by this group.^{5 3}

[Love and Nonresistance]

The third great element in the Anabaptist vision was the ethic of love and nonresistance as applied to all human relationships. The Brethren understood this to mean complete abandonment of all warfare, strife, and violence, and of the taking of human life.^{5 4} Conrad Grebel, the Swiss, said in 1524:

True Christians use neither worldly sword nor engage in war, since among them taking human life has ceased entirely, for we are no longer under the Old Covenant. . . . The Gospel and those who accept it are not to be protected with the sword, neither should they protect themselves.^{5 5}

Pilgram Marpeck, the South German leader, in 1544, speaking of Matthew 5, said:

All bodily, worldly, carnal, earthly fightings, conflicts, and wars are annulled and abolished among them through such law . . . which law of love Christ . . . Himself observed and thereby gave His followers a pattern to follow after.^{5 6}

Peter Riedemann, the Hutterian leader, wrote in 1545:

Christ, the Prince of Peace, has established His Kingdom, that is, the Church, and has purchased it by his blood. In this kingdom all worldly warfare has ended. Therefore a Christian has no part in war nor does he wield the sword to execute vengeance.^{5 7}

Menno Simons, of Holland, wrote in 1550:

The regenerated do not go to war, nor engage in strife. . . . They are the children of peace who have beaten their swords

into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, and know of no war. . . . Spears and swords of iron we leave to those who, alas, consider human blood and swine's blood of well-nigh equal value.^{5 8}

In this principle of nonresistance, or Biblical pacifism, which was thoroughly believed and resolutely practiced by all the original Anabaptist Brethren and their descendants throughout Europe from the beginning until the last century,^{5 9} the Anabaptists were again creative leaders, far ahead of their times, in this antedating the Quakers by over a century and a quarter. It should also be remembered that they held this principle in a day when both Catholic and Protestant churches not only endorsed war as an instrument of state policy, but employed it in religious conflicts. It is true, of course, that occasional earlier prophets, like Peter Chelcicky, had advocated similar views, but they left no continuing practice of the principle behind them.

[What is True Christianity?]

As we review the vision of the Anabaptists, it becomes clear that there are two foci in this vision. The first focus relates to the essential nature of Christianity. Is it primarily a reception of divine grace through a sacramental-sacerdotal institution (Roman Catholicism), is it chiefly enjoyment of the inner experience of the grace of God through faith in Christ (Lutheranism), or is it most of all the transformation of life through discipleship (Anabaptism)? The Anabaptists were neither institutionalists, mystics, nor pietists, for they laid the weight of their emphasis upon following Christ in life. To them it was unthinkable for one truly to be a Christian without creating a new life on divine principles both for himself and for all men who commit themselves to the Christian way.

[What is a True Church?]

The second focus relates to the church. For the Anabaptists, the church was neither an institution (Catholicism), nor the instrument of God for the proclamation of the divine Word (Lutheranism), nor a resource group for individual piety (Pietism). It was a brotherhood of love in which the fullness of the Christian life ideal is to be expressed.

The Anabaptist vision may be further clarified by comparison of the social ethics of the four main Christian groups of the Reformation period, Catholic, Calvinist, Lutheran, and Anabaptist. Catholic and Calvinist alike were optimistic about the world, agreeing that the world can be redeemed; they held that the entire social order can be brought under the sovereignty of God and Christianized, although they used different means to attain this goal. Lutheran and Anabaptist were pessimistic about the world, denying

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the possibility of Christianizing the entire social order; but the consequent attitudes of these two groups toward the social order were diametrically opposed. Lutheranism said that since the Christian must live in a world order that remains sinful, he must make a compromise with it. As a citizen he cannot avoid participation in the evil of the world, for instance in making war, and for this his only recourse is to seek forgiveness by the grace of God; only within his personal private experience can the Christian truly Christianize his life. The Anabaptist rejected this view completely. Since for him no compromise dare be made with evil, the Christian may in no circumstance participate in any conduct in the existing social order which is contrary to the spirit and teaching of Christ and the apostolic practice. He must consequently withdraw from the worldly system and create a Christian social order within the fellowship of the church brotherhood. Extension of this Christian order by the conversion of individuals and their transfer out of the world into the church is the only way by which progress can be made in Christianizing the social order.

However, the Anabaptist was realistic. Down

the long perspective of the future he saw little chance that the mass of humankind would enter such a brotherhood with its high ideals. Hence he anticipated a long and grievous conflict between the church and the world. Neither did he anticipate the time when the church would rule the world; the church would always be a suffering church. He agreed with the words of Jesus when He said that those who would be His disciples must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow Him, and that there would be few who would enter the strait gate and travel the narrow way of life. If this prospect should seem too discouraging, the Anabaptist would reply that the life within the Christian brotherhood is satisfyingly full of love and joy.

The Anabaptist vision was not a detailed blueprint for the reconstruction of human society, but the Brethren did believe that Jesus intended that the kingdom of God should be set up in the midst of earth, here and now, and this they proposed to do forthwith. We shall not believe, they said, that the Sermon on the Mount or any other vision that He had is only a heavenly vision meant but to keep His followers in tension until the last great day, but we shall practice what He taught, believing that where He walked we can by His grace follow in His steps.

FOOTNOTES

1. Reprinted from the *Church History* (March 1944) XIII, 3-24 with slight revisions.
2. Rufus M. Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion* (London 1909) 369. Professor Walter Kohler of Heidelberg has recently expressed a similar evaluation, asserting that the historical significance of the Anabaptists "erschöpft sich nicht in dem Duldermut, der Arbeitsteue, dem kulturellen Fleiss. . . . Nein, die Mennoniten dürfen ohne Überhebung einen Platz in der Weltgeschichte beanspruchen als Bahnbrecher der modernen Weltanschauung mit ihrer Glaubens- und Gewissensfreiheit."
3. The results of this research are best found in: *Mennonitisches Lexikon*, edited by Christian Hege and Christian Neff (Frankfurt a. M. and Weierhof (Pfalz), Germany, 1913 ff.), now at the letter "N"; Ernst Correll, *Das Schweizerische Täufermennonitentum: Ein Soziologischer Bericht* (Tübingen, 1925); *Mennonite Quarterly Review* (published at Goshen, Indiana, since 1927); *Mennonitische Geschichtblätter* (published at Weierhof (Palatinate) since 1936); R.J. Smithson, *The Anabaptists, Their Contribution to Our Protestant Heritage* (London, 1935); John Horsch *Mennonites in Europe* (Scottsdale, Pa., 1942); C. Henry Smith, *The Story of the Mennonites* (Berne, Indiana, 1941); L. von Muralt, *Glaube und Lehre der Schweizerischen Wiedertäufer in der Reformationszeit* (Zurich, 1938). Cf. also: Wilhelm Pauck "The Historiography of the German Reformation During the Past Twenty Years: IV. Research in the History of the Anabaptists." *Church History* (December 1940) IX, 335-364; Harold S. Bender, "Recent Progress in Research in Anabaptist History," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* (January 1934) VIII, 3-17. Only three volumes of the great source publication, *Quellen zur Geschichte der Wiedertäufer* (Leipzig, 1930 ff.), published by the *Verein für Reformationsgeschichte*, have yet appeared. (1944, Ed.)
4. Quoted in translation by John Horsch, *Mennonites in Europe*, 325, from Bullinger's *Der Wiedertäufer Ursprung*, etc., Zurich, 1560.
5. Horsch, 293, from Sebastian Frank's *Chronica, Zeitbuch und Geschichtsbibel* (Strassburg, 1531).
6. Heinrich Bullinger, *Vondem unverschampten fräfel. . . der selvsgeandten Widertouffern* (Zurich, 1531), folio 2v.
7. F. Roth, *Augsburgs Reformationsgeschichte* (Munich, 1901), I, 230.
8. Letter of Zwingli to Vadian, May 28, 1525, *Huldreich Zwinglis Sämtliche Werke* ed. Egli, Finsler, Köhler, et al. (Leipzig, 1914), VII, 332.

9. The full official text of the decree may be found in *Aller des Heiligen Roemischen Reichs gehaltene Reichstage, Abschiede und Satzungen* (Mainz, 1666), 210, 211. It is also edited by Ludwig Keller in *Monatshefte der Comenius Gesellschaft* (Berlin, 1900), IX, 55-57, and by Bossert in "Die Reichsgesetze über die Wiedertäufer" in *Quellen zur Geschichte der Wiedertäufer, I, Band Herzogtum Württemberg* (Leipzig, 1930), 1-10. See the excellent discussion of Anabaptist persecution by John Horsch in "The Persecution of the Evangelical Anabaptists," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* (January 1938), XII, 3-26.

10. *Geschicht-Buch der Hutterischen Brüder*, edited by Rudolf Wolkan (MacLeod (Alberta) and Vienna, 1923), 142, 181.

11. *Ibid.*, 182-187. The following quotation is composed of extracts from this account without regard to the original order, chiefly from 186, 187.

12. Gottfried Keller's *Werke*, ed. by Max Nussberger (Leipzig, n.d.) VI, 309. See Elizabeth Horsh Bender, "The Portrayal of the Swiss Anabaptists in Gottfried Keller's Ursula," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* (July, 1943) XVII, 136-150.

13. In Switzerland, this group was called "Swiss Brethren," in Austria "Hutterites," in Holland and north Germany, "Menists." All these groups seriously objected to the name "Anabaptists" which was a term used to designate a punishable heresy and which after the tragic Munster episode (1534-35) was a name of odious opprobrium. I use the term here only for custom's sake. The term "Mennonite" came into wider use in the seventeenth century and was ultimately applied to all the groups except the Hutterites.

14. Ernst H. Correll, *Das Schweizerische Täufermennonitentum* (Tubingen, 1925), "Allgemeine historisch-soziologische Kennzeichnung," 3-10, gives an excellent concise survey. See particularly 6, footnote 1. See also Karl Kautsky, *Communism in Central Europe in time of the Reformation* (1897). Troeltch rejected the theory of the socioeconomic origin of the Anabaptists.

15. Albrecht Ritschl, *Geshichte des Pietismus* (Bonn, 1880). Cf. R. Friedmann, "Conception of the Anabaptist," *Church History* (December 1940) IX, 351.

16. Ludwig Keller, *Die Reformation und die älteren Reformparteien* (Leipzig, 1885). Cf. also Friedmann, *op. cit.*, 352.

17. Max Göbel, *Geshichte des Christlichen Lebens*, etc. (Coblentz, 1848), I, 134. Ritschl, *op. cit.*, 22, characterizes Göbel's views as follows: "Die Wiedertäufer also soll nach Göbel die gründlichere, entschiedeniere, vollständigere sein, welche als 'Kind der Reformation' Luthers and Swinglis zu erkennen aber von Luther seit 1522, von Zwingli seit 1524 aufgegeben worden wäre." Ritschl (*op. cit.*, 7) himself states the Anabaptist position as follows: "nicht minder haben die Wiedertäufer sich dafür angesehen, dass sie das von Luther und Zwingli begonnene Werk der Wiederherstellung der Kirche zu seinem rechten Ziel führten."

18. Horsch, *op. cit.*, 289.

19. Letter of Conrad Grebel to Thomas Müntzer, Sept. 5, 1524. *Thomas Müntzers Briefwechsel*, ed. H. Böhmer, and P. Kirn (Leipzig, 1931), 92; English translation, Walter Rauschenbusch, "The Zurich Anabaptists and Thomas Müntzer," *American Journal of Theology* (January 1905) IX, 92.

20. Taken from an unpublished manuscript in the *Staatsarchiv des Kantons Bern*, (*Unnütze Papiere*, Bd. 80), entitled *Acta des Gesprächs zwüschem predicannten und Touffbrüderenn* (1538), Copy in the Goshen College Library.

21. *Corpus Schwenckfeldianoru*, (Leipzig, 1911), II, 280 d. See also K. Ecke, *Schwenckfeld, Luther und der Gedanke einer apostolischen Reformation* (Berlin, 1911), 101f. See also the discussion on this topic in J. Horsch, "The Rise of State Church Protestantism," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* (July 1932), VI, 189-191.

22a. See Luther's *Deutsche Messe*, translated in *Works of Martin Luther* (ed. C. M. Jacobs et. al.) Vol. VI (Philadelphia, 1932), 172, 173.

23. "Drei Zeugenaussagen Zwinglis im Täuferprozess" in *Huldreich Zwinglis Sämtliche Werke* (Leipzig, 1927), IV, 169.

23. Against this interpretation of Luther (and Zwingli) it may be argued that Luther never completely and consistently adopted the concept of a church of "earnest Christians only" which is here attributed to him, but that along with it he also retained the contradictory concept of the church functioning as a "corpus regens," that is, as an institution of social control. It may be agreed that Luther held the two concepts for a time and that he finally abandoned the former in favor of the latter, but the fact nevertheless remains that the former was for a time dominant, and that it is the implicit meaning of his whole basic theological position. The retention and eventual dominance of the second concept is an evidence of the carry-over of medievalism in Luther's thought. In regard to Zwingli, William Hadorn says: "It must be admitted that not only Zwingli but also Swiss and South German Reformers, e.g., Oecolampad and Capito, originally held views similar to the Anabaptists" (*Die Reformation in der Deutschen Schweiz*, (Leipzig, 1928), 104) Walter Köhler, the best living authority on Zwingli, says, "Es ist wie bei Luther auch, die Kapitulation der autonomen kirchengemeinschaft vor der Obrigkeit eingetreten." (*Zwinglis Werke* (Leipzig, 1927) IV, 29).

25. Karl Müller, *Kurchengeschichte*, II, I, 476, Müller describes the essential goal of the Anabaptists as follows: "Es bedeutete inmitten der Auflösung aller Verhältnisse genug, dass hier eine Gemeinschaft stand, die die Heiligung des Lebens allem anderen voranstellte und zugleich in dem unteren Volksschichten wirklich Fuss gefasst, sie mit selbständiger Religiösität gefüllt hat." (*Kirchengeschichte*, II, I, 330.)

26. Johannes Kühn, *Toleranz und Offenbarung* (Leipzig, 1923), 224 says: "With the Anabaptists everything was based on a central idea. This central idea was concretely religious. It was Jesus' command to follow Him in a holy life of fellowship." Professor Alfred Hegler of Tübingen describes the Anabaptist ideal as "liberty of conscience, rejection of all state-made Christianity, the demand for personal holiness, and a vital personal acceptance of Christian truth." Professor Paul Wernle says: "Their vital characteristic was the earnestness with which they undertook the practical fulfillment of New Testament requirements both for the

individual and for the church," These and other similar quotations are to be found in Horsch. "The Character of the Evangelical Anabaptists as Reported by Contemporary Reformation Writers." *Mennonite Quarterly Review* (July 1934), VIII, 135.

27. Pilgram Marpeck, the outstanding writer of the Swiss and South German Brethren, is an example. See J. C. Wenger, "The Theology of Pilgram Marpeck." *Mennonite Quarterly Review* (October 1938) XII, 247.

28. The German (Luther) translation of I Peter 3:21 calls baptism "Der Bund eines guten Gewissens mit Gott."

29. Bullinger, *Von dem unverschampten fräfel* (1531), fol. 75 r.

30. S. M. Jackson, *Selected Works of Huldreich Zwingli* (Philadelphia, 1901), 127.

31. Bullinger, *Der Widertäufer Ursprung*, fol. 15 v.

32. Joachim von Watt, *Deutsch Historische Schriften*, ed. Ernest Goöttinger (St. Gall, 1879), II, 408

33. C. A. Cornelius, *Geschichte des Münsterschen Aufruhrs* (Leipzig, 1860), II, 52.

34. W. J. McGlothlin, *Die Berner Täufer bis 1532* (Berlin, 1902), 36.

35. J. J. Simler, *Sammlung alter und neuer Urkunden* (Zurich, 1757), I, 824.

36. Karl Rembert, *Die Wiedertäufer in Herzogtum Jülich* (Berlin, 1899), 564.

37. Ernst Müller, *Geschichte der Bernischen Täufer* (Frauenfeld, 1895), 88 Müller speaks (p. 89) of the mandate of 1585 as conceiving of "das Täuferwesen" as a just judgment of God on the church and the people of Berne.

38. Sebastian Franck, *Chronica, Zeitbuch und Geschichtsbibel* (Strassburg, 1531), folio 444v.

39. Schwenckfeld's *Epistolar* (1564), I, 203.

40. Bullinger, *Der Widertäufer Ursprung* (1561). fol. 170r.

41. *Quellen zur Geschichte der Wiedertäufer, I, Band Herzogtum Württemberg*, ed. Gustav Bossert (Leipzig, 1930), 216 f.

42. *Ibid.*, 259 ff.

43. *Complete Works of Menno Simons* (Elkhart, Indiana, 1871), II, 37b.

44. *Handlung oder Acta der Disputation gehalten zu Zofingen* (Zurich, 1532).

45. Böhmer-Kirn, *op. cit.*, 97

46. Horsch, *op. cit.*, 386

47. P. Tschackert, *Die Entstehung der Lutherischen und reformierten Kirchenlehre* (Göttingen, 1910), 133, says of the Anabaptists that they were "A voluntary Christian fellowship, striving to conform to the Christian spirit for the practice of brotherly love."

48. Johannes Kühn, *op. cit.*, 44. See Ernst Correll, *op. cit.*, 15 f. on the attitude of the various Anabaptist groups on community of goods.

50. Horsch, *op. cit.*, 317.

51. A. Hulshof, *Geschiedenis van de Doopsgezinden to Straatsburg van 1525 tot 1557* (Amsterdam, 1905), 216.

52. Bullinger, *Der Widertäufer Ursprung*, fol. 129v.

53. John Horsch, *The Hutterian Brethren 1528-1931* (Goshen, Indiana, 1931), gives the only adequate account in English of the Hutterian Brethren. It is of interest to note that Erasmus, Melanchthon, and Zwingli condemned private ownership of property as a sin. See Paul Wernle, *Renaissance und Reformation* (Tübingen, 1912), 54, 55, for the citations of Erasmus, and Melanchthon, and Horsch, *Hutterian Brethren*, 132, footnote 126, for the citation of Zwingli. Wilhelm Pauck says that Bucer's ideal state was that of Christian Communism, "Martin Bucer's Conception of a Christian State," in *Princeton Theological Review* (January 1928), XXVI, 88.

54. Not all of the Anabaptists were completely nonresistant. Balthasar Hubmaier for instance for a brief period (1526-28) led a group of Anabaptists at Nikolsburg in Moravia who agreed to carry the sword against the Turk and pay special war taxes for this purpose. This group, which became extinct in a short time, was known as the "Schwertler" in distinction from other Moravian Anabaptists called the "Stäbler," who later became the Hutterites and have continued to the present. It is obvious that Hubmaier and the "Schwertler" represent a transient aberration from original and authentic Anabaptism. Bullinger, (*Von dem unverschampten fräfel* (1531) fol. 139v.) testifies that the Swiss Brethren considered war to be "das ergist uebel das man erdencken mag," and (*Der Widertäufer Ursprung* (1561) fol. 16 r.) says "they do not defend themselves, therefore they do not go to war and are not obedient to the government on this point." See also, extensive compilation of evidence by John Horsch in his booklet, *The Principle of Nonresistance as Held by the Mennonite Church, A Historical Survey* (Scottsdale, Pa., 1927), 60 pages.

55. Letter of Grebel to Muntzer, Bohmer-Kirn, *op. cit.*, 97

56. (Pilgram Marpeck). *Testamenterleütterung* (n.d., n.p., ca. 1544), fol. 313r.

57. (Peter Riedmann), *Rechenschaft unserer Religion, Lehre und Glaubens, von den Bruedern die Man die Hutterischen nennt* (Berne, Indiana, 1902), 105.

58. *The Complete Works of Menno Simons* (Elkhart, Indiana, 1871), I, 170b and 81b. The quotations were revised by comparison with the Dutch editions of 1646 and 1681.

59. Mennonites of Holland, Germany, France, and Switzerland gradually abandoned nonresistance in the course of the nineteenth century. The emigrant Mennonites in Russia and North America have maintained it. The Mennonites of the United States furnish 40 percent of all conscientious objectors in Civilian Public Service in the present war, and the Mennonites of Canada a still higher percent of the conscientious objectors in that country.

THE PETER SCHROCK LETTERS

(Installment II)

The following letters are from a collection of letters which were sent to Peter D. Schrock (1829-1902). The collection consists of ca. 152 letters written in German and ca. 170 in English. The German letters are in the archives at Ohio Amish Library.

Peter D. Schrock (Schrack) was born in 1829, in the Glades settlement in Somerset Co. Pa., to David and Mary (Stukey) Schrock. In probably the fall of 1850 he was married to Susanna, the daughter of John P. and Anna (Beachy) Miller. They lived in Brother's Valley Twp., Somerset Co. until they moved to Preston Co. Virginia in January, 1860. During the Civil War this area became the state of West Virginia in 1863 and the settlement was known as the Aurora, West Virginia settlement. In the fall of 1860 Peter was ordained as minister here. Daniel Beachy was the bishop at that time. Tensions between conservative and progressive elements in the church prompted Peter, a conservative, to look for a new home by 1865. It went until 1868 that Peter, with his family of seven children, ranging from 16 year-old Anna to 5 month-old Peter, moved to Holmes County, Ohio, where he died in 1902. Susanna had died on Sept. 17, 1869, only about a year and a half after they had come to Holmes County. Peter bought the farm where his son Peter P. Schrock and grandson Joe P. Schrock lived, and where his great-grandson Ervin J. Schrock now lives. Many of Peter's descendants live in Holmes and Geauga Counties, Ohio.

The letters cover a wide variety of subjects, such as can be expected that correspondence from family and friends would in the days when mail was the primary means of communication across state lines. The three main subjects, however, are the weather and crops; the health of their families and friends; and church matters. The letters presented here were selected to give us a window into the church issues and conditions at that time. A sample of the original German script and grammar is found at the end of this article, on page 28, 29. Most of the words are phonetically written in the Pa. Deitsch dialect.

The years from 1860-1890 were difficult times for the Amish descendants of those Anabaptist forebearers who had braved persecution, a dangerous journey at sea, as well as the red men and wild animals, to carve out a niche for their descendants in the "new world" frontiers. The pressures those next generations faced were more subtle: acculturation, pietistic influences of other plain groups, and the changes brought on by material prosperity and the fast-growing western settlements. In this time frame the Civil War (1861-1865) took place with its uncertainties for the "wehrlose" groups. The Dunkers, John Holdeman, and the "Sleep Preachers" were active in this era and presented different and unsettling religious emphases.

The *Amish Ministers Meetings* (Diener Versammlungen) of 1862-1878 took place in this period also. With them came the questions of rebaptism, stream baptism ("Waldenser"), the ordnung, and worldliness, etc. which were the issues precipitating the Meetings. The tensions which resulted in the Old Order / Amish-Mennonite distinctions were wide-spread and are evident in this selection of letters.

The first nine letters are from the east: Pennsylvania, W. Virginia, and Ohio; and the last nine are from Iowa. Each group is arranged in chronological order and show the progression of the church issues in their area. Most of the letters were written in German script.

The following (part) letter was written during the Civil War to Peter while he still lived in Aurora W. Va. Peter was already ordained a minister by then. This letter was written mostly in English and was from Peter's father-in-law John P. Miller from Cove, Garret Co., Maryland. He had apparently visited Holmes County and reports about that visit. We present the letter in its original spellings.

Pages 28, 29

April 13, 1862

Mr. Peter Schrack, Esq.

Zum ersten die Mamme hot der schnupfen rechtschaffen. Ich bien gekummen den 4ten April. Di leid in Ohio siend ziemlich gesund. Sie hatten mener dreck wie etwas schee iest.

Now I will tell you something els about the church matters. The Walnut Crick ar by themselves and I cannot think they ar on good way but my Cuson Moses ["Gla Mose"] Miller is as near rite yet as any to be found yet with their mode or fashion. It pleased me very much to see them. And all the others round their ar starded purty well too but yet far from unkel Moses Millers ["Gros Mose"]. Wewant to go to Jonas Musser. Their child will be buried today.

Your sinseer friend

*John P. Miller
Cove, Addison, Pa.*

The next letter was written to Peter while he was still in Aurora, W. Va. It appears that he had written Levi Miller about moving to Holmes County and this was Levi Miller's reply. Miller was the third Amish bishop ordained in the new Holmes County settlement. When the first church needed to divide because of size, Moses P. (Gros Mose) Miller was ordained bishop in 1840 for the second congregation. When the first bishop, Moses Beachy, Sr., died in the fall of the same year, Levi Miller was ordained bishop in his stead. "Gros Mose" Miller was married to Levi Miller's sister Catherine, making them brothers-in-law. During the ensuing differences in the Amish church a decade later "Gros Mose" was the leader of the progressives and Levi Miller was the leader of the conservatives. The remarks Miller makes in this letter are interesting in light for those differences.

To: Peter Schrack German Settlement, Preston County, West Virginy

Holmes County, Ohio

March 4, 1867

First a heartfelt greeting of love and peace to you Peter Schrack and to your wife, wishing you everything good in body and soul, here in this time and in eternity. Herewith these few lines we let you know that we received your letter of February 8 only on March first. Which was completely unfamiliar to me at first until I had read it. Then we rejoiced over it, because it appears that there are still such church members here and there who want to follow our faithful Redeemer and Saviour Jesus Christ in simplicity and humility and seek to be separated from the evil and wicked world. For Matthew says in the eleventh [chapter] "Come unto me all ye weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take upon you my yoke and learn of me for I am meek and humble at heart, then you will find rest for your souls. And He says, My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

We have nothing to boast at all among us concerning the pomp and pride (Pracht und Hochmuth) rather much more to lament. It may well be the time whereof our Saviour said in the 24th [chapter] that the unrighteousness will take the upper hand and the love in many will grow cold. Further, there are 4 congregations here who try to remain upon the old ordnung with the help and assistance of God, and one of the apostate ones (abgefallenen). So it is very bad among us. Where there are vain young folks (stolze Yunge) among us, they go to the Walnut Creek [church] where the freedom in pomp and pride (pracht und hoffart) is all tolerated. I do not think to say much more, because I for my part want to commit it to the great God. So the best counsel I can give you is to come to us yourself. Then you can see for yourself.

With this I want to close and to say with the poet: " Finally, it is my wish to be remembered with the Lord , as I am also minded to do and watch all together through Jesus Christ, Amen."

Further, we are, as usual, healthy and the people mostly also. Only those older people have sicknesses. We have had very cold weather this winter until the beginning of February. Then it was nice until the last Saturday it began to get cold. Yesterday it began to snow and now it is quite wintery. The land is quite high in price, from 30 to 60 dollars per acre, but always there is land for sale. You wrote me concerning the stopping place(s). From your area go to Wheeling, then up

*the
towards*

*Ohio (River) until Wellsville. Then take the road towards Cleveland until Bayard, then
Canal Dover and then to Shanesville.*

So much from us, Levi Miller and Maria

The next letter was written to Peter Schrack at the Walnut Creek Post, from Christian Petersheim who was a good friend living in Aurora, W. Va. Petersheim was wanting to also move to Holmes County, but couldn't sell his farm. Peter and his family had moved less than a year before and his wife Susanna was still living.

Germantown Settlement, W. Va. February 26, 1869 (begun)

First, a heartfelt greeting to you Peter Schrack and to your wife and children, wishing you everything good in body and soul in this time and in eternity. Further, I let you know that we are as healthy as usual, as long as the Lord wills. This week I got your letter which you wrote the tenth. I saw that Mose Miller¹ got the letters from Daniel Beachy¹. About three weeks ago he was here and said he got an answer and should write again. Mose Miller wrote that he knew nothing about the matters, and if it (would suffice) if you could confess that you failed. Then I said we had thought it was all settled and no one should speak of it any more. Then he said the reason was that you had promised to come to church again and to take the church again.² I said I knew nothing like that and I think neither did you. Then he said the others who were there also say this, and he also thinks it was so. They were of the opinion you would come again. I said it was because of the pride (hochmut) that you did not come. Then he said they did not know that, and that we should have said so. I said we said enough and saw that we could not accomplish anything. So we said we will not say more but will sell and will go as soon as we can. Then he said we have no word in the Scriptures which say how the clothes must be. I said, but we are not to be conformed to the world. And Hans Schlabach had promised you the spurs must be put away, and I think the jeans also, and what else, I don't remember anymore. That the very next time they would be disallowed (abgestellt) even if it were not council meeting. Then there was council meeting and I was there but not a word was said about those things. Then he said maybe it was forgotten. Finally he said he feels it should be left up to the majority. Last Sunday the church was there. I was there and thought it would be brought up but they said not one word about it.

You asked whether they did not have communion since it was held at the Selders. They did not have another. It will be two years in the spring. I could indeed say more about these things if we were together but it takes me too long to write. I do not know if I can sell or not. There is a man here who burns lime who says he wants to buy it. His name is Daniel King, but he says the time is too short until spring. He does not know whether he can get his money. I did not have a good chance to talk with him yet. The Bredes do not know about it yet. They would like it (the property) but cannot afford it. They had bad luck burning lime. They built a furnace in which to burn coal. They said it cost over \$300 and they can not do anything with it. They say the coal are are not like in Pennsylvania. Now they have [Mr.] King here to set up piles and burn them with wood. They say he has a patent-right for the big United States. They burned one pile but it did not burn all the way through. They said the limestone were not good, that the ones in the other field were better. They would like to buy it over to the orchard, but I said I don't want to sell except everything.

Frank Sol said... the times are so hard that there is no money to be had. That the richest farmers will break up. The richest man in Chambersburg is going to break up and he owed old Sol 3000 (dollars). He must lose it. Brede says that will not faze him.

.....You wrote that the snow was about 3 inches thick there. Here it was about 3 feet thick where it had not blown. That day Selders went out to get someone and could not get through. The tenth he came walking and the eleventh we broke out with six sleds and a large crew of shovelers. Since then the snow was not all gone. We have cooked some (maple) sugar. The elder Dans and Bredes also cook. They have not bored the trees yet. They had Benj. Miller to help cut wood. It is said they they want to sell their land in the spring. ...I do not know exactly how much corn the Bredes got. They have fed some of it. Recently Tobias threshed the last, 6 bushels. King said he could carry it all on his back at once. I must put my name down. So much from me, Christian Petersheim.

1. Mose Miller was probably "Gla Mose" who would have been Peter's home bishop in Ohio. Daniel Beachy was bishop in the Aurora, W. Va church. Peter apparently had some differences with Beachy concerning the ordnung.

2. It was a common reaction then, unheard-of among the Amish today, that people would refuse to take the church services into their homes if they disapproved of something. It also appears that many people did not attend services regularly, especially if they had differences with the church. Benjamin Schrock writes of the same practice in Iowa.

The next letter is also from Christian Petersheim. Peter's wife Susanna had died over a year before. He addresses the letter to "Peter and your children." The greetings in all of Christian's letters are practically identical, such as in the previous letter, dated Feb. 26, 1869. Therefore we skip over that portion.

German Settlement December the 4th, 1870

A friendly greeting to you Peter Schrack..... Further, we had an uncommonly nice fall so far. We had snow several times but I was still plowing the oats fields this week. And Tobias helped Valentine Selders dig (limestone?) He helped us burn lime. When it freezes hard enough I want to haul it onto the seeded fields.

Further, concerning the church... They are now in the process of dividing. Hans Schlabach does not go to church anymore at all. He is now on the same trail as Sam Gnegi. He wants to do away with the silent prayers and he wants the (holy) kiss to be practiced. He says to lend money and take interest is usury and he is against voting. Where worldly people have a gathering, there shall be no church members there.

Today the 12th it is very unpleasant. It is raining and freezing. Further, we have not sold yet. It is still difficult here with us. I have already wished that if only all the proud people would keep to Hans, but they all stay with Beachy The river preachers were here because of this.

I believe today 12 weeks ago the church was at the Selders and they took council (roth gehalten) Old Yutzy said he does not know who worldly people are. And old Schrock and Joel Schlabach said if they cannot vote any more, then the guns have to go also. I said the most important would be to get rid of pride, that things could come back to the old ordnung. Then Hans said with that he is totally agreed, but concerning the guns, God the Lord created all sorts of animals and said that man shall rule over them. And how shall we rule over them if we don't have any guns? Peter Miller and Joseph Kemp held to him and Christ Yutzi did too, but he doesn't any more. And Peter M. also says he doesn't want anything to do with him anymore. Gnegi's wife says she dreamed that Beachy's light has been burning darkly for a long time and now it is completely extinguished. But that Hans's is burning brightly.

I think it is 6 weeks that we got word that the elderly Mrs. Gnegi was sick. Then Hanses and ___? and Lydi Gnegi went down. She was a little better when they came down. Then they got word that Mrs. Abraham Miller had died. Then they went over to the funeral. As they came back to the river, old Mrs. Gnegi had also died. As they came home Lydi was mixed up and also dreamed such (strange) things. I must close..So much from your well-wisher, Christian Petersheim

The following letter is from Christian Petersheim, who is still in Aurora. In the previous letter he speaks of the discontent of Hans Schlabach. In this letter he relates that John Holdeman was Schlabach's mentor. He also speaks of the importance and costliness of lime for their lean soil.

German Settlement May this 6th, 1871

First a friendly greeting to you Peter..... We had a beautiful spring. About a month ago it was very dry. Now it is very wet. This week it has rained every day. The fruit has not frozen yet, if it will not yet do so. It is presently cool and rainy.

Tomorrow it will be two weeks that I was at Hans Schlabach's schoolhouse at church. Holdeman was there. Mondays they had services again and again in the evening. Def Schrack was there again in the evening. He said that Tuesdays Hans will be baptised, but Benj Miller was also there and he did not know anything about that. Since then I have not heard anything whether he was or not. I do not think anyone holds to Holdeman but Hanses and the Gnegis. So much about that.

The winter crops look pretty good. Flour is from 9 to 10 dollars the barrel. The oats is not all sowed yet. Old Dans and us are going to burn limestone this summer in partnership. We get the wood there and they get the stone and we burn them. Then I get half and they get half. But I have to watch myself closely or I will come out at the short end. If I could better stand the work then I would want nothing to do with him. My idea is to spread lime like one should until I can sell. To hire people to burn lime when you do not have the money right away to pay them brings one deeper into the hole rather than out of it. Brede went backwards faster than forwards. He bought (lime) from the store for himself and old Dans.

I want to let off my humble writing. Remember us to the Lord as we are also minded to do. Now watch all through Jesus Christ, Amen. So much from me , your well-wisher, Chr. Petersheim

The following letter is also from Christian Petersheim. He gives more information on the activities of John Holdeman in the Aurora community.

German Settlement July 23, 1871

First a friendly greeting of love and peace to you Peter Schrack and your children. I expected you would get yourself a wife again by this time. Yet if you are content then it is not necessary that anyone be concerned about that. I saw in your letter that you are healthy which brings us joy. We are also quite healthy as long as the Lord wills. We had a very wet summer. In the spring it was very dry for a while. It did not give much hay and it is so wet that we almost could not get it made. On the 4th of July we began to mow but have not put much away yet. The wheat we harvested in urgency. The corn is not all cut off. It went down so that we almost could not cut it off. Eight nights ago it rained so that the water ran off all over. The corn lay on the ground but most of it stood up again, but not all. We had mowed grass along the road and it washed a lot of it onto the road. The fence was stuffed full with hay. It washed much dirt and stones and logs away.

Hans Schlabach and his wife were baptised by Holdeman this spring. Now they and the Gnegis have their church by themselves. No one else holds to them. Hans's Lena also does not hold to them. She is at Henry Schlabachs and is taking instruction classes. Valentine Selders, Si Schlabach is also going and Anne Miller. Tobias is also going (to instruction). In the spring he said he wants to go and I did not want to discourage him, but it would suit me much better if he could have gone to instruction at your church. Selter's Dena and young Jacob Bitschi and Joseph Miller's Johan are also going. That is all.

I will now close....so much from me, Christian Petersheim.

The following is another letter from Christian Petersheim. He mentions the opinion Hans Schlabach had of Holmes County. Christian uses the term "Waldenser," referring to those who advocated stream baptism. Probably it came to mean more broadly those who were of a progressive persuasion. Before 1850 a young Mifflin County bishop, Solomon Beiler, began teaching that baptism should be performed as the applicant kneels in a stream. He based this on a Waldensian Creed which he had. This was one of the first open differences between progressives and conservatives, but it really was more a token rather than a critical issue.

December the 31, 1871

First a heartfelt greeting to you Peter....A while back we had quite a lot of sick people. Joseph Kemp's children had the scarlet fever. One of the boys died and old Peter Feib also died. Last summer old Yost Yoder down at the river died and old Jonathan Hostetler.

I want to let you know that only last Wednesday I got your letter which you wrote November 30. You asked how and where Hans Schlabachs were baptised. They were baptised in the house. I heard just like they were baptised before. Holdeman was here again this fall and baptised Sam Gnegis. Then they and Hanses went out (to Ohio) with him. He lives in Wayne County. Hans said to me they do not have to dress all alike, but that their church members are from all areas. When they were there, there was also an Amish man there. He was the most worldly dressed man there. Then I said he probably was a "Waldenser" and he said he was. Then he (Hans) said they told him in Holmes County they are more plain and simple (niedertrechtig) but their speech is very loose and they are boastful. Then I said I would not think that it is like that. He said he thinks it is.

I guess the land is nothing cheaper around you, than it used to be. Maybe I could sell this winter if I sell cheap enough. Old Rimple came up from the river and bought the Miller place where Henry Schlabach lives. He bought 500 acres for 2300 (dollars). And he bought the Schlabach place for 1800 (dollars), also over 500 acres. And Hefner Grete's son bought the Maers place for 1000 (dollars) for 100 acres. Tobias Moser was around here several times. He wants to buy here but has only 600 (dollars) to put down.

I must close.... So much from me, Christian Petersheim

The following letter is from Peter's father-in-law John P. Miller. They lived in Cove, Garret County, Maryland at this time. We have only part of the letter, originally written in English.

December 13, 1873

Peter Schrack

We have all our trouble this winter and for to leaf the pleasant cove next spring. Rudi is preparing for a new house and barn. Christ Beachy sold his farm. He is going on the Dan Hershberger farm.

I am afraid we have bad business going on in our church. Some want meeting houses and some don't. Some want to quit giving something to eat. I am afraid it will make bad business yet.

*John P. Miller
Cove, Garred County*

As Christian Petersheim wrote this last letter from Aurora (in this series,) he still had not sold his farm. And he never did get it sold, but in this letter he speaks of quitting farming. The Dunkers were frequently drawing members from the Amish there during this time.

German Settlement January 31, 1866

Now I will write you a few lines. . . As far as I know, the people are healthy yet here and there are sick people. Old Joseph Miller is not well. He has cancer on the nose. Christian Millers joined the Dunkers. I should have written to you sooner but through neglect and unskilled hand it so happens that I don't get to write. Old Dan's Benj also went to the Dunkers. The rest of the boys, I believe, are all with the Lutherans and think they are big gentlemen. So much for that.

We already had cold and stormy weather, but not much good sledding roads. Now it is quite good again and is snowing again. It is colder again.

Noahs and Joni and Mommi went to Selders. Leah and I are at home alone. I think the feed will become scarce till spring. It did not give much hay. Wheat, corn, oats, and rye were relatively good. I do not know exactly how much wheat we got but I believe around 60 bushel. Oats, I also don't remember, but it was around 200-300 bushel. I believe we got 40 bushels rye and about 300 bushels corn on cobs.

I guess in the spring we will quit farming and will have sale. Noah and Levi can farm the place. Noahs want to build a house back by the spring on the "new" fields.

Now it is February. Today the boys went for coal again. They have hauled about 500 bushels by now. They want to burn about 2000 bushels of lime this spring. I want to close....so much from me, your humble friend and well-wisher Christian Petersheim

The following letter is the first of a series which Peter received from Iowa. Peter's brother Benjamin, also a minister, had moved to Johnson County, Iowa City, Iowa in 1857. Their brother Christian moved to Iowa the year this letter was written. Another brother, Daniel, (mentioned in the letter), as well as Peters, still lived in Aurora at this time. The Abner mentioned by Benjamin is probably Abner Yoder who was married to the Schrocks' sister Veronica. They had only recently moved to Iowa. Benjamin relates interestingly about the weather they have had in Iowa.

Johnson County, Iowa City, Iowa August 18, 1866

First I wish to bring a heartfelt greeting of love and peace to you Peter Schrock and your wife and to all our good friends and also to brother Daniel. Wishing you everything good in soul and body in this time and also in eternity. Further we are fairly healthy and the people in general are in good health as far as is known to me. I hope these few lines will again find you healthy. I received your letter which you wrote. We were very glad to hear from you. We had quite warm weather this summer. It was warmer than it ever was since we have been here. It was very dry until about 8 days ago it rained. Now it is soaked up. The people are finished with the harvest. It turned out good. Wheat was good and the rye was good. The oats were very good. I think it yielded 50 bushels per acre in this area. The corn looks very nice. Joseph took corn into the city for me today, 38 bushel. Abner got two loads yesterday. I still have about 600 bushel left.

Abner is building a house. The region (landschaft) suits him very well. Harry Miller was here with us and it also pleases him very well. He worked for me for ten days. We built a shed.

Concerning the church, it is not to be praised. There is no peace yet, but I hope it will straighten out. Ten young people are taking instruction class again. (Today is the 19th.) The church is at Daniel Yoders. I should have written to you sooner, but I did not have time. I helped in the harvest for about 3 weeks, and I have my lands to tend also.

I think we could entertain ourselves for quite a while if you were with us, and I do not think it would spite you to spend some time here. I used to think no one can make out here in Iowa but the people get a good chance and they build good barns and houses, but it is true that it costs quite a lot.

*I will now close and again wish to greet you warmly. The grace be with you all, Amen. Further, remember us in your prayers. We also have in mind to do so for you. Joseph Gasho died in Indiana
So much from me, Benjamin Schrack*

The following letter was written to Peter in Aurora, W. Va., from Benjamin in Iowa. Benjamin would like to see Peter move to Iowa instead of Holmes County. Benjamin's greetings are almost identical in all his letters, so we will omit that part in the following letters.

To Peter Schrack, German Settlement, Pristen(sic) County, W. Va.

Johnson County, Iowa City February 16, 1868

First a hearty greeting to you... There were several funerals here. Old Christian Swartzendruber was 90 years and about 10 months old. Widow Schlabach's Jacob was 13 years, 8 months, and 20 days old. He was in school. They played with a ball, and another threw a frozen clod after the ball and it hit him in the temple. It made him dizzy. He was a good learner. This was on Friday. It hurt from the beginning. By Tuesday evening he had died.

You wrote you have so many apples, and black walnuts, and cider. Apples, walnuts, hickory nuts, and hazelnuts we have plenty of. Cider we don't, but we have wine in the basement. We had a lot of grapes.

Concerning the church, it appears to be peaceful again but I don't know for how long. There was [a delegation] of men here. They pretty well agreed with us. The others practically all take the church again, but pride (Hochmut) still wants to prevail. It is very bad. So many sorts [of people] come here. There are people here from 12 or 13 congregations. Some comply with the ordnung, and some only half. Maybe you think we do not want to have an ordnung anymore. Often we are simply sick about this but it does not help a bit. [This concerns] the gowns and the (Veshing ?!) among the women. I think they want to force things.

I thought you would come here to us and would see how we live here. The land is not as expensive as in Ohio. I believe, as far as earthly things, one can make good progress here. Joseph made about 2 thousand dollars off my place this year. But I do not want to beg you. One cannot buy the land as cheaply as at first. It is around five to six thousand dollars for 160 acres.

*I will now close ... so much from me, Benjamin Schrack Box 379 Iowa City
Benedict Hochstetlers have a baby son. Sems are all healthy. Give a greeting to Daniels.*

This letter was written by Benjamin Schrack from Iowa. Peters had moved to Holmes County about a year prior to this letter, and his wife had died in the meantime. So the letter is addressed to *Peter Schrack and children Walnut Kreak, Holms County, (sic) Ohio*

Johnson County, Iowa November 21, 1869

First a greeting to you Peter Schrack and children....There have been a number of sick people here because of typhoid fever. They are up and going again.

I received your letter, for which we were very thankful. Please excuse me because I should have written you long ago. I know this well, but I do not write much. I hear about you every once in a while. From Daniels I hear nothing.

On the tenth of November it began to snow. The eighteenth it snowed again. Now the sled riding is going quite well. The ground is not frozen, and there is a lot of corn still out. Among us most of it has been husked, but at Deercreek there is a lot to be husked yet. They have not thought about winter yet. It appears it will be a long winter.

Further, we have not gotten ahead with holding communion yet. It appears that the unrighteousness will take the upper hand and the love in many grow cold. The spirit of toleration (macht-nichts Geist) wants to take over. I guess we can not keep all [of the people] with our ordnung. I believe the church will divide.

Today I am going to the city. You have lamented that you are now alone. If you will trust in the Lord then He will not forsake you. He will be with His own until the end of the world, if we always have rejoicing. The pleasures of this world will pass away but the will of God remains unto eternity. Further, remember us in your prayers...so much from me, your humble brother, Benjamin Schrack

In this following letter Benjamin writes again about the conditions in the church. He mentions "der Paul" who was Paul Hershberger. Peter Schrock bought his farm in Holmes County from this Paul Hershberger, who then moved to Iowa. Hershberger was a minister and in another letter Benjamin asks Peter if he knew why Hershberger "had gone the other church", probably referring to the Walnut Creek congregation. In Iowa Hershberger seems to have been the leader of the progressives. Benjamin mentions that is frequently dry in Johnson County.

to: Mr. Peter Schrack, Walnut Creek, Holms County, (sic) Ohio

December 26, 1870

First a greeting of love and peace to you Peter Schrack and children... Old Henry Hochstettler has had a stroke. He can still speak and his mind is clear. He can still do a few things. Old Magdalena Kempf broke her leg 8 weeks ago. She is sitting up again.

Yesterday I was at church at Jacob Yoders. There I saw B. Hochstetler and M.P. Miller, and Abner Yoder. They are all in good health. The others are also healthy as far as I know. Tomorrow we want to go the wedding at Frider Schwartzendruber. Their Barbara and Mose J. Stutzman will marry. On Thursday Jacob D. Yoder and Susanna P. Swartzendruber will get married.

We did not hold communion this spring in the lower congregation. There is far too much confusion with the spirit of toleration (*macht-nichts Geist*). I guess our old *ordnung* will be ruined. Too many want freedoms and too much is compromised. Paul [Hershberger] is in Henry County right now, visiting. He thinks a lot of them.

Concerning the weather, we had a very dry summer until into the fall. There was no pasture left for the animals. The fields were completely red. Then it rained again and the pasture is plentiful again. We had good wheat: 80 to 85 [bushels to an acre (?)]; corn 30 to 37; oats 35; hogs 5-20 [dollars per head (?)]; pork 6-25. The livestock is very "cheap-sale". Yesterday a week ago it snowed a little, but it is melted again. The last week it was quite cold. The road is very nice. (My letter was not finished, Today is Jan. 6.) We saw no more snow. This week J.P. Miller's Barbara broke her leg. She walked to the creek on crutches and slipped and fell. She has broken it several times already before this, one time her arm. Writing goes badly for me. I think I will close my poor writing and greet you again heartily.... Benj. P.S. If you write Christian, direct your letter to Iowa City. Mine in the same box.

In this letter Benjamin writes about the "Waldenser" spirit and puts it in the same category as the "*macht-nichts Geist*." He also relates a tragic accident in their community.

Johnson County, Iowa City, Iowa August 6, 1871

First a greeting of love and peace to you Peter Schrack and your children... Mose P. Miller's Mahlon was killed by a hay rake. The horse ran away and threw him off and broke his head. (!) He was dead on the spot. He was 11 years, 3 months, and 26 days old.

I would have written you for some time now but I heard from you occasionally. The weather is very warm, from 86 to 96 [degrees] every day. It is very dry. The grains are all shocked. The wheat is not very good. The rye and the oats are very good. We got good hay and the corn is good so far.

I wish we could talk with each other about the *ordnung*. Here almost everything is the toleration spirit or Waldenser. Much is attempted but little is accomplished. I guess if we want peace then we must all become Waldenser. But I have always thought that as I have accepted the Lord Jesus, so I want to stay with that and help prevent all disunity, as much as possible.

(Today is the 9th.) Tomorrow I have the opportunity to send (this letter) to the city. We had a lot of grapes this year. On Monday it rained very hard, and there was hail in places. It stormed very hard and the shocks and the hay was torn apart. It shook the apples, of which there are a lot. I suppose the apples are plentiful with you. Frider Schwartzendruber married Elizabeth, Jacob Yoder's daughter. I will now close my inept writing... So much from me, Benjamin Schrack Box 360

In this letter Benjamin speaks of "Waldenser" ministers "from Ohio" who held services in their community. He says Abner, who was probably Abner Yoder, his brother-in-law and a fellow minister, attended the services diligently. Abner didn't follow this persuasion though, as a later letter will show.

to: Peter Schrack, Walnut Kreak, Holns County (sic)

December 1872

First a greeting to you Peter Schrack... Old Schöttler has been very poorly for a long time. He had fever but is better now. Daniel P. Brenneman is poorly with consumption. I do not think he will make it very much longer. On Sunday (?) there was a wedding at P. Brenneman's. Daniel P. Miller's William, from Illinois, and Demi Brenneman were married. I was at the wedding.

I have not heard anything from you for a long time. I did not get an answer to my last letter. We helped butcher at Lisbets on Monday. Sam's brother-in-law was also there. Ann is better again and is working. Benedicts, Christians, Abners, and Mose P.'s are in good health.

We had visitors from the East and from Ohio. There were 6 preachers here, but I didn't see them. They were Waldenser. They had services at J.P. Miller's in the evening, and twice the next day at

M.P. Miller's. I did not go but Abner and Paul attended diligently. Then they went with one [from here] to Henry County to Eicher and from there to Schlegel. They really stick together. I can barely stand it any more. I guess they are doing this for themselves. They [feel] tied down too much. The rest are still strong in the faith and in hope. May the loving God still be with us and lead and direct us until a blessed end.

Concerning the weather, the 19th it snowed a little, maybe several inches. It is quite cold. It had not snowed worth speaking of until now. It was dry but nice until now. It was fairly cold occasionally.

Write us again how you are coming along in your church. Whether you are so entwined with the falling away and with deception? So much from me, your brother Benjamin Schrack

In this letter Abner Yoder (from Johnson County) relates that Paul Hershberger broke away and formed his own church. Abner apparently had given himself off with Paul Hershberger, but in this letter he makes it clear that he doesn't support him and that he is faithful to the old ordnung. Paul Hershberger apparently left the community soon afterwards, it is known that he later served as pastor in four Mennonite congregations in Nebraska. His descendants say that Paul was a progressive who always strongly advocated Sunday Schools. Abner reports that the reliability and speed of the postal service in those days was less than desirable.

To Peter Schrack Walnut Creek, Holmes County

Johnson County, Iowa February 9, 1873

The grace of God and the pure love of Christ and the working together of the Holy Spirit, we wish unto you Peter Schrack and yours, as a warm greeting. As also to all those who love the Truth and stand with us in the same faith and hope.

Thanks to God, we are yet fairly healthy and hope these few lines will also find you in good health. Yet there are quite a few sick people in our area this winter. We had a harsh cold winter and since December 19, some snow and good roads for sledding. Recently it was mild several days and thawing temperatures which spoiled the sledding.

Further, I want to give you a report about our church. But with this I do not want to slander anyone. I believe we all are reason to this. For a long time we had two churches in our area. In ours there are some in the sixty households and at Deercreek a few less. Since 14 days ago we have another church besides. Paul P. Hershberger serves it by himself. The first time their church was at Bollers schoolhouse. Today they announced it to be at Henry Hochstettlers. Where he (Paul) expects to obtain help from here on, is not known to us. As far as concerns me, I am still in the same faith as I received it, and hope to remain faithful with the Lord's help. As you can imagine, this causes much sorrow and concern. It often divides between a man and his wife and between parents and children. Only God knows what will yet happen from here on.

Now I want to give you a list of the deaths. Daniel Brenneman died December 23, 1872. I do not know how old he was. He leaves to mourn his parting, his wife and two small children. On January 13, 1873 Maria, the wife of Christian Bender died. She leaves behind her husband and 9 children. One child had died previously. On February 6, 1873 Samuel, an infant child of John G. and Magdalena Miller died. His age was 9 months and 21 days. He died from the measles. William, son of Daniel Millers of Illinois and Anna, daughter of Peter Brenneman of Johnson County married on December 15, 1872. On January 21, 1873 David Raber married Maria, daughter of Joseph Schwartzendruber, both of Johnson County, Iowa. On January 16, 1873 David S. Yoder and Eliza Anne Stutzman married, both of Johnson County, Iowa.

Benjamin Schrack told me that you wrote to him that you have written to me several times already but you have never received an answer from me. I have not received any letters from you. I wrote to Daniel Schrack in Virginia but I received no reply from him. I thought I will write you. I would like to hear whether you get it or not.

Herewith I hope to have written enough and want to committ us and you together to God who will guide and direct us until a blessed end, through Jesus Christ, Amen. From me, your friend and well-wisher, Abner Yoder

Write again soon.

The following letter is from Benjamin Schrock from Johnson County, Iowa. In it he mentions that Paul [Hershberger] is now in Henry County. Apparently he moved there soon after starting the new church in Johnson County. Benjamin wishes to be able to discuss these things with Peter and has a solution of what to do should they get tired of talking.

To Peter Schrack Walnut Kreek, Holmes Co.

Johnson County, Iowa November 19, 1874

First a greeting to you Peter Schrack.... The people are mostly in good health except for old Knepp, who has dropsy and is very poor. My wife was not in the basement for a whole year. She can get around well in the house. She cannot go outside when it is wet. We have a maid all the time. Recently two Germans moved in with us. She is the maid and he is a blacksmith. We built a blacksmith shop and he wants to do shoeing. The people here have wanted a shop for a long time. I made five bobsleds this fall and a lot of wagon tongues and other things that were broken.

I got your letter and was glad to hear from you again. Paul has now gone to Henry County. I guess he will not bother us much anymore. I will be happy to hear that they like it there. He will not visit us very often. We divided the church into two districts and held communion in the two places. Presently we have church services every Sunday if they can find enough places. We have some that want to have a church house. They do not take the church at their homes, but they gladly sit in the foremost seats if something is going on.

If we could be together we could talk about a lot of things. We would not be finished in three days! If we would get tired, then we would drink a little wine, and we would go on again. I made about 70 gallons. We had quite cold weather already. One time it snowed about 4 inches, but it is all gone now. I will close now ... so much from me, Benjamin Schrack

In the last letter in this series, Benjamin writes to Peter that their church problems are not all past. Although Paul Hershberger drew away many progressives, many differences remained within the group. Benjamin died in March, 1879, only a little over two years after this letter was written.

To Peter Schrack Walnut Kreak (sic), Holmes County

Johnson County, Iowa January 15, 1877

First a greeting to you Peter Schrack...The people are, for the most part, healthy. Isaac Esch had a start of consumption and Lena's Katie has rheumatism and I guess also consumption. On the 6th of January we had a very sad funeral. A horse kicked Daniel H. Gingerich in the face, as he was leading them to water. One of them came loose for him. He was by himself. He still came into the house by himself and spoke a few words yet. By the evening of January 4 about 4:30, he died. We are not assured of our life. We do not know how soon our time will be up. Therefore be prepared for the Son of Man will come in an hour in which you think not. The Apostle says, What I say I say to you all! So watch!

I would have much to speak about if you were here. We have brethren here who do not obey at all. They begin to do merchandising with buying and selling, with shipping and dealing. They are itching to run around in the world, to sell patents, and do not take the church services in their homes any more. Should we tolerate or use such people in the church? They do exactly as they please.

One couple married recently: Steven J. Yoder to Lucy Miller. Christ L. Gingerich and Lena G. Swartzendruber were published to be married on the 7th. Mose P. Miller's Steven and Steven Yoder's Katie will marry on Thursday the 25th.

The weather was quite dry and cold until now and we had no snow worth speaking of. The 15th it snowed very hard, about one foot deep. The road is now good for sledding.

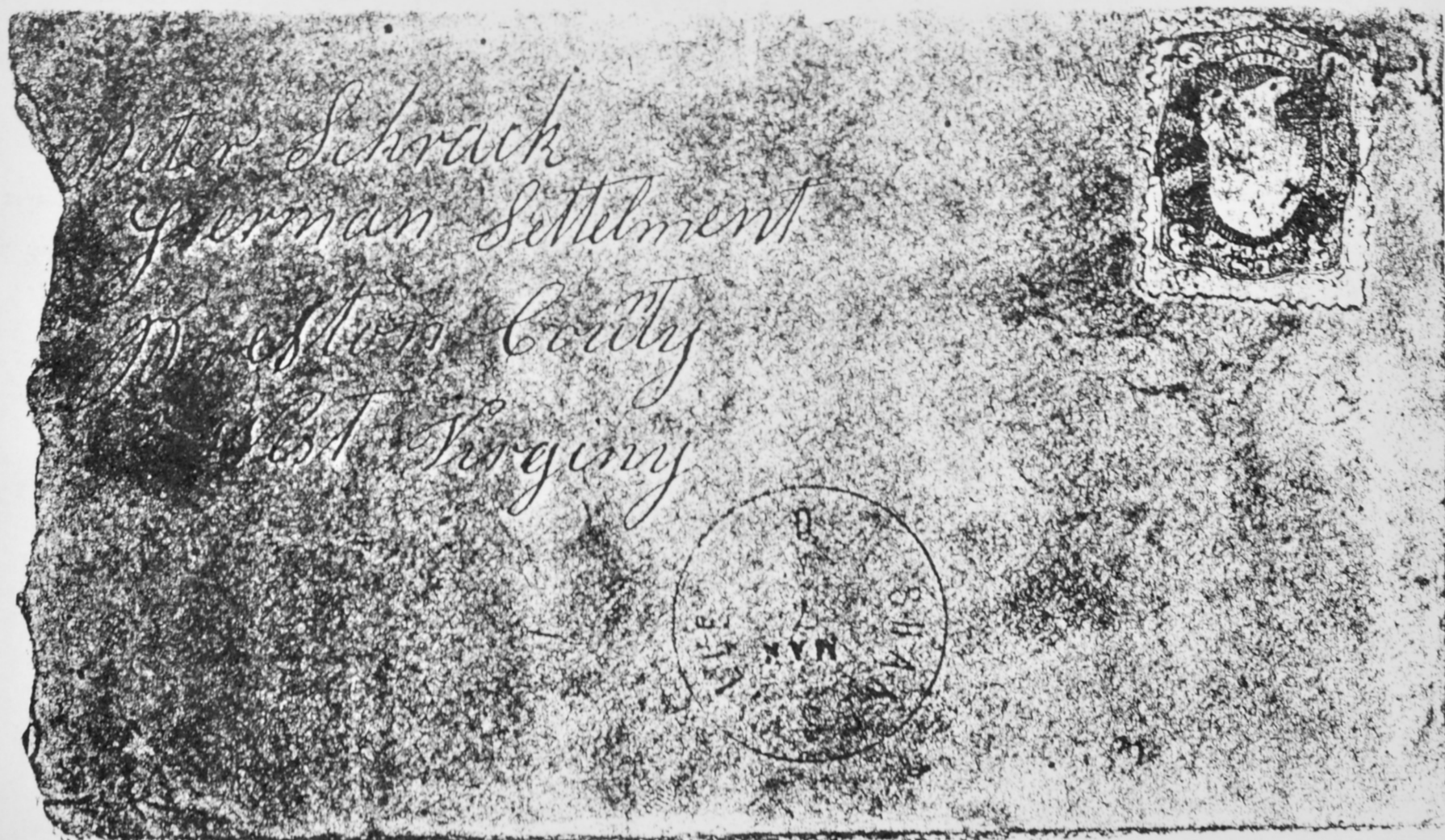
We have not heard from you for some time. I have hauled home quite a lot of wood. I guess you do not have so many problems with wood as I do. I paid one dollar per load to get it hauled. I now have about 22 loads and have cut most of it to stove length.

So much from me, Benjamin Schrack

On the following page is a photo copy of the letter Levi Miller sent to Peter Schrock on March 4, 1867. His handwriting is exceptionally beautiful and easy to decipher. Below it is a copy of the envelope in which the letter was sent. The stamp was for 3 cents, and the postmark is from Shanesville, Ohio. The address is not very detailed but quite sufficient for those days.

Holmes County Ohio
 März den 4ten 1867
 Herzlich ein herzliches Gruss der
 liebe und das freunds an mich
 Peter Schrack und dein Weib mit
 Mühsen alles gut an dich und
 Paul hier in dieser Zeit und in
 Gütigkeit hier mit diesen Worten
 grüßen lassen. Mein mich wissen
 das Mein wiran brief vom 2ten
 Sonntag erst den 1ten März erhalten
 haben. Maler mir am ersten
 ganz' freund war. Ich ist in gelbes
 satte. Darnach haben Mein mich
 verset darüber, Mail of Geist
 das ich noch sein und Meinere solich
 Gammels glück sind die imherin
 Gattinnen Erleber und Religionen
 Jesus Christum in der nichtheit

2
 im demüthigkeit gründen nachzufolgen
 und sich freuen Man der wegen und
 lösen. Maler abzugeben. Von der folgt
 malerim im 1ten kommt hier zu mir
 alle die ihr Mühselig und baldanfang
 ich will mich freude an mich
 mich mein geist und lernat von mir
 den ich bin freundschaftlich und von
 herzen demüthig so macht ich Briefe
 finden von Herrn Paulen und folgt
 Mein geist ist feucht und mein leyt
 ist leicht, Mein haben mich auf geist
 nicht zu Büchern. Ich mich magun
 dem Wurst und schmeilt senden
 mich mich mehr zu belegen, was
 Mal die Zeit sein die unser freude
 folgt mit anhalten das die ungarisch
 die Zeit überhand nehmen mich
 die liebe mich in feulen abhalten



3 Maiten so sind noch 4 gemeinden bey
uns die Mier loben wir uns der al-
-ten erntung zu bleiben mit Gottes
-hils und beystand, und wir von
-den abgesetzten so ist es sehr viel
bey uns wo solche jungen sind die gesun-
-nach der Abreise der wo die freyheit
in freyheit und fressen alles gemüth
-Mier so gemüth ist nicht viel zu ma-
-den das ist für mein theil Will es von
-großem Gott anheim gegeben werden
-aber die besten theil ist die geben
-ken ist Miller zu uns zu kommen den
-kocht in dreyt fassung mit dem und
-zu beyfließen und mit dem nicht sagen
-zum und ist unser begehren gemüth
-unser in dem fassen alle Mier
-auch gesinnat sind und Mier alle
-samen durch fassen Christen am

4 Maiten so sind Mier noch so wie
-gemeinlich gemüth und die best Mier
-sind als ob wir solche die alle Mier
-sind haben und Mier setzen auch
-sich halt Mier gegeben den Mier
-bis anfang fassung darnach Mier
-us den bis am letzten fassung seit
-anfangen halt zu Mier geben seit
-anfangen zu fassen und ist ist
-ziemlich Mierigly sehr land ist
-ziemlich hoch im May von 30 bis
-60 daher die Mier und aber noch
-immer land zu Mier haben und sehr Mier
-gegeben Mier dem Mier Mier
-so von uns nach Mier den Mier
-sinnlich Mier Mier Mier Mier
-nach Cleveland bis nach Cayard
-darnach nach Land oder darnach
-Shaverill so viel von uns
-Lui Miller und Maria Mier