Mennonites as a Plural Minority Church within Pluralism – A German Perspective

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For Peter J. Foth on his sixtieth birthday[1]

Once upon a time there were two Mennonites, sole survivors of a shipwreck. They found refuge on an unknown island somewhere in the vast ocean. After a while they were discovered. To the surprise of their rescuers, the two had founded three Mennonite churches, each with buildings of its own. Asked why they had done this, they responded: One attends the one church, the other attends the other. And why the third? That's the church to which neither of us goes!

The Problem of Describing a Plural Minority within Pluralism

One of the challenges of describing Mennonites lies in their plurality. The roots alone of this religious denomination in the sixteenth century's "left wing of the Reformation" can only be described as polygenetic[2]; there are no historical confessions of faith that would have been adopted by all Mennonites in like manner,[3] and despite an agreed on conscious renunciation of hierarchic ministerial offices, concretely descriptive moments of unity elude them. The strict congregational structure of organization, oriented towards the autonomy of the individual congregation, did the rest in shaping pluralistic developments within this minority church. Basically, Mennonites can be described only within their specific local context.

A second challenge arises from the church landscape in Germany, in which the two state churches dominate. The Mennonites are perceived, if at all, by these bodies as "a Protestant free church" and often assessed as (and

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limited to being) 'not-a-State-church'. As a result, the riches of this tradition can hardly be discerned, and it only seldom appears as a serious partner of dialogue. At best Mennonites are regarded as an exotic sliver within the landscape of confessions, though still known as a "historic peace church" by experts.[4] Many Mennonites in Germany still define themselves in just these categorical terms, namely in the listing of characteristics that distinguish them from the state churches. On the one hand, this apologetic behavior can result in a negative 'image' of the state churches; on the other, it leads to a holding of positions lacking reflection and sound argument.

From these short remarks one can already suspect a potential identity crisis. The fear of losing identity always involves the danger of fundamentalism and the conservation of handed-down convictions with reasoning no longer understood because it is not exposed to larger social discourse nor is its plausibility proved.

In pluralistic forms of society that have developed in the modern age and have experienced a radicalization in so-called postmodernism, the identity issue has become a reality for *all* areas of life. Most Mennonites live in democracies in a globalized world, where pluralism seems most properly to belong. Cultural variety, variable and competitive philosophies of life, and different ideas of values and norms of behavior exist simultaneously next to each other. That also holds for the religious sector in general, both as a result of and an initiator of secularization. As a result, the question of an identity of one's own imposes itself more strongly now than in former times. Due to massive breaks with tradition – also among Mennonites – seemingly nothing can be taken for granted anymore: who we are, what we want, what we stand for. If everyone is to find his or her own salvation, will only a few individuals who are satisfied with themselves remain? In confessing faith this amounts to the question: What is truth? To what do church fellowships orient themselves, which criteria are irrefutable, and how have they developed? Validity threatens to lead to indifference, while relativism hinders clear orientation to what is right or wrong; uncertainty is the result.

In this paper, I will try to react positively to the challenges of the present, out of the collective experiences and developments of this distinct tradition, especially with respect to the challenges of pluralism, in order to try a *reflective translation* of the tradition in the context of the present. For this it is first

necessary to describe pluralism as a social challenge. Then the special challenge of pluralism in church and society must be recognized, and a possible interpretation advanced that leaves behind the static and simplified classification of 'Church - Sect - Mysticism' (Troeltsch),[5] in order to ask about possibilities of identification out of a Mennonite perspective that could arise from a treatment of just this tradition. The leading question here is: Shouldn't a pluralistic minority church with polygenetic origins be superbly prepared for its church presence within pluralism? This approach could lead to a sharpening of identity that in turn would dispense with the one-sided photo-negative of the state church as a static opposite.

Pluralism as a Modern Phenomenon

Years ago Peter L. Berger argued that "modernity plunged religion into a specific crisis, into a crisis which is unquestionably marked by secularism but, more important, characterized by pluralism."[6] Next to the Industrial Revolution there are specifically European phenomena which contributed to it: capitalistic market economy and pluralistic metropoles, as well as complex ideological structures brought about by the Reformation and the Renaissance. Indeed, a perpetual pluralization of all dimensions of society since the sixteenth century can be observed. The renewal of the church through re-commitment to the central biblical message of the grace of God in Jesus Christ was achieved only at the price of losing the institutional unity of the church.[7] The questioning of traditional authorities and claims for validity emerging with the Enlightenment demanded a general rational accounting and thereby drove everything religious into the area of privacy. The succeeding relativization resulted in further pluralization, which at the same time proved to be a protest against the universalizing demands of the Enlightenment. In the same way the Age of Romanticism contradicted these tendencies of universalization with the postulate of individualism; and insight into historical limitedness deepened the tendencies to relativism. These developments help us recognize the potential for the formation of pluralism today.

"Confusing pluralism with a vague 'pluralism and diversity', of pluralism and individualism or of pluralism and relativism is the intellectual and cultural pest of our time."[8] The temptation is to leave everything undecided and not to commit oneself. But nothing is gained this way, for diffuse claims of power

will arise and will be much more problematic than merely different plural forms of expression. This is a real experience among existing Mennonite congregations. It is very easy for congregationalism, with its anti-clerical trends, to turn into an uncontrolled power performance of individuals, thereby working against mutual understanding. But if we take pluralism not merely as relativism or individualism, then it has describable even if highly complicated forms. And this description is necessary, if pluralism is not simply to be accepted as destiny. In all its usages 'pluralism' has as its central theme "the connection of many elements in relationship to each other and to their field of reference, which is not determined or limited by a superordinate principle of unity and which is therefore experienced as problematic and in need of clarification and structure."[9]

What follows for the religious situation? It can now be described as "postsecular religiousness," which takes for granted that the tradition of secularization has been broken. The resulting necessity lies in a *conscious turning* to religion. Today, people are challenged first to make a conscious decision for religion and then to choose a very specific content and social form of it. Philosophies of life, like religion, are not simply handed down as destiny by earlier generations and accepted almost unreflectively, but are offered as a choice. Berger calls this the "compulsion to heresy."[10] In the pre-modern world heresy was hardly a choice, for the believing person found him- or herself in a situation of relative security that was only occasionally questioned by heretic deviants. By comparison, says Berger, in the modern age heresy becomes a typical necessity, for the believer finds him- or herself in permanent insecurity that "is occasionally fended off by more or less fragile constructions of religious affirmation."[11] Earlier social and institutionally secure agreements are not taken *eo ipso* anymore today, but must be searched and fought for. Then, building on that, a "quasi-sectarian" community constitutes itself.

But the building of community is necessary, since the individual needs a social safeguard for his moral and religious ideas in order to make sure of their plausibility. This is why Michael Welker and others plead for a structuring of pluralism. The construction of a community and the relatedness of different communities to each other allow for an emerging of network systems. It isn't easy to think in such complex categories. Yet they are only an image of a reality which is possibly even more diverse. The prospects of pluralism are

obvious, and a pluralistic minority church, such as the Mennonites are, should be aware of them: the many different gifts in the church are here granted room; the limitedness of human knowledge is taken seriously; liberation from provincial traditions and horizons is made possible; a capability for ecumenical breadth is developed; rash denunciations are hindered; alternatives to standardized world views can be discovered; and lastly, differences of opinion do not necessarily need to be done away with.

A pluralism understood in this way, though, requires certain disciplines: first, the will to confess to that which is considered right, true and good, but also, secondly, an interest in alternative endeavors; and finally, striving for perfection through communication. If this desire for interchange declines, then the bases of pluralism go to pieces. If faith is not seen as a possession or as a principle, if it always stands within the probation of the prevailing situation, then this is the best requirement for the structuring of pluralism, and the life of believers can take place in dialogue. The process of dialogue is the element of structure of pluralism. Further conditions for a functioning of these processes are the protection of minorities and a willingness to correct one another or to allow correction.

Mennonites as Plural Minority

Polygenetic Source and Polyform Development of Mennonites

If there is one unifying feature of the roots of Mennonites in the Anabaptism of the sixteenth century, then it is "aggressive non-conformity,"[12] although it found structure in very different forms depending on the context and the personalities involved. Anabaptists of various stripes stood, on the basis of the New Testament, for a Reformation orientated more radically than that of a Luther or a Zwingli, whether in Switzerland, Southern Germany, or the Netherlands. The resulting persecutions and suffered martyrdoms are a witness to the reaction of a pre-modern society, for which heresies still posed a strong and feared irritation. On the basis of this persecution a lay piousness gradually formed itself, displaying "anticlerical, anti-church, anti-authority, antidoctrinal and anticultural traits."[13]

Of course a formation of confessions took place here, too, such as the Articles of Schleitheim of the Swiss Anabaptists of 1527.[14] But it wasn't until later that these Articles could be considered an expression of a part of the

Anabaptists: baptism on confession of faith, rejection of oaths (so as not to make commitments competing with the confession to Christ, and as a sign of truthfulness in every situation), renunciation of violence and a refusal to take offices of authority, as well as a strict dualism of church and world. This dualism required a separation of those who wished to give the imitation of Christ priority in their lives. This stance, gradually adopted by many, led the Mennonites into a seclusion and a churchly piousness averted from society, and soon brought them toleration in certain areas. H.-J. Goertz observes that their previous aggressiveness now turned inward and led to countless quarrels and separations in a struggle to maintain the purity of the church. Arguments now took place not with the surrounding societies but among the Mennonite churches, and led to separations and schisms, so that they developed quite plurally.

But Anabaptists and early Mennonites cannot be described as pluralists in the postmodern sense. They rather tended – as a reaction to their rejection by surrounding societies – to a diversity which, as an identity-forming factor of unity, merely characterized their existence as a 'heretic' group within a society that was at least territorially uniform. As such, though, they contributed to the continuing pluralization of society as a whole, this pluralization being one of the varieties of Protestantism.

Pluralistic Churches Today

This development explains – paradoxically – why Mennonites were much more at the mercy of trends in the history of ideas than were the established churches and other comparable denominations that preferred a stronger commitment to their own denominational Confession of Faith. Even today this can be shown by the various forms of devoutness of the Mennonites in Germany (about 40,000 baptized members[15] today).[16] The Mennonite churches in the north and the west were and are more urban (e.g., in Hamburg or Krefeld). Wherever they were tolerated or later even respected for their economic success, they assimilated themselves into the middle classes and were emancipated for the most part. Enlightenment and liberal thinking influenced these churches. By comparison, the churches in the south (Rheinland-Palatinate, Baden-Württemberg, and Bavaria) had always remained small and were found mostly among the agricultural population, sometimes in

seclusion on scattered farms. Strengthened by pietistic influences, this led in part to a stronger scepticism and isolation from surrounding society.

In the turmoil of World War II, it was immigrants from the former Eastern territories who founded new Mennonite congregations in Western Germany. Even before the war there had been strong efforts by these people to prove again and again that they – like the Lutherans or the Reformed – were obedient citizens whom the authorities had no need to fear and who claimed their rights and duties like everyone else.[17] Thus, for instance, by the end of the nineteenth century the principle of defencelessness had been practically given up and left up to individual conscience. They brought to the churches in North and South Germany a style of piety strongly conforming to society.[18]

In addition, since 1972 Mennonites from the former Soviet Union have emigrated to Germany. Often there were so many of them in one city that they could quickly found their own large churches. Only seldom did they seek contact with existing Mennonite church conferences or congregations, because the differences between their piety and that of the others in Germany were considerable. The time of repression in the Communist era had simply conserved many religious convictions over decades, or let them 'clot' to static, unfounded positions, or led others into total secularization.

In a new study of Mennonite confessions of faith by the *Mennonite World Conference*, one bit of common ground becomes visible. For Mennonites the Bible is the basis of faith and the manual for life in the discipleship of Christ. And that's it, in most cases, for any kind of common ground. Colombian Mennonites seek first and foremost to commit themselves as a peace church for justice. Some North American Mennonites[19] (and Amish[20]) continue focusing on withdrawal from the "world," the search for a simple lifestyle within an exclusive brother- and sisterhood, sometimes rejecting all technical advance. Some European Mennonites persue conscious involvement with the ecumenical movement, because the biblical foundation is shared with all Christians in the church worldwide.[21]

Even though there have been repeated attempts to formulate a common theology of the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition they are not really convincing. At the most, single theological premises determine the interpretation of history. Rather it is probably the socio-historical phenomena first, from which – in

theological reflection – efforts were made to produce denominational characteristics. For this reason there was a reliance, particularly after the experiences of World War II, on the theological positions of North American Mennonites.[22] A new construction of identity took place: "They brought an until then unknown 'Anabaptist identity' and gave us a world-wide horizon both with missionary and with church welfare aid."[23] A new discussion on peace witness and nonviolence returned into the consciousness of the churches, and was now brought with intensity into the worldwide ecumenical movement.[24] The "Bender School" did its part in correcting the "image of the Anabaptists, which had been distorted by confessionalistic polemics . . . But this school of research which, since the 1970's, had to give way to a revisionist, de-confessionalized, also a more strongly socio-historically oriented Anabaptist research, was not free from interpreting the idealistic image of its own present-day church and from viewing its own history too uncritically or idealizing it."[25]

Religious Pluralism

Before we can ask about how to deal constructively with this tradition, we must grasp pluralism in its particular church and religious moulding. Below we will investigate how intra-Mennonite, denominational, and religious pluralism portrays itself. This differentiation is necessary, for sometimes pluralism comprises different forms of expression for one and the same thing, and sometimes the one thing disintegrates into an immense number of things. Even if the question of truth cannot be dispensed with, it seems advisable to be aware of three different levels and to consider their limitations.

Pluralism and Mennonites

The little story at the beginning of this paper indicated the variety of Mennonites. The joke lies in the fact that the two persons and the three churches call themselves "Mennonite." In Germany alone the Mennonite church falls into many different mergers which consider themselves legitimate representatives of the Anabaptist or Mennonite heritage and strive to carry it on. This effort takes place in extremely different ways, so different that sometimes they cannot even communicate with one another. The points of dispute are not only about

non-essentials but about elementary statements of faith, like the understanding of Scripture, the church, or positions of service.

How can these congregations all call themselves "Mennonite," and how can they, in spite of all their differences, somehow actually feel connected? Mennonites who have been abroad and have met other, foreign Mennonites, will have felt it: a feeling of belonging together and with it an extension of trust beyond dogmatic differences. Explaining this feeling merely as the sociological phenomenon of a minority situation is not sufficient. There is, in addition, a factual unity through a mutual "story." Even today Mennonites share the one "story" of Anabaptistm, they form a story-telling community in which it is passed on.[26] This means there are – in spite of breaks from tradition – uniting (implicit) axioms, even if they are difficult to describe in words. As long as they do not deny each other being a Mennonite, this form of pluralism functions. But attempts to put mutuality into doctrinal or confessional sentences almost always fail. How could it be otherwise with a denomination which traces its roots back to a polygenetic source and which shows later polyform developments?

Pluralism within Denominations

Pluralism in the ecumenical movement portrays itself somewhat differently. Recently I, a Mennonite pastor and theologian, was asked to marry an Adventist woman and a Catholic man. The wedding was to take place in the University Church of Heidelberg, which belongs to the Protestant State Church in which Lutheran and Reformed Christians are united. And probably there were other denominations as well among the Polish, Indian, and German guests. This is the ecumenical reality in which we live.

Within the various Christian denominations, differing and even contradictory teachings derived from the biblical witnesses. Efforts towards reaching agreement began even before the age of the ecumenical movement. Today the model of *reconciled diversity* is predominant, which assumes that the church in itself remains plural and that this should be seen as positive. The adjective is key: If denominations live together 'reconciliatedly,' then they are not contradicting an awareness of the one, world-wide church of Jesus Christ. If all of them being churches is mutually acknowledged, then their contrasts can be seen as an enrichment. The deciding point here, too, is that being reconciled is brought about through the unifying "story" of God with his people,

as testified to in the Jewish-Christian tradition. There is a pole, a center that has a unifying effect: The confession of the triune God, who is also the God of Abraham and Sarah. But because this basis, the biblical canon, is itself laid out plurally, it is only logical that there are different denominations. This realization allows us to endure contrasts positively, without everything becoming relative. The confession of faith is not watered down through plurality; rather in constant, reciprocal examination it becomes steadfast – in the ideal case, even optimal. But one must ask critically to what extent this model of reconciled diversity is in itself capable of ecumene. There are traditions whose understanding of the nature of the church does not seem to allow for this model.

Pluralism among Religions

Another level necessary to distinguish is the pluralism of religions. In the ecumenical student dormitory where I am director of studies, there are Christians of very different traditions as well as a Jew and a Muslim. Can we celebrate worship together in our chapel? We do. But what happens here? Do we pray to the same God, or do we merely speak together, each to 'her' and 'his' God? Do we speak the same language? The words are comparable, but what is said is understood differently by each one and surely connects each person with different experiences. There may be some common ground within the monotheistic religions, but we do run into absolute borders with Buddhists and Hindus. Different perspectives in their entirety confront each other. There are different models to describe this relationship: exclusiveness (we lock each other in); inclusiveness (in the end non-Christians are people of the "Christian" God who hasn't revealed himself to them yet); pluralism (different ways of believing, with equal rights).[27] In the pluralistic model the question remains: Shall a universal God be considered here, to whom finally everything can be traced back (a "normative understanding")? Or do we completely sacrifice anything common (a "descriptive understanding")? A further question must be asked: How are absolute statements, without which religion virtually cannot seem to exist, to be understood? Confessions of faith that contradict each other cannot be equally "true." Yet we must stress that, in reality, this is what we see is happening.

The problem stems from the fact that we cannot judge one "perspective of entirety" over another. We are always already within a confession, a

community of story-telling which obstructs this universal perspective. What remains is the possibility of each confessing our own faith to each other, in the hope that the others can hear it even if they will never completely understand everything. We remain Christians, Jews, or Muslims. But we are not condemning each other, nor merely co-existing, but respecting the other's faith. The result will be neither heteronomous nor arbitrary, for each person will hold as true that in which he or she believes. Pilate's question stays unanswered even today. But we must live with each other and, ideally, help each other to become better Muslims, better Christians. Real communication is conceivable, if at all, in the area of ethics, for the protection of all of life. "Until the manifestation of truth in the visio beatifica *in patria*, the pluralism of the consciousness of truth *in via* must be tolerated and shaped from the perspective of faith."[28]

Theological Legitimation of Unity in Diversity: Pluralism out of Faith

A last point can be mentioned only briefly: The question about the theological legitimation of attempts to shape diversity. We could go back to the well-known picture the Apostle Paul presents of the body and its many members (1 Cor. 12). The happenings at Pentecost are also an illustration of how the one Spirit brings about the plurality of languages, yet understanding each other is possible (Acts 2, Joel 3). Differences remain but without prejudicial effects. And the problem with the Tower of Babel was not its height but its builders' aspirations towards uniformity and conformity. Based on thinking along these lines in the last years, the doctrine of the Trinity in systematic theological reflections in the West has experienced a renaissance, not least in encounters with Orthodoxy.[29] If we believe in the triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, then plurality in God is already applied. "Just as I and the Father are one . . ." (John 17). There have always been disputes in the church over the relationship between the immanent and the economic Trinity. It must be emphasized that God is more than the almighty Father, more than the suffering Jesus on the cross or the risen Christ, more than the moving Spirit. God is all of that in relationship to each other. And hence God is conceivable – if at all – only in a dynamic relationship to us, not in a static oneness and a mere opposite.

Over and above that, an important revelation of the Reformation – and therefore of all churches that came out of it – is the knowledge of the "unavailability" of faith.[30] Faith is not the work of an individual or of the

church, but a gift of God, the work of the Spirit. The faith of the other person is beyond all human action. The community of believers that forms itself out of the remaining diversity, in which differences have no further discriminating effects, is the community of the body of Christ. A "pluralism out of faith" originates on these grounds (Chr. Schwöbel). A critical aspect is the relationship of *verbum internum* (what the Spirit teaches in the heart) and *verbum externum* (the message of Christ).

Freedom of Faith and the Idea of Peace as Prerequisite of Pluralism

Mennonites have always belonged – unconsciously! – to the sponsors of pluralism and have always lived as a plural minority church. But which element of this tradition can be brought into the pluralism debate constructively, not in an ahistoric way, denying the 'nasty trench between,' nor in an idealistic, romantic way, projecting present connections into the beginnings? Which implicit axioms of this tradition can be newly expressed in discussion with today's experiences of pluralism?

First, Peter Berger claims that "the heretic imperative can become a help instead of a hindrance, for religious faith as well as for reflection."[31] Since the beginning of Reformation the demand for freedom of faith and conscience – first as a reaction, then justified independently – has stood in the foreground.[32] Even today it provides the argument that the state should not rule over the church. The believing person should be able to decide freely and not – as in the case of pedobaptism – have his or her faith and confession predetermined by others. Neither a church office nor a statement of confession valid for everyone shall be set above the freedom and the conscience of the individual. The autonomy of the congregation requires that this demand finds expression in the institutional form. To this day baptismal candidates as a rule give a personal confession of faith to the congregation before they are accepted into it by baptism.[33] Consequently the 'heretic imperative' is a given.

Second, shouldn't the awareness of living as a "peace church" also suggest that not everyone must believe, think, and feel the same? Doesn't the renunciation of the use of violence[34] as a means of asserting personal convictions point to the legitimacy of variety? One restriction should be made, though: Where the demand for non-violence led to isolation and sometimes even into self-righteousness, there the idea of non-violent conflict resolution is

not central. There personal spotlessness is sufficient, and this leads – in contrast to pluralism – to pure individualism. But it is not similarly contradictory if the demand for nonviolence is understood as a witness to those who *think* differently. Living a testimonial alternative is in itself not an absolutization of one's own position, if it is not forced on the other person.

Both convictions, that of freedom of faith and conscience and that of non-violence, stem from original situations in which Anabaptists and later Mennonites argued apologetically. Mennonites could now move from being sponsors of pluralism to becoming constructive designers of it in a completely different way from their Anabaptist forbears. They would do so without giving up their own identity. Quite the contrary, for with help from these central claims, their identity has been sharpened and made possible again. So a pluralism becomes visible which neither defends itself against heteronomy nor leads to arbitrary thinking. If Mennonites introduce the "Anabaptist inheritance" in this reflective and constructive way, they could make an important contribution within the ecumenical fellowship of churches. For that, howeber, this plural minority would have to translate freedom of faith and peace-theology into the situation of postmodernity.

Conclusion

Mennonites have remained a plural minority since their polygenetic beginnings at the time of the Reformation, and quite stably so. They form a community which did without established dogmas and unifying confessions of faith. Yet their common 'story' unites them, a story unthinkable without common axioms such as standing up for freedom of conscience and the idea of peace. And so today they offer an ecclesiastical alternative to the state churches which in part face (post)modern demands in a different way. Mennonites are this alternative by virtue of their experience as a plural community and their awareness of minority. It is a church tradition, always leading a shadowy existence, and yet asserting itself, propagating itself, and bringing forth live congregations. Sometimes this tradition has succeeded through isolation, sometimes through raising a firm voice. Membership affiliation always occurred – at least ideally – by voluntary and conscious choice. Either way, Mennonites often built a form of counter-culture to ruling society.

Possibly, in times of breaking away from traditions, of secularization and the loss of significance of the institutional church, all of this must first be learned laboriously by the state churches. Mennonites sometimes lack the (theological) competence to bring their collective experiences fruitfully into the general denominational and socio-political dialogues. They will be dependent on the ecumenical community to endeavor to be church, together with other church traditions, within pluralism. Thereby they will discover that the state churches, which once belonged to their worst persecutors, today face similar tasks as they do themselves. They will discover in them comrades-in-arms for a more just and more peaceful society. Conversely, will the state churches want to listen to the experiences and reflections of the Mennonites?

(Translated by Anita Lichti, Stuttgart)

Notes

[1] Peter J. Foth is pastor of the Mennonite Church of Hamburg and Altona. He has contributed to the fact that Mennonites in Germany have become able to find their way to each other. He was chairman of the Association of Mennonite Congregations in Germany from 1990 to 1999 and has become theological mentor to many.

[2] Cf. K.Deppermann, W. Packull, J. Stayer, "From Monogenesis to Polygenesis," in *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 49 (1975): 82-122.

[3] Cf. H.-J. Goertz, "Zwischen Zwietracht und Eintracht. Zur Zweideutigkeit täuferischer und mennonitischer Bekenntnisse," in *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter*, 43/44 Jg. 1986/87, 16-46.

[4] Next to the Church of the Brethren and the Quakers (Society of Friends).

[5] This is discussed in greater detail in H.-J. Goertz, "Religiöse Bewegungen in der frühen Neuzeit," in *Enzyklopädie Deutscher Geschichte* Vol. 20, Munich 1993, especially under II. Probleme und Tendenzen der Forschung, 59-110.

[6] P.L. Berger, *Der Zwang zur Häresie*, Freiburg 1992, 9.

[7] Cf. Here and in the following Chr. Schwöbel, 'Pluralismus,' II. Systematisch-theologisch, in *Theologische Realenzy Klopädie*, Vol. 26, 724-39.

[8] M.Welker, "Missionarische Existenz heute" in A. Feldtkeller and Th. Sundermeier (Publ.), *Mission in pluralistischer Gesellschaft.* Frankfurt am Main 1999, 60. Cf. for the following reflections further articles in this book, and also M. Welker, Kirche im Pluralismus, Munich 1995.

[9] Cf. Chr.Schwöbel in *Theologische Realenzy Klopädie*, loc. cit., 724.

[10] Heresy is declared as "choice" etymologically. Cf. P.L. Berger, loc. cit., 40f.

[11] "Heresy, once the trade of marginal and eccentric types of people, has become by far a more general condition; heresy has indeed become universal," 44.

[12] H.-J. Goertz, 'Menno Simons/Mennoniten,' II. 2. Frömmigkeit, Theologie, konfessionelle Identität, in: *TRE*, Vol. 22, 453. Cf. his, *Die Täufer: Geschichte und Deutung*, Munich 1988.
[13] *Ibid.*
[14] "Brüderliche Vereinigung etlicher Kinder Gottes, sieben Artikel betreffend," in H. Fast (ed.), *Der linke Flügel der Reformation*, Bremen 1962.
[15] All numbers from *Mennonite and Brethren in Christ World Directory 1998*, compiled by Mennonite World Conference, Strasburg.
[16] Cf. here D.G. Lichdi, *Über Zürich und Witmarsum nach Addis Abeba: Die Mennoniten in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Maxdorf 1983, 151-81.
[17] Cf. H. Penner, "Die Ost- und Westpreußischen Mennoniten," *Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein*, Vol. 1 1978, Vol. 2 1987. Also: D.G. Lichdi, *Die Mennoniten im Dritten Reich. Dokumentation und Deutung*. Schriftenreihe des Mennonitischen Geschichtsvereins Nr. 9, Weierhof/Pfalz 1977.
[18] In spite of these differences the German Mennonite churches have been united in the Association of Mennonite Congregations in Germany, K.d.ö.R. (AMG) since 1990, ca. 6,600 members in 52 congregations. The 'Russian-Germans' form various different unions. The largest number, though, based more on estimates and cited very differently, are presently composed of independent Brethren Churches, which are not organized in larger unions. They are hardly represented in the institutional ecumenical movement.
[19] See, e.g., C. Redekop, *Mennonite Society*, Baltimore and London 1989.
[20] Cf. L. Hege/Chr. Wiebe (Publ.), *Les Amish: Origine et Particularismes* 1693-1993, Ingersheim 1996.
[21] The AMG is integrated in the ecumenical movement on different levels: Union of Protestant Free Churches, National Council of Churches in Germany, and in part in the World Council of Churches as well. The Union of German Mennonite Congregations ("Vereinigung") and the Mennonite Church in the Netherlands ("Algemene Doopsgezinde Societeit") are founding members of the World Council of Churches (1948).
[22] Cf. above all the contributions of the Bender-School and of John Howard Yoder, who increasingly became the speaker for the Mennonites in ecumenical-theological discussions.
[23] P.J. Foth, "Hüben und Drüben. Der Einfluss der amerikanischen auf die europäischen Mennoniten seit 1945," in *Mennonitisches Jahrbuch 2000*, published by the AMG, Lahr 2000, 55-60.
[24] Cf. the so-called Puidoux Conferences in D.F. Durnbaugh (ed.), *On Earth Peace. Discussions on War/Peace-Issues between Friends, Mennonites, Brethren and European Chuches 1935-1975*. Elgin, IL 1978. The impulse for an ecumenical Decade for Overcoming Violence was introduced at the VIII General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Harare 1998; cf. F. Enns, "Impuls zur Gegenbewegung: eine ökumenische Dekade. Das ÖRK-Programm zur Überwindung von Gewalt vor und nach Harare," in *Ökumenische Rundschau* April 1999, 48. Jg., Heft 2, 167-75.
[25] H.-J. Goertz in *TRE*, loc. cit., 454. It is to the credit of Goertz and his extensive contributions that large corrections could be made in Anabaptist research.
[26] Recently more often at the Anabaptist Mennonite Theological Seminary Bienenberg in Switzerland.
[27] Cf. the "story-concept" by D. Ritschl, *Zur Logik der Theologie*, Munich 1988: "The identity

of an individual or of a group can best be expressed through 'stories'. People are what they say about themselves in their 'story' (or what is said to them) and what they make out of their 'story'," 45.

[28] See, e.g., R. Bernhardt, *Der Absolutheitsanspruch des Christentums: Von der Aufklärung bis zur pluralistischen Religionstheologie*, Gütersloh 1990.

[29] Chr. Schwöbel, "Die Wahrheit des Glaubens im religiös-weltanschaulichen Pluralismus," in U. Kühn (ed.), *Christlicher Wahrheitsanspruch zwischen Fundamentalismus und Pluralität*, Leipzig 1998, 116.

[30] See, e.g., Chr. Schwöbel (ed.), *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Being and Act*, Edinburgh 1995. M. Volf refers the Trinitarian-theological reflections of Jürgen Moltmann to ecclesiology in *Trinität und Gemeinschaft: Eine ökumenische Ekklesiologie*, Mainz/Neukirchen 1996.

[31] Cf. Chr. Schwöbel in *TRE*, loc. cit., 734.

[32] P.L. Berger, loc. cit., 48f.

[33] Cf. W.Klaassen (ed.), *Anabaptism in Outline, Selected Primary Sources*, Kitchener,Ontario 1981, chapters X, XII, and XV. Here several references from the sixteenth century can be found. Cf. also H.-J. Goertz, *Die Täufer*, loc. cit..

[34] Though some other churches have set baptismal phrases they mirror the same freedom of conscience; e.g., the Mennonite Church in Krefeld: "Do you desire to live your life as a right (real) Christian looking up to God, and as a disciple of Christ, as your free conscience commands you? If you so desire, then answer: Yes." This is followed by baptism in the name of the triune God.

[35] Cf. die "Brüderliche Vereinigung etlicher Kinder Gottes" in H. Fast (ed.), *Der linke Flügel der Reformation*, Bremen 1962.