

What Constitutes a Mennonite Gospel of Peace? Progressives, Traditionalists, and the End of Mennonite Nonresistance in Prussia, 1848-1880

Mark Jantzen

On October 2, 1870, a month after the German military victory against the French at Sedan that would make the founding of the German Empire possible in January 1871, the Danzig Mennonite Church voted to allow “each brother to decide in which manner and to what degree he considers himself permitted in his conscience before God to follow the demands of the authorities” to serve in the military. The congregation agreed to recommend noncombatant service as the better option, but would equally accept members who became regular soldiers. This new approach was not, however, a change in any way to “our calling to present the love and the peace of the gospel of Jesus Christ through our Constitution and through every aspect of the life of our congregation.” For this congregation it became possible to see Mennonite soldiers, noncombatant or regular service, as presenting the gospel of peace. The only reason given in the resolution for this change was that “it does appear very difficult . . . to prove from scripture the complete inadmissibility of the obligation to military service required of every citizen of the state.”¹ By 1880, virtually all Mennonites in the Vistula Delta area had reached the same conclusion, the last group in Germany do to so, completing the shift toward the creation of Mennonite German soldiers.

The Danzig Mennonite church was the largest of three urban congregations in the Vistula River community. Its members were thus on average better educated and more integrated into German society than the majority in the rural areas. As such, this progressive congregation stood for better education for youth and for more engagement with society. Social engagement meant support for equal civil rights and for at least limited

¹ H.G. Mannhardt, *The Danzig Mennonite Church: Its Origin and History from 1569-1919*, ed. Mark Jantzen and John D. Thiesen, trans. Victor G. Doerksen (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 2007), 205.

democracy instead of rule only by the king. Along with education and engagement with society also came, as we see, a new attitude toward the Bible and a new way to present the gospel of peace in a Mennonite key.

Mennonite traditionalists questioned whether the Danzig church was still Mennonite and whether its members did not have a twisted sense of peace, since they could now kill Frenchmen either as a last recourse or with abandon as individual conscience allowed. Traditionalists openly advocated for civil inequality, since it meant that their young men would not have to serve in the military when the law otherwise declared all men equally liable for service. They disdained democracy if accepting it meant abandoning their view of living peacefully. When government pressure to conform and to serve grew too onerous, they emigrated to Russia or the United States, where staying outside the military was still an option.² An example of the traditionalists' understanding of the source and aim of sharing the gospel of peace with the world is included in one of their pleas to the Emperor to restore their exemption: "When our pilgrims' journey is ended and that which on earth is shrouded in darkness becomes bathed in light, then perhaps among the pillars supporting your royal throne will be found the prayers of our religious community."³ The gospel of peace, in their view, was predicated on individuals deciding to support God's actions, not human action; and peace, which was generated by God's desire and not human desires, was finally achieved by spiritual means, including right living, not by human violence.

Mennonites in Prussia

Until German unification in 1871, individual sovereign states determined the legal parameters for Mennonite existence. From the mid-16th century until 1772, however, most German-speaking Mennonites lived under Polish rule. The Mennonite community in the Vistula Delta comprised some 13,000 people in the second half of the 19th century, a large majority of the Mennonites in German lands. As part of the Partitions of Poland, from 1772 to 1795 Mennonites transitioned from living in the Commonwealth

² For a general overview of these two approaches to Mennonite identity and theology, see Mark Jantzen, *Mennonite German Soldiers: Nation, Religion, and Family in the Prussian East, 1772-1880* (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 161-228.

³ *Ibid.*, 221.

of Poland to the Kingdom of Prussia. Poland had only a tiny standing army, and Mennonites thus faced little pressure to serve in the military. Their challenges were freedom to worship; requirements to pay extra fees, taxes, and bribes; and facing periodic calls, never implemented in Poland, for their expulsion.⁴

Under Prussian rule starting in 1772, Mennonites received a new legal framework. Since Prussia had a large standing army and needed many soldiers, military service now became a much bigger issue. A Charter of Privileges issued in 1780 guaranteed Mennonites both freedom of worship and freedom from registering for military service, but it levied a new collective tax in exchange for legally tolerating their nonresistant stance. In 1789, under a new king, this policy was reviewed and changed. The Mennonite Edict issued that year took account of the fact that military registration was tied to farmsteads and households, so that if a Mennonite bought a farm from a Lutheran or Catholic, it had to be removed from the military rolls. To reduce such occurrences, Mennonites were for the most part permitted to buy real estate only from other Mennonites, effectively putting an economic cap on the size of the community and starting a large, long-standing stream of migration to Russia. In addition, the Edict mandated that boys born to marriages of Mennonites with non-Mennonites had to be enrolled as liable for military service. Since the Mennonite community did not allow members to be registered for service, the Edict effectively made so-called mixed marriages illegal. There were not a large number of such marriages in any case, but this absolute prohibition was a potent symbol of Mennonites' strenuous efforts to preserve faithful observance of the gospel of peace even if it meant accepting the imposition of greater distance from society.⁵

Revolutions in 1848

The year 1848 saw revolutions temporarily suspend royal rule in much of Europe. In the German Federation and Austria, the cowed rulers agreed

⁴ Peter J. Klassen, *Mennonites in Early Modern Poland and Prussia* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 2009); Mark Jantzen, "Seeking out the Crevices in a Rigid Society," *Mennonite Life* 66 (2012), <https://ml.bethelks.edu/issue/vol-66/article/part-iii-seeking-out-the-crevices-in-a-rigid-socie/>, accessed August 1, 2016.

⁵ Mark Jantzen, "From Poland to Prussia to Russia: Mennonite Emigration out of the Vistula Delta," *Preservings* 35 (2015): 52-60; Jantzen, *Mennonite German Soldiers*, 15-77.

to hold elections for an all-German parliament, known as the Frankfurt National Assembly, which would write a constitution in order to unite all the states into one, thus pursuing goals of nationalism, equality, and democracy all at once. The revolutionaries were inspired by the ideals of the American and French Revolutions of the late 18th century.

When the Frankfurt National Assembly met, members first passed a set of Basic Rights to create a basis for the constitution and to inspire the masses to continue their support. The initial proposal abolished the nobility in order to create equality before the law for all, most controversially including Jews. Paragraph Thirteen read, “The enjoyment of civic and civil rights will neither depend nor be restricted on the basis of religion. Religion must not hinder the fulfillment of national duties.” If adopted, this law would also mean the end of restrictions on Mennonites buying real estate and stop the payment of extra taxes imposed only on them. One Mennonite, Hermann von Beckerath, from the town of Krefeld in western Prussia, was a leading member of the parliament and was asked to serve as financial minister in the shadow national government the parliament set up. He was a vocal proponent of Jewish equality and favored Mennonite equality before the law as well.⁶

The principle of equality was applied to military service in Paragraph Six, “The obligation of military service is the same for everyone.” Heinrich Wilhelm Martens, the representative from Danzig, knew this proposal would cause problems for Mennonites from his district. He explained to the Assembly the current Mennonite practice along the Vistula River of paying extra taxes to avoid military service, and advocated that the proposal be softened a bit to allow a future parliament to pass laws regulating exemptions. He warned the Assembly that for Mennonites this was a matter of freedom of religion and conscience, and to violate their conviction would make the new constitution less tolerant than the dreaded police state that members were trying to replace.⁷

⁶ Jantzen, *Mennonite German Soldiers*, 137-51, quotation on 139. See also John D. Thiesen, “First Duty of the Citizen: Mennonite Identity and Military Exemption in Prussia, 1848-1877,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 72, no. 2 (April 1998): 161-87; Ulrich Hettinger, *Hermann von Beckerath. Ein preussischer Patriot und rheinischer Liberaler* (Krefeld: Mennonitengemeinde Krefeld, 2010).

⁷ Jantzen, *Mennonite German Soldiers*, 141.

Many speakers protested his promotion of inequality in the Basic Rights that were intended to make at least all German males equal. One of the most powerful speeches against granting Mennonites unequal and exempt status came from von Beckerath. He noted that almost all Mennonites in his home congregation were willing to serve. Although he did not tell the Assembly, Krefeld had recently formed a civil guard militia unit largely drawn from property owners in support of the revolution and for self-protection against lower-class demands and riots. Mennonites provided 20 percent of the officers for this self-financed group. Von Beckerath called for imposing the draft on his fellow Mennonites in the expectation that time and additional education would bring traditionalists out east around to the German majority viewpoint.⁸

The Assembly passed the Basic Rights as proposed, explicitly requiring Mennonites everywhere in Germany to serve in the military while also granting them full civil rights, including the right to buy property. However, in the time it took the Assembly to finish writing the constitution, monarchs in Austria and Prussia reasserted their authority and turned their armies against the revolutionaries everywhere in the German Federation. Monarchical rule returned, though tempered in Prussia by a new constitution that the king had his advisors write, and the decisions of the Assembly were not implemented. As the first all-German constitution, this application of modern liberal political thinking nonetheless came to define the expectations of broad segments of the educated German public.⁹

Progressives during German Unification

Prussia fought three wars in order to unify the roughly forty German states into a single nation-state, the German Empire—defeating Denmark in 1864, Austria in 1866, and France in 1870. As a result of the new legal framework that included limited democracy in the form of an imperial parliament, the debate over Mennonite military service was revisited in much the same terms as 1848—and with the same outcome in the parliamentary vote. This time, however, the newly created law was actually implemented. In October 1867, the responsible parliament, a short-term North German Confederation Diet,

⁸ Ibid., 145-46.

⁹ Ibid., 137-51.

passed a law making military service equal for all and explicitly mentioning Mennonites as required to serve. In March 1868, the King of Prussia, responding to visits and petitions by traditionalist Mennonite leaders, granted the option to serve in the military in noncombatant positions. Further clarification revealed Mennonite noncombatants would go through basic training with everyone else.¹⁰

The most influential progressive spokesperson was Wilhelm Mannhardt from Danzig, the first German Mennonite to earn a Ph.D. Trained in folklore, he worked as a tutor, sessional instructor, and independent scholar. He was well connected to Mennonite leadership circles, since his father, Jakob Mannhardt, had been pastor of the Danzig Mennonite Church since 1836. From December 1868 to January 1870, Mannhardt published a series of articles in the Mennonite newspaper his father had founded in 1854, *Mennonitische Blätter*, which laid out the case for serving in the military. As a moderate progressive, he advocated serving as a medic in the army, but he was willing to let individuals do as they saw fit. After the series was published, his congregation made the decision to see military service as a viable part of the gospel of peace.¹¹

Mannhardt addressed the problems of biblical interpretation, noting how the Old and New Testaments seem both to find a place for warfare in the service of God and humanity and to prohibit it. He concluded that the time was not yet ripe for a complete absence of violence in human affairs, although that remained the goal of both God and the church. He argued that Menno's aim of a congregation without spot or wrinkle led Mennonites to separate themselves from society in a way that was neither realistic nor sustainable. The dogma of nonresistance created a false sense of separation, of us versus them, that denied a shared humanity. In contemporary terms, Mannhardt ruled out the possibility of a two-kingdom theology where God

¹⁰ *Allerhöchste Kabinettsordre vom 3. März 1868 betreffend die Wehrpflicht von Mennoniten und weitere Bestimmungen* (Elbing, 1879).

¹¹ The series of newspaper articles is reprinted in translation in Wilhelm Mannhardt, *The Military Service Exemption of the Mennonites of Provincial Prussia*, ed. Mark Jantzen and John D. Thiesen (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 2013), 297-358. On Mannhardt himself, see Mark Jantzen, "Introduction," *ibid.*, xxiii-xxx, and "Mannhardt, Wilhelm (1831-1880)," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Mannhardt,_Wilhelm_\(1831-1880\)&oldid=120769](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Mannhardt,_Wilhelm_(1831-1880)&oldid=120769), accessed August 1, 2016.

had one set of standards for believers and another for the state, which might be required to wage wars of self-defense. He examined a wide variety of case studies from history and philosophy that showed how working for justice and conflict resolution on occasion required violence as a last resort.¹² Karl Koop has noted how Mannhardt's argument highlighted the injustice inherent in Mennonites' social distancing. The unfair advantage their Charter of Privileges gave them over their neighbors made them "co-conspirators in a profoundly unjust situation."¹³ Their lack of social engagement was cast as both a Christian and a social justice failing.

Mannhardt's use of martyr stories and Bible texts perhaps most clearly showed the shift in thinking. His account made no mention of any Anabaptist martyrs from the 16th century. Instead, he listed examples of those who died to rescue others, putting other people's lives ahead of their own. Prominent on the list was Arnold of Winkelried, a 14th-century soldier who sacrificed himself to win a battle and freedom for Switzerland. In addition to this being an odd choice of a martyr story for a Mennonite audience, it is not possible historically to establish if Winkelried even existed. But popularizing this story played an important role in developing 19th-century Swiss nationalism. Mannhardt went on to conclude that such examples of giving one's life for self-defense and defense of one's neighbors was the most rational route and best embodied Christ's words in John 15:13, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."¹⁴ Certainly Mennonites serving as medics in the German army best fit this implicit command and these examples, but other forms of military service could fit as well, provided one served out of love of humanity, not hatred of the enemy. Mannhardt's argument for allowing the state to determine the moral boundaries around killing demonstrated that he accepted what one scholar calls an important aspect of German cultural Protestantism in the late 19th century that "reduced ethical activity to the nation, conceived as the means through which God revealed his will."¹⁵

¹² Mannhardt, *The Military Service Exemption*, 297-358.

¹³ Karl Koop, "A Complication for the Mennonite Peace Tradition: Wilhelm Mannhardt's Defense of Military Service," *The Conrad Grebel Review*, 34, no. 1 (Winter 2016): 42.

¹⁴ Mannhardt, *The Military Service Exemption*, 305-307.

¹⁵ Richard Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919-1945* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), 15. See also Martin Jung, *Der Protestantismus in*

In 1874, the Prussian Landstag, the parliament of the Kingdom of Prussia that was by far the largest of the German states comprising the Empire, passed a new Mennonite Law. Most civil restrictions on Mennonites were formally lifted, and Mennonite congregations were permitted to incorporate so that they could register as property owners and enjoy other legal rights. In order to do so, however, the law required that “their bylaws do not contain any provisions that are contrary to the general laws of the land.”¹⁶ The state counted Mennonites’ Confessions of Faith as a part of their bylaws, so the old confessions that ruled out military service had to be rewritten. Two basic types of statements were developed, one asserting that war was an evil that resulted from sin, and the other, pioneered by the Danzig congregation, listing war as a terrible misfortune and reiterating the duty of every Christian to work for peace. By 1895, a unified Confession of Faith that followed the Danzig rationale called simply for members to avoid war insofar “as it depends on us.”¹⁷ This new vision, now enshrined as doctrine, conceptualized a Mennonite gospel of peace as something done at least partly with society, not as something specifically Mennonite carried out against social norms.

Traditionalists during German Unification

Traditionalists had long practice in tactics designed to maintain their understanding of the gospel of peace—refusing to kill under any circumstance while living godly lives dependent on God as an acknowledgment of the reality that Jesus is Lord—in the face of intense state pressure. From coming under the Prussian state in 1772 through the Napoleonic Wars of the early 19th century to the revolutions of 1848, the first step was always to petition king and government. Depending on the response and circumstance, Mennonites would then move to civil disobedience, suffering beatings and arrest rather than serve in the military, and to emigration as the next steps. A crucial problem now was that many Mennonites saw the issue as one for individuals to respond to, not one for the church to move on as a unified body, as the 1870 decision in Danzig made clear. Petitioning, civil disobedience,

Deutschland von 1870 bis 1945 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2002), 49-53.

¹⁶ Jantzen, *Mennonite German Soldiers*, 269.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 251.

and the threat of emigration had been effective in changing policy in the past, partly because virtually all Mennonites had acted collectively. The new swing to individualism broke both the power of Mennonite leadership to make decisions on behalf of the whole and the effectiveness of traditional modes of creating space in a hostile society for a Mennonite gospel of peace.

Thus, traditionalists following established patterns at first ignored the public debates and concentrated on influencing royal and governmental policy. From 1867 to 1873, numerous delegations went to Berlin to meet with the king, leading politicians, and cabinet members. This action resulted in a directive allowing noncombatant service. But participating in the military in any form was unacceptable to traditionalists. A large petition drive that collected around 1,800 male Mennonite signatures argued that liberal politicians targeted the Mennonites because they voted conservative. The proposed remedy was to restore Mennonites' exemption but strip them of some their civil rights, including the right to vote. An unequal society that respected their right to religious freedom but denied them other rights was preferred.¹⁸ Their petitioning, and their known proclivity to emigrate, resulted in a ministerial regulation issued on November 28, 1868 that allowed them a couple of years of extra time before the draft was finally imposed.¹⁹

Since petitioning did not bring the full relief they wanted, traditionalists next turned to civil disobedience over military service, a tactic of long standing. They tried varying approaches this time. David van Riesen, who was to be drafted as a noncombatant medic in 1871, escaped the draft by arguing that since he had already renounced his citizenship and obtained a passport to leave, as a non-citizen he could not be inducted. It was just that his departure was delayed, perhaps indefinitely. The government decided against expulsion of this non-citizen, and instead closed the loophole by issuing exit visas revoking citizenship that were valid for only six months, after which citizenship was automatically restored. Nonetheless, this victory boosted the resolve of traditionalists. Johann Dyck was told to report for duty on April 22, 1872, but instead went into hiding. However, he was found that very day, arrested, and taken under military escort to Berlin. His uniform was forced onto him, but he refused to swear or affirm the oath

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 193-228.

¹⁹ *Allerhöchste Kabinetsordre*, 4.

of induction. He was sentenced to several days in confinement, then asked again. He refused. Apparently this process repeated itself until September, when it seems his health was broken and he was given a medical release.²⁰

Civil disobedience extended to using the ban and denying communion to Mennonite German soldiers. The staunchest proponent of nonresistance was Elder Gerhard Penner of the Heubuden congregation near Marienburg/Malbork. He stood by the claim worked out during the Napoleonic Wars that a Mennonite who accepted military service by that choice chose to stop being Mennonite. As non-Mennonites, such people were of course no longer part of the congregation and, unless they repented and rejoined, they could not be served communion. Unfortunately for this position, Prussia in the 1870s was involved in the Kulturkampf controversy. Conservative Chancellor Otto von Bismarck needed liberal votes in parliament to pass his budget, and he secured them by instigating a struggle for German culture that targeted an ostensibly internationalist and traitorous Catholic church as a threat. Liberals feared the control of priests over supposedly simple-minded Catholics going to Marian pilgrimage sites in great number, cheering for Austria during the war against it, and generally promoting regressive ways of thinking. One of the laws passed made it illegal for a clergyman to withhold communion from a parishioner for obeying a law. The intent was to prevent priests from punishing Catholics who helped or sided with the state in this controversy.²¹

On June 7, 1874, Elder Penner publicly denied Bernhard Fieguth communion for being a soldier. This act brought the elder into court. At the end of an appeals process, the High Court in Berlin found him guilty and sentenced him to small monetary fine or a week's imprisonment. Penner emigrated in 1876 to Beatrice, Nebraska. Concluding that there were now no Mennonites left in Prussia, only former Mennonites who were willing to become or already were soldiers, he took along a communion set designed to serve over 1,000 members at one setting. It is now part of the permanent display at Kauffman Museum on the campus of Bethel College in North

²⁰ Jantzen, *Mennonite German Soldiers*, 220-23.

²¹ David Blackburn, *Marpingen: Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in a Nineteenth-Century German Village* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993); Ronald Ross, *The Failure of Bismarck's Kulturkampf: Catholicism and State Power in Imperial Germany, 1871-1887* (Washington, DC: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 1998).

Newton, Kansas. Since there were no legal options for Mennonites to avoid military service, all the traditionalists, roughly 16 percent of the community, emigrated to the United States or Russia.²²

Traditionalists failed not only in their regular patterns of response to government pressure to go to war, but also in understanding or working within the new individualistic context. As the struggle over a Mennonite gospel of peace moved to individual decision-making, it was difficult for traditionalists to counter the intellectual arguments of Wilhelm Mannhardt and educated urban Mennonite pastors who advocated military service. Traditionalist leaders were willing to deal with state officials and even go to audiences with the king and emperor, but they did not have much education beyond primary school. Already in 1850, in response to lapses in the Mennonite peace witness in the face of the 1848 revolutions, Elder Peter Froese of the Orlofffelde congregation had published a booklet outlining the case for nonresistance. He saw the rise of a conception of humans as primarily focused on getting their rights as a cause of violence, not a solution to violence. The love of enemy was a command of Jesus Christ, the King of Kings. Who could set it aside? The problem was that a natural person, as opposed to a spiritual person, “cannot reconcile such an idea with his reason, he judges all by natural standards and sees only the physical nature. According to natural reason it would be the biggest folly not to defend one’s right, one’s possessions, one’s worldly goods.”²³

In the 1870s, one of the few traditionalists writing on the subject was Wilhelm Ewert, Elder of the Obernessau congregation near Thorn/Toruń. He was the Prussian delegate who travelled with Mennonites from Russia in 1873 looking for immigration opportunities in North America. For him, a nationalistic definition of neighbor could never be a Christian definition. On the meaning of John 15:13, he noted that the French were still “our brothers . . . saved with the precious blood of Christ.”²⁴ Ewert went on to enumerate

²² Jantzen, *Mennonite German Soldiers*, 223-28.

²³ Peter Froese, *Liebreiche Erinnerung an die mennonitische Glaubens-Genossen in Hinsicht des Glaubens-Artikels von der Wehrlosigkeit* (Tiegerweide, 1850), 9-12, quote on 11-12.

²⁴ Wilhelm Ewert, “Erwiderung auf den Aufsatz in Nr 6, 7, 8, 9 der Mennonitische Blaetter, Jahrgang 1872, ‘Koennen und duerfen wir Mennoniten der vom Staate geforderten Wehrpflicht genuegen.’” See the abridged version, “A Defense of the Ancient Mennonite Principle of Non-Resistance by a Leading Prussian Mennonite Elder in 1873,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 11,

the ways in which progressives' flirtation with and adaption of many norms from society had led them to prefer military service to emigration. Jakob Mannhardt, for example, had been awarded a Prussian medal, the Order of the Red Eagle (fourth class, with the number fifty), for his fifty years as a Mennonite pastor and his assistance in getting Mennonites to serve in the military. Others relished their new civil rights and equality before the law, especially since they could now buy additional farmland. Some leaders were interested in the benefits of congregational incorporation. The final straw for Ewert was the new Mennonite interest in "the glory of the fatherland and the nation." Traditionalists found themselves powerless to prevent these manifestations of modernity from winning the hearts and minds of their co-religionists.

Conclusion

This case study of Prussian Mennonite acceptance of military service as an authentically Mennonite mode of the gospel of peace raises questions about the foundations of contemporary Mennonite peacebuilding. These questions revolve around contemporary peace workers' understanding of their role, their place in society and their relationship to modernity, the locus of collective discernment, and the epistemological lenses examined, used, and discarded.

In this case, traditionalists argued for a certain distance from society, in that a Mennonite application of the gospel of peace could never involve or support military violence, a stance that historically is more accurately called "a peace witness," since it witnesses to God's actions and to personal conversion and ethics as the source of peace, not human force. Given the strenuous efforts involved in funding extra taxes, maintaining community economic life in the face of clear discrimination, engaging hostile government officials and angry neighbors, and finally emigrating when necessary, traditionalists could never understand the progressives' slur that they were too passive and inactive. Traditionalist social distancing, however, makes it hard to see how they were building anything—peace or otherwise—with and for society. Outsiders and even their own progressives could see them only as dangerous, ignorant, or obnoxious freeloaders.

Progressives therefore countered with a social engagement that saw military intervention as a necessary function that, if done with restraint and humility, could be a valid expression of a Mennonite gospel of peace, since it was judged to have more potential than traditionalist approaches for enhancing social justice. Accepting society's definition of peace as human actions that will inevitably, if regrettably, require violence had the advantage of eliminating forever the charge of freeloading that so haunts Mennonite existence in societies based on equal rights and duties. If the violence could be minimal enough and the gain in rights and justice great enough, this was an overall gain that progressives viewed as meeting God's expectations better than traditionalists' tired claims to be following the example of Jesus in their personal lives.

Behind the question of when violence is justified lurks the larger one of Mennonites' relationship to modernity. Karl Koop's analysis of Mannhardt's arguments shows how Mannhardt borrowed the modern privileging of the individual as the site of moral decision making. Self-preservation as the highest moral duty is the wedge he used to drive Mennonites to participate in preservation of the group via military self-defense. The group was now defined by the "democratic principle" and not by ecclesiology.²⁵ The nation or the society had replaced the congregation as the arbiter of what constituted the gospel of peace. The protests lodged by Froese and Ewert were perhaps arguing that modernity and the language of equal rights shifted the boundaries of Mennonite individual and collective identity, and of Mennonite understandings of peace, in ways that progressives have under-analyzed or ignored.

Both sides still had visions for Mennonite efforts on behalf of peace, but from quite different social locations with different aims and practices. This raises another question: What remains "Mennonite" about peace efforts from these two different stances of seeing peace as something humans achieve with God or on their own, or as withdrawal from or integration with society? Historian Tom Brady recently asked this question about Mennonite contributions to European history.²⁶ On the traditionalist side that prides itself

²⁵ Koop, "Complication for the Mennonite Peace Tradition," 41-44, quote on 44.

²⁶ Tom Brady, "The Cost of Contexts: Anabaptist/Mennonite History and the Early Modern European Past," *European Mennonites and the Challenge of Modernity over Five Centuries*:

on its distance from society, the contributions to history and peace appear recognizably Mennonite—but miniscule. If Mennonites are so different from and disengaged from society, how could they contribute? On the other hand, if they are well integrated into society and are free as individuals to become activists or to remain indifferent in various arenas, including peacebuilding, what about their contributions remains “Mennonite”?

One answer suggests that Mennonites had their own unique, Bible-based way of engaging and accepting modernity, but numerous case studies show how difficult and how rarely successful that approach was.²⁷ Brady suggests that such progressives might contribute as individual businesspeople, farmers, or even soldiers, but not really or clearly as Mennonites. Examining Mennonites’ location in society raises a further question of whether there is such a thing as peacebuilding that is “Mennonite” in a collective or ecclesiastical sense. Is it simply a few individual Mennonites and some Mennonite institutions doing peace work with the same approach as other practitioners, just as progressive Mennonites’ business, educational, or farming practices might not differ greatly from those of others?

A final set of questions concerns the epistemological foundations of current Mennonite peacebuilding. Traditionalist epistemology for a gospel of peace in Prussia was narrow in scope, while progressives added new sources of knowledge and authority borrowed from the society at large. One constant is that both sides appealed to biblical texts, but they did so in different ways. Koop has found Mannhardt’s approach to be less Christocentric than that of traditionalists, and dismissive of the new birth and discipleship so central to Menno Simons and other Anabaptists. Mannhardt’s analysis seemed more Lutheran.²⁸ Does the common practice of referring to the Bible suggest that Mennonite peace workers even today should cite the Bible in justifying their work? And if it does, must such reference be done only in certain ways or with certain lenses? Mannhardt and other progressives appealed to the best academic and scientific research of the day as part of their acculturation

Contributors, Detractors, and Adapters, ed. Mark Jantzen, Mary S. Sprunger, and John D. Thiesen (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 2016), 1-23.

²⁷ The suggestion of a unique synthesis is outlined in Mark Jantzen and Mary S. Sprunger, “Introduction” in *ibid.*, xvii-xxx. Eighteen case studies follow in the same volume.

²⁸ Koop, “Complication for the Mennonite Peace Tradition,” 44.

to society, while traditionalists rejected such findings as becoming more important than the Bible.

Today, we might ask, on what combination of epistemologies is Mennonite peacebuilding finally built? How do sociological, biblical, theological, communal, scientific, and experiential understandings of truth shape and guide Mennonite peacebuilders? Since modernity has changed and expanded what constitutes authoritative sources of truth, we finally must ask, In what ways do modernity and modern understandings of the world and human beings aid—or detract from—peace work and a gospel of peace that is recognizably Mennonite?

Mark Jantzen is Professor of History at Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas, and Chair of the Department of History and Conflict Studies.