

Historical Anabaptist-Mennonite Pneumatology: A Review of Confessional, Catechetical, and Devotional Materials, 1525-1963

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Introduction

Anabaptist-Mennonite theologians display evident investment in academic and pastoral discussions around Christology, ecclesiology, theological method, the interpretation of Scripture, and ethics. When other topics are treated—if they are treated—they are most often subordinated to one or more of these central topics.¹ If this scenario results in a rich body of reflection on a few areas of interest, it also raises the possibility that other important areas of theology and church life are being underemphasized. In this essay I draw attention to one of those underemphasized areas, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

It has become a commonplace that North American Anabaptist-Mennonites lack a robust doctrine of the Holy Spirit or, more generally, a “spirituality.” In academic circles, Steve Dintaman’s 1992 article, “The Spiritual Poverty of the Anabaptist Vision,” is usually credited as beginning a discussion that was extended by Paul Martens and various participants in the debates over whether or not John Howard Yoder reduced theology to ethics.² The conversation in North American churches seems to have gone on much

¹ See, for example, J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), which is largely about Jesus and the ethics of nonviolence. Another example is A. James Reimer, *Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2001). Much of this book is about method and, as the title indicates, a method rooted in “classical” theological sources and articulated in order to sustain an ethics.

² Stephen F. Dintaman, “The Spiritual Poverty of the Anabaptist Vision,” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 10, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 205-208; Paul Martens, “Discipleship Ain’t Just about Jesus: or, On the Importance of the Holy Spirit for Pacifists,” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 21, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 32-40; Paul Martens, *The Heterodox Yoder* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012). See references to additional entries in the debate over Yoder in Jamie Pitts, *Principalities and Powers: Revising John Howard Yoder’s Sociological Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), 148-49.

longer: Brian Froese documents controversies among California Mennonites in the 1920s and after over contacts with Aimee Semple McPherson and early Pentecostalism; the influence of the charismatic movement in the Mennonite Church of the 1970s led to the formation of Mennonite Renewal Services and the creation of a study document, “The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church”; and today questions are raised about how North Americans might respond to the strong Pentecostal currents in Global South Christianity.³ In spite of these conversations, there has been little sustained work on the Holy Spirit by Anabaptist-Mennonite theologians in recent years.

The few recent writings that touch on these issues call for renewed attention to pneumatological resources in Scripture, early Anabaptist history, and the Global South churches.⁴ This call is welcome and deserves serious uptake. At the same time, it shares a common historiographical assumption that what matters most is idealized stories of origin and how these interface with the present.⁵ For Anabaptist-Mennonites, it supports an assumption that what happened between roughly 1550 and 1950 has little bearing on what we might think or do today.

³ Brian Froese, *California Mennonites* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2015), 67-71; Harold E. Bauman, “Charismatic Movement,” *Global Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* (1990), http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Charismatic_Movement; the Mennonite Church, “The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church” (1977); Conrad L. Kanagy, Tilahun Beyene, and Richard Showalter, *Winds of the Spirit: A Profile of Anabaptist Churches in the Global South* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2012), 246-49.

⁴ Martens, “Discipleship Ain’t Just about Jesus,” 34-37; Kanagy, Beyene, and Showalter, *Winds of the Spirit*, 246-49. Discussions about the “global church” and the “Global South” sometimes assume that the “Global North” is homogenously white, middle class, and secularizing, and that charismatic impulses come only from outside. This approach ignores both the long involvement of white Mennonites in charismatic movements, as signaled above, and the influence of Pentecostal-oriented Latinos, African-Americans, and various migrant groups. See, for example, Felipe Hinojosa, *Latino Mennonites: Civil Rights, Faith and Evangelical Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2014), 34-35.

⁵ Walter Sawatsky has questioned how this historiographical structure misshapes narratives of Anabaptist-Mennonite history. See Walter Sawatsky, “20th-Century Anabaptist-Mennonites Re-Shaped by Context—First, Second and Third Worlds,” in *Prophetic and Renewal Movements: The Prague Consultations*, ed. Walter Sawatsky (Geneva: World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 2009), 177-87. For a very critical reading of general Christian historiography along these lines, see Robert Louis Wilken, *The Myth of Christian Beginnings* (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1971).

The burden of this essay is to offer a narrative of Anabaptist-Mennonite teachings about the Holy Spirit, and, when possible, accounts of experiences of the Spirit, that extends from early Anabaptism into what is too often regarded as an uninteresting “middle period.” Although I will offer a synopsis of early Anabaptist pneumatology and touch on some recent developments, much of the essay surveys confessional, catechetical, and devotional materials from the 17th century through the early 20th century. I stop in the mid-20th century, as the growth of Anabaptist-Mennonite academic theology and increasing interaction with Pentecostal and charismatic movements after that date make for a proliferation of sources that deserve their own study.

There are, of course, significant limitations to my approach. Highlighting this period and its “official” Anabaptist-Mennonite literature keeps the focus on (relatively) powerful white European and North American men and their writings. This focus wrongly excludes the perspectives and experiences of women, people of color, and people from outside Europe and North America. It also lacks a certain scholarly thoroughness: there are sure to be valuable pneumatological insights from other writings, such as sermons, other occasional pieces, meeting minutes, hymns, letters, and diaries, in addition to what can be gained from visual art and architecture, historical reconstructions of marginalized experience, oral history, and so on. All these sources are worthy of study, and a comprehensive treatment of historical Anabaptist-Mennonite pneumatology requires their inclusion. At the same time, there is value in small beginnings. No one, to my knowledge, has attempted to synthesize a narrative from these readily available sources. Moreover, beginning the process of narrating an historical Anabaptist-Mennonite pneumatology that includes, rather than excludes, the middle centuries may be an important step toward an interpretation of Anabaptist-Mennonite history as a developing pneumatological tradition—and not simply a Christocentric ethical tradition that lost its original pneumatology.

This last comment brings me to the argument, or story, that I want to unfold in this essay. The typical story of an early pneumatological fervor followed by restrained biblicism is true, but only partially so. Although reticence about the Holy Spirit and experience of the Spirit is visible throughout the tradition, so is the quest to know, understand, and experience the Spirit. That quest has often involved interactions with other

Christian movements, such as Pietism, Revivalism, Pentecostalism, and Fundamentalism; sometimes these interactions have eroded commitment to traditional Anabaptist-Mennonite convictions and practices, at other times they have strengthened them. I contend that these interactions and their fruits should be understood as constitutive of Anabaptist-Mennonite pneumatology: part of how Anabaptist-Mennonites have sought to know, understand, and experience the Holy Spirit is by learning from other Christians. Other constitutive features of this pneumatology include a strong association between the Spirit and disciplined community, a persistent epistemological tension between Word (Jesus, Scripture) and Spirit, and an occasional emphasis on the Spirit's role in consummating history (eschatology).

The story is told in four parts. The first part reviews the strong pneumatological elements of early Anabaptism as well as the reactions against pneumatic excesses. That pattern—striving for the Spirit and reactive wariness—characterizes much of the history that follows. The second part focuses on the many, mostly Dutch and North German Mennonite confessions and martyrologies produced during the late 16th and early 17th centuries. The final two parts look at Anabaptist-Mennonite interactions with Pietism and Revivalism and fundamentalism. In the conclusion I review the story, summarize some of the major themes, and suggest what difference telling this story might make to the church today.

I

Early Anabaptist Pneumatology, 1525-1554

The most prominent account of early Anabaptist history is Harold Bender's "Anabaptist Vision." In that 1942 presidential address to the American Society of Church History, Bender contended that Anabaptism could be described in terms of (1) its understanding of Christianity as the practice of discipleship; (2) its insistence on the voluntary character of the church, which character implies adult baptism, separation from and criticism of ungodly society, suffering, and mutual aid; and (3) the ethic of love and

nonresistance.⁶ Bender's summary relies on the "clear line of demarcation" he drew between Anabaptists on the one hand, and spiritualists, mystics, revolutionaries, and antinomians on the other.⁷ This historiographic decision meant that the Anabaptists who most emphasized the Spirit were read out of the history. Anabaptism was identified with sober biblical ethics, not an abundant, sometimes messy life in the Spirit.

Bender's "Vision" has been subject to thorough criticism, and charismatic tendencies have been identified even in his model Swiss Anabaptism.⁸ In St. Gallen, in eastern Switzerland, Margaret Hottinger and other women prophets led a healthy Anabaptist charismatic community in 1525. This community eventually fell into disrepute for its associations with sexual promiscuity and the bizarre proclamations of at least one member.⁹ Although scholars suggest that Michael Sattler's 1527 "Schleitheim Confession" is in part a response to excesses at St. Gallen,¹⁰ Schleitheim is by

⁶ Harold S. Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1944), <https://www.goshen.edu/mhl/Refocusing/d-av.htm>.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Bender thought all true Anabaptism came from the movement that broke from Zwingli in Zurich. Most historians later accepted the very different approach outlined in James M. Stayer, Werner O. Packull, and Klaus Depperman, "From Monogenesis to Polygenesis: The Historical Discussion of Anabaptist Origins," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 49 (1975): 83-121. My narration of early Anabaptism is indebted to polygenesis historiography, with its identification of three primary early Anabaptist movements (Swiss, South German/Austrian, and North German/Dutch), as well as later scholarly "softenings" of this tripartite division through identifying commonalities and contacts among the movements. The term "softenings" comes from Werner O. Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings: Communitarian Experiments during the Reformation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1995), 10-11. For a comprehensive introduction to early Anabaptism that accounts for both differences and similarities, see C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 1995).

⁹ Charles Byrd, "Sixteenth Century Anabaptism and the Manifestation of Glossolalia." Conference paper, Society of Pentecostal Studies, Evangel University, Springfield, Missouri, 2014; Auka Jelsma, "A Messiah for Women? Religious Commotion in North-East Switzerland, 1525-26," *Frontiers of the Reformation: Dissidence and Orthodoxy in Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1998), 40-51; C. Arnold Snyder, "The Birth and Evolution of Swiss Anabaptism (1520-1530)," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 80 (Oct. 2006): 593-94; George Hunston Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 3rd ed. (Kirksville, MO: Truman State Univ. Press, 2000), 228.

¹⁰ E.g., Snyder, "Birth and Evolution," 594.

no means anti-pneumatological. The unity of those gathered at Schleithem is, according to the document's cover letter, secured in the face of "a very great offense" introduced by "some false brothers" who, "thinking to practice and observe the freedom of the Spirit and of Christ . . . have fallen short of the truth and . . . are given over to the lasciviousness and license of the flesh."¹¹ The ensuing theological argumentation that defines its seven articles is largely Christological—Jesus' teachings, example, and atoning work are at the forefront—but there are references that connect the Spirit to comfort in tribulation, and to the peaceable unity and nonresistant separation of the true church.¹² Although Sattler and his fellow confessors were clearly wary of abusing the Spirit, they certainly welcomed the Spirit in their midst.¹³

Mennonite theologian Thomas N. Finger has recently argued that the early Swiss Anabaptists "mentioned the Spirit least often" of the triune persons, but he also acknowledges pneumatological emphases in the thought of Swiss leader Balthasar Hubmaier.¹⁴ In Hubmaier we see clearly the common Anabaptist conviction that the baptism of the Spirit was the concrete inner transformation leading to water baptism and participation in disciplined Christian community. Finger suggests that "the Spirit occupied the foreground" in Hubmaier's ecclesiology.¹⁵ For example, Hubmaier's

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹² *The Schleithem Confession*, trans. and ed. John H. Yoder (Scottsdale, PA, and Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1977), 7, 9, 13, 15.

¹³ Byrd, "Sixteenth Century Anabaptism," 8, notes Sattler's comment in his final letter to the church at Horb: "I do not reject the grace and revelation of God, but the puffed up make use of this revelation." Sattler then quotes Paul from 1 Cor. 13 on "the tongues of men and angels" (in Thieleman J. van Braght, *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians*, trans. Joseph F. Sohm [Scottsdale, PA, and Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1950 [1660]], 419. Byrd develops this and related evidence to suggest that Sattler continued to welcome the gifts of the Spirit in spite of wariness over their abuse. Byrd's case is strengthened by Lutheran pastor Elias Schad's account of a clandestine Swiss Brethren worship service in 1576. Here, almost fifty years after Schleithem had supposedly rejected pneumatic experience, Schad observed Anabaptists "sigh[ing] and groan[ing] for the Spirit"—in other words, speaking in tongues. Elias Schad, "True Account of an Anabaptist Meeting at Night in a Forest and a Debate Held There with Them," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 58, no. 3 (July 1984): 294. I am grateful to the late Alan Kreider for bringing this story to my attention.

¹⁴ Thomas N. Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology: Biblical, Historical, Constructive* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), 424-25.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 425.

devotional commentary on the Apostles' Creed describes the Spirit as the one "in whom I place all my trust, that he will teach me all truth, increase my faith, and stir up the fire in my heart with his holy breathing and kindle it right properly that it might burn in genuine, unadulterated love toward God and my neighbor."¹⁶ The Spirit is for Hubmaier the divine agent of transformation who makes spiritual communion with God and others possible. He goes on to pray that this communion would experience reformation and purification by its ongoing disciplinary practice.¹⁷

The origins of South German and Austrian Anabaptism are closely associated with Thomas Müntzer, the preacher and leader of peasant revolt in the central Germanic lands of Thuringia. Early South German-Austrian Anabaptist leaders Hans Denck and Hans Hut had at least some contact with Müntzer, and they shared his mystical focus on the difficult though transformative encounter with the spiritual "inner Word." Hut moreover developed the apocalyptic dimensions of Müntzer's thought.¹⁸

For Denck, salvation was a triadic process oriented to life in the Spirit. Only by receiving the living Word through the Spirit could the believer understand Scripture aright and obey God's will.¹⁹ From Finger's perspective, Denck's Müntzerian emphasis on the Word led to a "subordination" of the Spirit, and "nearly everything Denck said about the Spirit he could say of the Word."²⁰ Hut articulated more clearly than Denck how saving knowledge of God led toward the Spirit. From examination of creaturely realities, Hut said, we can learn about the Father's omnipotence; we must, however, learn

¹⁶ Hubmaier, "Twelve Articles in Prayer Form," *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, trans. and ed. H. Wayne Pipkin and John Howard Yoder (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989), 238.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 238-39.

¹⁸ Although Anabaptist apocalyptic fervor reached its height with Hut and the early Dutch movements, apocalypticism was strong throughout early 16th-century Europe. See Walter Klaassen, "Apocalypticism," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* (1989), <http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Apocalypticism&oldid=143478>. Hut's insistence, however, on a specific eschatological calendar was rebuked by other leaders at the so-called "Martyrs' Synod" in 1527. As mentioned below, apocalypticism only occasionally resurfaces in later Anabaptist-Mennonite history.

¹⁹ Clarence Bauman, "Denck's Spirituality," *The Spiritual Legacy of Hans Denck: Interpretation and Translation of Key Texts*, ed. Clarence Bauman (New York: E. J. Brill, 1991), 23-29.

²⁰ Finger, *Contemporary Anabaptist Theology*, 427.

from the Son to detach from creatures—this involves embracing the inner and if necessary outer suffering of the cross—and only then we can know abundant life in the Spirit.²¹ It is, indeed “the power of the Spirit,” and not the “commandment of sacrifice,” that for Hut contained “the precept of God.”²² The church as the community of the Spirit was to practice mutual aid, looking forward to the coming age of the Spirit when private property would be abolished.²³ More generally, in Hut’s apocalyptic preaching “the Spirit leaped into the foreground with multiple revelations.”²⁴ Given Denck’s and Hut’s impact on the larger movement, Finger’s judgment is unsurprising: “early South German-Austrian Anabaptism was highly pneumatic.”²⁵

Elements of Swiss and South German/Austrian pneumatologies appear in the communitarian Anabaptism that developed in Moravia. Peter Riedemann’s “Confession of Faith,” which became foundational for Hutterite doctrine, opens with a commentary on the Apostles’ Creed, in which Riedemann affirms standard trinitarian and pneumatological claims, but with a distinctive Hutterite twist: the unity of Father, Son, and Spirit is said to be the basis of the community of goods legislated in Hutterite communities.²⁶ When he writes that the Spirit “now accomplishes everything in us,” driving out our sin; that only by the Spirit can we yield to Christ and

²¹ Ibid., 426. Rollin Armour, *Anabaptist Baptism: A Representative Study* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1966), 85.

²² Hans Hut, “A Beginning of a True Christian Life (The Mystery of Baptism),” in *Jörg Maler’s Kunstbuch: Writings of the Pilgram Marpeck Circle*, ed. John D. Rempel (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2010), 126. Hut has just cited Isaiah 1:11 and Psalm 50:9. In this text he also describes the process of suffering detachment in terms of the “affliction of the Spirit” (131) necessary before the “comfort of the Spirit” can be experienced (133, 134). Hut thinks all of this—the “gospel of all creatures” (his reading of Mark 16:15)—can be known by observing how all creatures fulfill their purpose through suffering (121-29).

²³ Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 238-39; James M. Stayer, “Swiss-South German Anabaptism,” in John D. Roth and James M. Stayer, eds., *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism, 1521-1700* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), 87-88. On connections between Hut and Joachim de Fiore’s apocalyptic trinitarian theology of history, see Werner Packull, *Mysticism and the Early South German-Austrian Anabaptist Movement, 1525-1531* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1977), 67.

²⁴ Finger, *Contemporary Anabaptist Theology*, 427.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Peter Riedemann, *Peter Riedemann’s Hutterite Confession of Faith*, trans. and ed. John J. Friesen (Waterloo, ON, and Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1999), 80.

become obedient; and that “there are no churches apart from those which the Holy Spirit gathers and builds,”²⁷ he therefore attributes to the Spirit the regeneration of believers and the formation of communities in which all things are held in common.

Though influenced by South German and Austrian Anabaptist theological currents, Pilgram Marpeck developed his own distinctive ministry and theology among the Swiss Brethren who had scattered across the southern Germanic lands.²⁸ He attempted to hold together a focus on spiritual renewal and visible, disciplined community practice. As Walter Klaassen put it, Marpeck was “the man who gave most attention to the relation of the invisible Spirit to the visible church.”²⁹ Marpeck asserted what might be called a philosophy of divine communication: God so ordered creation that matter was required to “preach” to matter, and the Spirit to human spirits.³⁰ Far from a rigid dualism, Marpeck’s view was that human transformation involved both physical and spiritual realities. Here Jesus’ model proved decisive. Just as Jesus’ humanity united the physical and the spiritual, so the visible church, as Christ’s ongoing physical presence on earth, enjoys the Spirit. Jesus in fact makes possible our relationship to the Spirit: “To conquer the powers,” Finger explains, “Marpeck’s Jesus walked with God as no human had, opening a relationship with the Holy Spirit in which others could participate.”³¹ Communal life in the Spirit took on the concrete shape of Jesus’ own life,³² and concrete church practices such as baptism and the Lord’s Supper formed the means of participation in life with the Spirit.

In contrast to the mainstream Swiss Brethren, who tended to downplay

²⁷ Ibid., 61, 67, 77.

²⁸ See John D. Roth, “Marpeck and the Later Swiss Brethren, 1540–1700,” in Roth and Stayer, *Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism*, 347–88.

²⁹ Walter Klaassen, ed., *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources* (Waterloo, ON, and Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1981), 72.

³⁰ See the selections of Marpeck’s writings in Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline*, 31–34.

³¹ Finger, *Contemporary Anabaptist Theology*, 377. Finger notes that Marpeck’s trinitarian language is inconsistent but argues for a functional interpretation giving Marpeck’s orthodoxy the benefit of the doubt (378–79, 381, 435).

³² Neal Blough, “The Holy Spirit and Discipleship in Pilgram Marpeck’s Theology,” in *Essays in Anabaptist Theology*, ed. H. Wayne Pipkin (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1994), 144.

the activity of the Spirit, Marpeck insisted on the centrality of the Spirit in the Christian life. The Christian life on his account is more than strict obedience to the biblical letter. However, in contrast to spiritualists and spiritualist-oriented South German and Austrian Anabaptists who thought that life in the Spirit made visible ecclesial practices irrelevant, Marpeck offered a sacramental ecclesiology in which the Spirit is met through formative practices.³³ Biblical obedience matters for him, but only as graciously enabled by the Spirit. In the end he offers a corrective to both the Swiss and South German/Austrian Anabaptist movements: the Swiss are correct to insist on the necessity of external observances, and the South German/Austrians to insist on the necessity of internal transformation; but each are required for human beings, composed of spirit and matter as we are. Salvation involves the coordination of the inner and outer, the spiritual and the material, the work of the Spirit and the believers' faithful discipleship.

These themes are evident in the 1554 "Confession of Faith" by Jörg Maler, a member of Marpeck's circle. In his confession, which follows the Apostles' Creed, Maler affirms the Spirit's role in effecting sanctification, comfort, assurance, and eternal life, and confesses that (water) baptism must occur "according to the Spirit of Christ," i.e., following the Spirit's transformational work.³⁴ The church in fact is "gathered by the Holy Spirit."³⁵ "The Holy Spirit alone," Maler proclaims, "has enabled me to know all this, who ignites my heart (with love) and enlightens me with the understanding and wisdom that such gifts come from above."³⁶ Here we see the outlines of a pneumatological epistemology, in which the ecclesially situated knower is enlightened by the Spirit to faith's content and source.

Melchior Hoffman's pneumatology was, like Hans Hut's, highly eschatological. According to Finger, Hoffman thought "the Spirit was exceptionally active in converting, sanctifying and directly conveying Scripture's hidden [apocalyptic] meanings, especially among the theologically untrained."³⁷ Hoffman's apocalyptic pneumatology took hold in

³³ See Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 358-59.

³⁴ See "A Confession of Faith by Jörg Maler," in Karl Koop, ed., *Confessions of Faith in the Anabaptist Tradition, 1527-1660* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2006), 40, 42.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Finger, *Contemporary Anabaptist Theology*, 529. Finger portrays Hoffman as a modalist

North Germany and the Netherlands and, after his arrest, fed the prophetic leadership of Jan Matthijs and Jan van Leiden at Münster. Post-Münster Dutch leaders such as David Joris and Jan Batenberg continued to claim charismatic power as the basis of their authority. Other Melchiorites, such as the community of prophets at Strasbourg, rejected these claims when Joris and Batenberg failed to root their teachings in Scripture. The memorable exchange between Joris and Barbara Rebstock highlights how, for Rebstock and the Strasbourg prophets, prophecy was only welcome insofar as it aligned with biblical teaching.³⁸

Our best window into what kind of Spirit-inspired prophecy the Strasbourg Melchiorites did accept is the collection of Ursula Jost's visions, published in 1530 by Hoffman himself.³⁹ In each of Ursula's seventy-eight visions the "glory of the Lord" appears and reveals highly symbolic images of judgement and redemption. According to Ursula's recent interpreter Lois Barrett, "Ursula's visions encouraged people to live lives of holiness. That path of holiness, according to these visions, was an alternative to the military action of the Peasants' War or to revenge against persecutors. That path was the gentle way, the nonviolent way, of participation with Christ in his sufferings."⁴⁰ This visionary "pacifist apocalypticism"⁴¹ was what counted as genuine, biblically-based prophecy for Hoffman and his Strasbourg associates.

with a strong sense of the economic interactions among the members of the trinity (438).

³⁸ See "The Strasbourg Disputation, 1538," in *The Anabaptist Writings of David Joris, 1535–1543*, trans. and ed. Gary K. Waite (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1994), 183–245 (198–99 for the exchange with Rebstock). The Strasbourg group argued that, while Scripture does not always agree with itself and so has to be interpreted according to the "rule of Christ," communal discerned rational accounts of true biblical teaching is possible. Joris argued instead that biblical contradictions, the fact that we don't have all of the writings of Jesus and the apostles, and the fact that some passages have (merely) historical or eschatological import suggest that the Spirit must show us the true "meaning" of Scripture apart from our reading or communal discernment. At best, for Joris, the text was an "aid" to understanding what the Spirit, and only the Spirit, reveals (220).

³⁹ Melchior Hoffman, "Prophetic Visions and Revelations," in Lois Yvonne Barrett, *Wreath of Glory: Ursula's Prophetic Visions in the Context of Reformation and Revolt in Southwestern Germany, 1524–1530* (Ph.D. Diss., Union Institute, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1992), 19–68.

⁴⁰ Barrett, *Wreath of Glory*, 276–77.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 277.

With the shadow of Münster looming large over their ministry, Menno Simons and Dirk Philips repudiated Melchiorite prophetic impulses and emphasized obedience to Christ's commands as read in the Bible. Even so, C. J. Dyck maintains that (all) "Anabaptist life was *centered on the Holy Spirit*, even in the case of stalwart biblicists like Dirk Philips and Menno Simons."⁴² As mentioned previously, Anabaptists in general affirmed the Spirit's priority in leading the sinner to repentance, faith, and (water) baptized participation in Christian community; Menno and Dirk were no exceptions here.⁴³ They also drew on the Holy Spirit to defend the distinctive Melchiorite "celestial flesh" Christology: the pure heavenly "seed" was "planted" in Mary by the Holy Spirit.⁴⁴ If Menno and Dirk did tend to highlight practical "following after" Jesus, this was not because they utterly neglected the Holy Spirit. Yet, as we will see, their approach did combine with Swiss biblicism to shape a Mennonite heritage in which the Spirit's role in the Christian life is often underplayed. Already in 1554 the Wismar Articles, which defined Dutch Anabaptist approaches to church discipline, ethics, and leadership, made no mention of the Spirit.⁴⁵

⁴² Cornelius J. Dyck, trans. and ed., *Spiritual Life in Anabaptism* (Scottsdale, PA, and Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1995), 24, emphasis in the original.

⁴³ E.g., Menno Simons, "Confession of the Triune God," in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, ed. J. C. Wenger (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1984): the Spirit "guides us into all truth; He justifies us. He cleanses, sanctifies, reconciles, comforts, reproves, cheers, and assures us. He testifies with our spirit that we are the children of God. This Spirit all they receive who believe on Christ.... [W]e believe the Holy Spirit to be the true, essential Holy Spirit of God, who adorns us with His heavenly and divine gifts, and through His influence, according to the good pleasure of the Father, frees us from sin, gives us boldness, and makes us cheerful, peaceful, pious, and holy" (496). See further J. C. Wenger, "The Anabaptist Perspective on the Holy Spirit," in *Encounter with the Holy Spirit*, ed. George R. Brunk II (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1972), 81-100.

⁴⁴ Menno Simons, "The Reply to Gellius Faber," in *Complete Writings*, 760, and "The Incarnation of Our Lord," in *Complete Writings*, 793-94, 809.

⁴⁵ See Koop, *Confessions of Faith*, 109-13. Compare in the same volume the "Kempen Confession" (1545), a unity document between followers of Menno and Swiss and South German Anabaptists who had migrated north into the Lower Rhine area. Although Spirit language is sparse here, too, strong statements stress the need to be "born of the Spirit" in order to participate in the Lord's Supper and church leadership (99-105). Christians wield only "the spiritual sword"—the "holy word of God and weapon of the faithful in the Holy Spirit."

Reviewing the 16th-century heritage, we see that the Swiss and Dutch Anabaptists flirted and more with highly charismatic and apocalyptic expressions of Christian faith before disasters led to a more biblically and Christologically restrained practice. The South German-Austrian strand was imbued with mystical and apocalyptic currents that tended toward spiritualism; the Hutterites and Marpeck offered different ways to hold visible, biblically regulated community together with life in the Spirit. All Anabaptist movements experienced significant tensions between those who thought the Spirit's revelations could exceed or replace Scripture, and those who saw Scripture as necessary to verify or replace prophecy. In the face of such tensions, the live pneumatological dimensions diminished in all strands as time passed.

If there was little explicit, technical pneumatological elaboration among 16th-century Anabaptists, it is evident that they sought by and large to uphold and indeed experience the biblical witness to the Holy Spirit. The crucial step of water baptism was only to be taken once the Spirit had baptized the believer internally. Spirit baptism was often viewed as initiating the difficult inner journey toward holiness that is every believer's path, and the life of (nonresistant) public witness that might entail the outer suffering of persecution—a reality for many early Anabaptists. As Spirit baptism led directly to water baptism and ecclesial belonging, the Spirit was intimately connected to the formation, discipline, and sustenance of Christian community. Core church practices such as baptism, the Lord's Supper, binding and loosing, economic sharing, and biblical interpretation, as well as the structure of the church itself, were viewed as the outworking of the present Spirit, and not simply as obedient responses to biblical command and example. Indeed, in early communities in all strands (Swiss, South German-Austrian, and Dutch-North German), church practice was imbued and guided by spiritual gifts such as prophecy and visions. All were directed toward the fullness of God's eschatological reign in the Spirit, which was eagerly anticipated. As C. Arnold Snyder summarizes, "Anabaptism of all kinds was based on a lively pneumatology, on the expectation that God's Spirit needed to work in the hearts of human beings in order to initiate and sustain the life of faith."⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 87.

II

**The Spirit in Dutch and North German Anabaptist-Mennonite
Confessions and Martyrologies, 1578–1660**

Most urban centers were closed to Anabaptists, and Anabaptist life took on a distinctly rural character throughout Europe. The label “the Quiet in the Land” (*Die Stillen im Lande*) is often used to describe pastoral, isolated Anabaptist communities from this period to the present.⁴⁷ The surviving communities increasingly emphasized biblical discipline rather than spiritual experience, as has been intimated. The Swiss held to the Schleithem Articles, with their warning about deviant spirituality, and a Swiss Brethren confession from Hesse in 1578 unsurprisingly contains minimal Spirit language.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, the Confession connects the Spirit and the church, and affirms that Spirit baptism precedes repentance and water baptism.⁴⁹ Traditional Swiss spiritual themes were at least upheld in word.

Divisions were rife among the Dutch and North German Anabaptists, who during the 16th century spread along the northern coastline to the Polish city of Danzig (Gdansk). Several Dutch confessions were written as attempts to forge unity, particularly in relation to disciplinary practice, which was judged by some as too harsh and by others as too lax. The 1591 “Concept of Cologne” was meant to address concerns of Swiss Anabaptists who had migrated into the area over strict northern use of the ban and Melchiorite Christology. The Concept opens with a prayer for strength to maintain agreement “through God’s peaceable Holy Spirit” and thereby links the Spirit to church unity.⁵⁰ Jesus, the Concept’s signers affirm, was born of Mary “through the power of the Almighty and the participation of the Holy

⁴⁷ For a standard historical survey, see Cornelius J. Dyck, *An Introduction to Mennonite History: A Popular History of the Anabaptists and the Mennonites*, 3d ed. (Scottsdale, PA, and Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1993).

⁴⁸ “Swiss Brethren Confession of Hesse” in Koop, *Confessions of Faith*, 45-92. This Confession begins with several articles elaborating on the Apostles’ Creed, and contains a very brief article on the Holy Spirit. As the Confession was written to assure Lutheran authorities of its authors’ harmlessness, spiritual themes were possibly underplayed.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 68, 72, 73. The Swiss Brethren leader Thomas von Imbroich’s 1560 “Confession” contains a more transparent and developed pneumatology. See Part III below.

⁵⁰ Koop, *Confessions of Faith*, 119.

Spirit,” who is “the power of God . . . sent as a consolation to the believers.”⁵¹ Baptism “by one Spirit” inducts the believer into a community whose unity is sustained, not by harsh discipline “but rather by the anointing of the Holy Spirit demonstrating love toward those who are being punished, in order that they might improve and be corrected.”⁵²

The Concept of Cologne held briefly as an accord among the aforementioned Swiss group and two groups of northern Anabaptists. However, struggles over church discipline persisted and unity was broken in 1613. The less rigorous Dutch Waterlanders were moving in spiritualist directions, as evident from their 1610 concord with John Smyth’s English Baptist community in Amsterdam, the “Short Confession of Faith and the Essential Elements of Christian Doctrine.”⁵³ The document is richly pneumatological, as it ties the Spirit to justification, regeneration, good works, church leadership, and baptism and the Supper, these last understood as external enactments of the inner work of the Spirit.⁵⁴ Perhaps most significantly, the Short Confession insists that genuine knowledge of Jesus Christ comes only through the Spirit by prayer and enables believers to live like Jesus:

We must continue in fervent prayer to God, so that his holy presence may take place within us according to the Spirit, and a knowledge of [Jesus] be given to us, revealed through his infinite patience and love. All this must be sought to the end that his image and likeness may be born within us, that he himself may be revealed in us, living, walking, teaching, and preaching; that the miracles he performed in the flesh may be worked in us according to the Spirit, healing us of the sickness of the soul, deafness, blindness, leprosy, uncleanness, sin and death.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Ibid., 119-20.

⁵² Ibid., 20.

⁵³ Ibid., 135-58. On connections between English Baptists and Dutch Anabaptists, see Dyck, *Mennonite History*, 117-19. An earlier Waterlander confession of 1577 contains few references to the Spirit but intriguingly employs technical trinitarian vocabulary to posit the substantial unity of Father, Son, and Spirit (126-27).

⁵⁴ Ibid., 147-52.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 147.

The Waterlanders' spiritual inclinations led some to emphasize inner experience over outer practice, and a balance was sought in the 1626 "Thirteen Articles." The Articles identify the two-fold Word of God as Jesus and the Bible, and although inner renewal by the Spirit is necessary for salvation, it was the ascended Jesus who sent the Spirit and it is Scripture that moves us to spiritual renewal.⁵⁶ "In this written Word of God," the Waterlanders confessed, "are also revealed to us the saving works, which must come about in us through the power and working of the Holy Spirit."⁵⁷

In spite of their separation from the Waterlanders, the conservative Dutch groups retained a lively sense of the Spirit's work at least for a time. The Old Frisian Mennonites, hailing from Menno's own northern Dutch region, composed the "Thirty-Three Articles" in 1617 to combat Waterlander influence and protect Menno and Dirk's legacy. Several of these Articles mention the Spirit, described as "enlighten[ing] the hearts of people and mak[ing] them fiery, and establish[ing] them and lead[ing] them in all truth."⁵⁸ The Spirit "is given by God to all who are obedient to him" and "whoever does not have this Spirit is not of God."⁵⁹ True Christians submit themselves fully "to the obedience of Christ . . . , according to the Spirit (as expressed in the Holy Scriptures) . . . , and to regulate their whole faith and walk according to it."⁶⁰ Faith and the new birth come through the Spirit, and the church is the pure and separated body of those gathered by the Spirit.⁶¹ Particular marks of this inspired church include holiness, sincere leadership, humility, sharing of goods with those in need, and enemy love.⁶² The Spirit guides church practices such as the selection of ministers, baptism, the Supper, good works, and marriage.⁶³ The article on baptism is worded strongly: "Without this inward baptism, with the Holy Spirit and fire . . . , the visible baptism of water . . . is vain and useless."⁶⁴

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 159, 161.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 192-93, 196-97, 213, 215.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 216-20.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 224, 228, 231-32, 235, 238.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 228.

A later conservative agreement among Frisian, Flemish, and Swiss and South German Anabaptists, the “Jan Cents Confession” of 1630, likewise affirmed that the external church that preaches, baptizes, celebrates the Lord’s Supper, washes feet, performs “works of love,” marries and disciplines believers, and avoids government office and civil oaths is “inwardly in the Spirit, one true community . . . here and also in heaven with God and all the Lord’s saints,” as will be revealed at the eschaton.⁶⁵

The most influential of the conservative confessions was the “Dordrecht Confession” of 1632. Dordrecht was intended to bring together different groups of Flemish Anabaptists but eventually became the basis of union with the Frisians (1639).⁶⁶ In 1766 it was used again for union among diverse Dutch Mennonite groups; Zonist pastor Cornelius Ris combined it with other Dutch Mennonite confessions to form the “Mennonite Articles of Faith,” also known as the “Ris Confession.”⁶⁷ The latter became the unofficial confession of the General Conference Mennonite Church in the 19th century. The Swiss Brethren adopted Dordrecht in 1660, and took it to North America during their migrations there from the late 17th century to the early 19th century. Among Swiss- and South German/Austrian-descended Mennonites in North America, it became the doctrinal basis of the (Old) Mennonite Church and is still affirmed by Conservative Mennonite conferences and the Amish. There is very little Spirit language in the Confession and, aside from a standard trinitarian statement in the article on God, the Spirit is only mentioned in the articles on the church (“the household of God in the

⁶⁵ Ibid., 276-81. “Works of love” include giving alms, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and sharing goods with the needy (277-78). There are possible echoes of Marpeck’s teaching on the necessity of coordinating the material and spiritual.

⁶⁶ The Frisians and Flemish had long quarreled over perceived slights in church process in the mid-16th century. Flemish Anabaptists, arriving in the Netherlands after heavy persecution in their homeland, felt that a secretive alliance among local Frisian congregations excluded them. As the controversy expanded, distinctive party lines emerged even though regional origin ceased to be an indicator of party belonging.

⁶⁷ See Howard John Loewen, *One Lord, One Church, One Hope, and One God: Mennonite Confessions of Faith in North America: An Introduction* (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1985), 28, 87-109; and [http://anabaptistwiki.org/mediawiki/index.php?title=Mennonite_Articles_of_Faith_by_Cornelis_Ris_\(1766\)](http://anabaptistwiki.org/mediawiki/index.php?title=Mennonite_Articles_of_Faith_by_Cornelis_Ris_(1766)). The Zonists argued against the Lamist congregations that the older confessions were still authoritative and, more generally, that doctrine could not be compromised for life in the Spirit.

Spirit”) and on the selection of church leaders.⁶⁸

Ris’s attempt to synthesize several Dutch confessions led to a far more pneumatological tract than the Dordrecht Confession. For example, Ris closely coordinates Christ’s work as prophet, priest, and king with the Spirit (articles 14-16); insists on the priority of the Spirit in faith, salvation, the sacraments, and good works (articles 18, 20-21, 25–26); and depicts eternal life as continual refreshment “under the unbroken influence of the Spirit of glory” (article 35). Ris intriguingly cautions against speculation about the eternal fate of people in lands where the gospel has not been preached; although we can trust that God is active there, we do not know precisely what the Spirit is doing (article 17). General Conference Mennonites long shared Ris’s vision of pan-confessional Mennonite unity and his missional emphasis. Their participation in revival movements in the 19th and mid-20th centuries suggests, perhaps, that they shared his enthusiasm for the Spirit too.⁶⁹

Confessions were not the only means 17th- and 18th-century Dutch leaders employed to assert their understandings of the relationship between Word and Spirit.⁷⁰ The popular status of martyr stories made them ideal catechetical and devotional materials. Whereas Waterlander leaders Hans de Ries and Jan Philipsz Schabaelje produced martyrologies that emphasized only the testimony of the martyrs, Old Frisians such as Pieter Jansz Twisck included confessions of faith and creeds in their martyr books. For the Waterlanders, “practice stands above theology” and the martyrs’ “lives were

⁶⁸ Ibid., 294, 299, 300.

⁶⁹ See Beulah Stauffer Hostetler, *American Mennonites and Protestant Movements: A Community Paradigm* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1987), chapters 3 and 4. As I do not discuss the General Conference in detail again, I note that the one comprehensive theological textbook written by a GC author, Edmund G. Kaufman’s *Basic Christian Convictions* (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 1972), does not interact with historical Anabaptist-Mennonite views. It does have a section on the Holy Spirit, in which the following claim is made: “the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is a protection of every man’s right and obligation to look beyond tradition” (165). The section includes an overview and comparison of Old and New Testament passages on the Spirit, a summary of the Spirit’s work (in the world, church, and individual; to bring harmony and reconciliation, disturbance and conviction, and humility and strength); and spiritual discernment.

⁷⁰ For what follows see Keith L. Sprunger, “Dutch Anabaptists and the Telling of Martyr Stories,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 80, no. 2 (2006): 149-82.

their theology.⁷¹ For the Old Frisians and other conservative groups, martyr testimony was only valid insofar as it resonated with agreed upon, rationally formulated, biblically-based theological claims.

Thieleman Jans van Braght, himself a leader in the conservative Flemish Anabaptist group, attempted a compromise. His renowned *Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror of Defenseless Christians*, first published in 1660, adopted a spiritualist introduction written by Schabaelje for one of the Waterlander martyrologies,⁷² and included the Apostles' Creed and various confessions, including the Jan Cents and Dordrecht confessions analyzed above.⁷³ The *Martyrs Mirror*, in short, was an attempt to hold together Word and Spirit, to claim both as operative in the testimony of the martyrs and the living church.

III

Russian and Swiss Mennonites, Pietism, and Revivalism

If the pneumatological reticence of Dordrecht suggests that Mennonites on the whole had little interest in the Spirit after the mid-17th century, evidence of Mennonite contact with Pietists may suggest otherwise. From the mid-17th century on, Mennonites throughout Europe were challenged by encounters with Pietists, whose biblicism and emphasis on spiritual rebirth, sanctification, and eschatological community resonated deeply with historic Anabaptist themes.⁷⁴ Although Harold Bender's friend Robert Friedmann saw Pietism as weakening the Anabaptist character of Mennonite congregations,⁷⁵ more recent scholarship suggests that Pietism's effects were complex.⁷⁶ Some leaders found in Pietism resources to renew

⁷¹ Ibid., 171.

⁷² Van Braght, *Bloody Theater*, 355-62. Van Braght does not credit Schabaelje. See Sprunger, "Dutch Anabaptists," 173, note 107.

⁷³ Van Braght, *Bloody Theater*, 27-44.

⁷⁴ John D. Roth, "Pietism and the Anabaptist Soul," in *The Dilemma of Anabaptist Piety: Strengthening or Straining the Bonds of Community?*, ed. Stephen L. Longenecker (Bridgewater, VA: Forum for Religious Studies, 1997), 18.

⁷⁵ See Robert Friedmann, *Mennonite Piety through the Centuries: Its Genius and Its Literature* (Goshen, IN: Mennonite Historical Society, 1949).

⁷⁶ E.g., John D. Roth, "Context, Conflict, and Community: South German Mennonites at the Threshold of Modernity, 1750-1850," in *Anabaptists and Postmodernity*, eds. Susan Biesecker-

their Mennonite congregational life.⁷⁷ Similarly, Revivalist techniques such as tent meetings and Sunday Schools were widely adopted by 19th-century North American Mennonites, just as their 20th-century descendants have explored cell groups and “contemporary Christian worship,” practices often associated with Pentecostal-charismatic movements.

If there is evidence that contact with Pietism and its successors has often renewed Mennonite life, it is also clear that such contact has occasioned divisions among Mennonites. Perhaps the most well-known outcome of such a division is the Mennonite Brethren, who emerged from among the Dutch Mennonite colonies in South Russia.⁷⁸ Moravian Pietism’s influence was felt especially in the village of Gnadenfeld (now in southeast Ukraine), where traveling Pietist preacher Eduard Wüst stirred up religious sentiments, led “mission festivals” to inspire missionary activity, and set up conventicles for Bible study and prayer. The eventual split from mainstream Mennonites in 1860 involved acrimony over charismatic experiences, as the newly-constituted Mennonite Brethren confirmed the Mennonites’ fears that they thought the Spirit’s gifts were still available to the church. Individual members of the Mennonite Brethren moreover claimed that the Spirit was leading them into mission, and immediately began to evangelize not only their fellow German colonists but also their Russian-speaking neighbors—thereby endangering their colonial privileges.

As with other new charismatic movements in Anabaptist-Mennonite history, the early Mennonite Brethren experienced division over charismatic phenomena. Some of Wüst’s followers formed the Joyful Movement, which

Mast and Gerald Biesecker-Mast (Telford, PA: Pandora Press, 2000), 120-44; Roth, “Pietism and the Anabaptist Soul,” 17-34.

⁷⁷ For example, some scholars trace the humility spirituality of mid-19th century American Mennonites and Amish to Pietist influence. This spirituality focused on visible expressions of humility in, e.g., clothing, home décor, and nonresistance. See Theron F. Schlabach, “Humility,” *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* (1989), <http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Humility>.

⁷⁸ For this narrative I follow Dyck, *Mennonite History*, 179, 277, and especially Johannes Reimer, “The Spirit Says Go!: Mission and Early Charismatic Expressions among Russian Mennonite Brethren,” *Anabaptist Witness* 4, no. 1 (April 2017): 31-44. Victor G. Doerksen argues that Wüst and the genesis of the Mennonite Brethren should be associated more with later Revivalism. See Doerksen, “Pietism, Revivalism, and the Early Mennonite Brethren” in *Dilemma of Anabaptist Piety*, 69-84.

included enthusiastic spiritual expression and claims of Spirit-enabled moral perfection and to Spirit-given authority. After the Joyful gained a reputation for emotional excess, sexual immorality, and authoritarianism, Mennonite Brethren leaders passed the “June Protocol” in 1865 to address the concerns. Charismatic phenomena were discouraged and charismatic authority rejected, and over time local mission work ceased. According to historian Johannes Reimer, the June Protocol led to ongoing antagonism between European Mennonite Brethren and charismatic movements, leading many to seek the Spirit in Pentecostal and other churches.⁷⁹

While it is true that Anabaptist groups with historic connections to Pietism have sometimes lost their Anabaptist convictions, others attempt to hold them together.⁸⁰ As John D. Roth argues, Anabaptism and Pietism (and Revivalism and Pentecostalism) are complex phenomena⁸¹; various possibilities may emerge from their mixture. Some of the mixtures are evident in 18th-century Mennonite catechetical and devotional literatures.

The Swiss Brethren martyrology *Golden Apples in Silver Bowls*, first published in 1702, was an attempt to mediate between Pietist enthusiasm and the new Amish rigor.⁸² Various Pietist themes were incorporated, but arguably to express, not downplay, “traditional Swiss Brethren views of the Spirit of God.”⁸³ For example, the version of the Dordrecht Confession included in *Golden Apples* contains a new article on the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is affirmed to be one with the Father and Son as “the only true God,” and specifically as the one “through which the Father and Son work.”⁸⁴ Lines about the Spirit were also added to the articles on the church and the Lord’s Supper: it is “through the Holy Spirit” that Christians “have their fellowship”

⁷⁹ Reimer, “The Spirit Says Go!,” 42-44. In North America some Mennonite Brethren are assimilated to evangelical currents, as perhaps symbolized by the 2014 decision of the US denomination to amend their “Confession of Faith” to permit military service. See Article 13, “Love, Peacemaking and Reconciliation,” <http://www.usmb.org/menus/article-13.html>.

⁸⁰ Compare doctrinal statements, for instance, from the Brethren in Christ and the Missionary Church with the Church of Brethren.

⁸¹ Roth, “Pietism and the Anabaptist Soul.”

⁸² Leonard Gross, “Swiss Anabaptist Self-Understanding from the Perspective of 1702,” in *Golden Apples in Silver Bowls: The Rediscovery of Redeeming Love*, trans. Elizabeth Bender and ed. Leonard Gross (Lancaster, PA: Lancaster Historical Society, 1999), 4.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 246. See 318, n174 on the polemical context of this addition.

with God, Christ, the angels, and other believers; and the Supper “connects us to peace, love, unity of the Spirit, and true Christian communion among one another.”⁸⁵

Golden Apples also contains the “Confession and Letters” of Thomas von Imbroich, a mid-16th-century Swiss Brethren leader in Cologne. Von Imbroich’s “Confession,” first published around 1560, begins with a defense of two-fold baptism, the internal baptism of the Spirit and the external one in water; the external “witnesses” to the internal, and baptism as such involves repentance and conformity to Christ’s path of suffering and resurrection.⁸⁶ As he puts it later, “everyone may know whether he is born of the Spirit . . . if he has the characteristics of the Spirit.”⁸⁷ For von Imbroich there is the strongest possible correlation between the “experience” of the Spirit and a transformed life.

In a fascinating conclusion to the “Confession,” the original editor of *Golden Apples* invites readers to consider von Imbroich’s words in light of the different biblical passages cited therein. However, they must do this “with the eyes of the Spirit, in all fear and devotion, not understanding them [the biblical passages] simply according to the bare letter, but judging them according to the mind of Christ and the interpretation of the Spirit (Jn. 7; 2 Cor. 3).” This line and those that follow it convey a rich pneumatological hermeneutic consistent with earlier Anabaptist attempts to hold together Word and Spirit. Considering also the original editor’s introduction—which urges readers in light of the coming apocalypse to strengthen their faith by taking up the cross and being filled with the Spirit⁸⁸—we may judge that the interaction between Anabaptists and Pietists represented by *Golden Apples* renewed, rather than vitiated, Anabaptist-Mennonite pneumatology.

The achievement of *Golden Apples* was overshadowed, however, by another, far more popular Anabaptist devotional book: *Die Ernsthafte Christenpflicht*, the first extant edition of which was published in 1708, just a few years after *Golden Apples*.⁸⁹ According to Leonard Gross, the popularity

⁸⁵ Ibid., 248, 251.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 68-69.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 77.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 33-34.

⁸⁹ David Luthy, “A History of *Die Ernsthafte Christenpflicht*,” *Family Life* (February 1981): 19.

of the *Christenpflicht* among Swiss Mennonites is due to both to its format (it is a collection of prayers) and its content: the prayers supposedly show evidence of assimilation to Pietism's individualistic spirituality.⁹⁰ Perhaps most startling to students of early Anabaptist history is the inclusion in this collection of several prayers written by Caspar Schwenkfeld, the arch-spiritualist nemesis of Pilgram Marpeck and other early Anabaptists who insisted on the necessity of "external" community and discipleship practices.⁹¹

Nevertheless, the prayers by Schwenkfeld included in the *Christenpflicht* convey the familiar Anabaptist teaching that enlightenment by the Spirit leads to a disciplined moral life and Christian unity. For instance, the "Prayer to the Holy Spirit for Help, Comfort, and Support" requests the Spirit to "purify" and "reign" over believers so that "we may walk modestly, disciplined, and righteously in this world."⁹² Another prayer asks that God would "gather his people in the Spirit" and "that we through the Spirit may reach the goal of being one heart, one soul, one in spirit, one mind, and become wholly and truly one in Christ Jesus."⁹³ Clearly the editor of the *Christenpflicht* had not completely given up on traditional Anabaptist pneumatological themes.

Swiss Anabaptists also engaged Pietist currents in North America. Although the Dordrecht Confession—without the pneumatological additions of *Golden Apples*—remained the primary confession of the largely Swiss-descendent (Old) Mennonite Church until 1963, other resources were developed and disseminated in order to connect Mennonites to the surrounding Spirit-centered movements. Strong Pietist and Revivalist movements were centered in colonial Ephrata, Pennsylvania, where Mennonite leader Henry Funk had printed the first German-language edition of *The Martyrs Mirror* in 1748. In Ephrata and elsewhere he also printed copies of the *Ausbund*, *Golden Apples*, and the *Christenpflicht*, as well as his own writings. In the face of competing spiritual options, Funk's

⁹⁰ Leonard Gross, trans. and ed., *Prayers for Earnest Christians* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1997), 6-7.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 80-102. See Luthy, "A History of *Die Ernsthafte Christenpflicht*," 22, on the authorship of the prayers. Other prayers were written by the Dutch Mennonite bishop Leenaert Clock and Lutheran Pietist theologian Johann Arndt.

⁹² Gross, *Prayers for Earnest Christians*, 98.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 101, 102.

publishing efforts intended to make a case for a distinctively Anabaptist theology of life in the Spirit.⁹⁴ The nature of this case becomes especially clear in his book, *A Mirror of Baptism*, which sets forth a typical Anabaptist doctrine of the three-fold baptism in the Spirit, water, and blood.⁹⁵ For Funk, as for many earlier Anabaptists, the Spirit (and only the Spirit) moves a person to repentance, thereby opening them to baptism by the Spirit; this baptism leads the new believer to water baptism, which incorporates them into Christ's body, the church, and readies them for the life of discipleship that will likely include Christ-like suffering.

A more critical interaction with Pietism is visible in Christian Burkholder's addresses, first published in 1804 at Ephrata and after 1839 as an appendix to 17th-century Hamburg-Altona pastor Gerhard Roosen's popular catechism, *Conversation on Saving Faith*.⁹⁶ In keeping with the pneumatological minimalism of Roosen's work,⁹⁷ Burkholder directly disputes the necessity of an "experience" of new birth: God may or may not lead someone to have an emotional experience of the Spirit.⁹⁸ Personal spiritual experiences make no contribution to the community, and talking about them suggests a lack of humility. What really matters is that believers yield themselves without resistance to God, who can be trusted to work the new birth within us—whether they "feel" it or not. While Burkholder does uphold a pneumatological hermeneutic,⁹⁹ overall his addresses downplay the

⁹⁴ On Funk, see Friedmann, *Mennonite Piety*, 231-34; Hostetler, *American Mennonites and Protestant Movements*, 59-61; and John C. Wenger, "Funck, Heinrich (d. 1760)," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* (1956), [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Funck,_Heinrich_\(d._1760\)](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Funck,_Heinrich_(d._1760)).

⁹⁵ Henry Funk, *A Mirror of Baptism: With the Spirit, with Water, and with Blood in Three Parts, From the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament*, trans. Joseph Funk and Sons [1851] (Moundridge, KS: Gospel Publishers, 2000), German original 1744. This book deserves more attention than I can give it here, not least for its heavily typological and narrative approach to Scripture.

⁹⁶ Gerhard Roosen et al., *Christian Spiritual Conversation on Saving Faith for the Young: In Questions and Answers* (Lancaster, PA: John Baer and Sons, 1857), German original 1702.

⁹⁷ Roosen affirms the oneness of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (*ibid.*, 45, 47-48), and discusses the Spirit in relation to salvation (64) and faithful discipleship (89). But little mention is made of the Spirit elsewhere, including in sections on repentance and conversion, baptism, and the Lord's Supper.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 213-16.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 187: God speaks through Scripture to lead its readers to repentance and (then)

Pietist emphasis on spiritual experience.

In summary, both Russian and Swiss Mennonites encountered Pietist and Revivalist currents with at least some openness to the work the Spirit might be doing in them. Some Mennonite leaders were hesitant about potential (and real) spiritual excesses, and this hesitance could (and did) lead to divisions. But far from supporting the thesis that Mennonites have typically rejected Spirit-centered theology and practice for a “pure” biblicism, this study suggests that at least some Mennonites have integrated pneumatological themes into a discipleship-oriented framework. Attending to the work of the Spirit, for these Mennonites, is not a distraction from discipleship but is rather the very beginning of it and that without which it cannot endure. Particularly notable in this review is the recurrence of a pneumatological hermeneutic, in which Spirit-given insight is said to be necessary for adequate biblical interpretation.

IV

(Old) Mennonites and Fundamentalism

Another influential movement encountered by Mennonites is fundamentalism. If Pietism caused Mennonites to reconsider the experiential dimensions of their faith, fundamentalism caused them to seek greater doctrinal precision. The (Old) Mennonite Church was particularly roiled by the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy in the early 20th century, and in 1921 it adopted the “Christian Fundamentals: Articles of Faith.”¹⁰⁰ This brief confession was intended to reinforce, not replace, Dordrecht. Article seven on the Holy Spirit makes standard Christian pneumatological claims, and article nine on the church endorses the standard Anabaptist ecclesiological claim that the church consists of those who have “been born again and were baptized by one Spirit into one body.”

A few years earlier, Mennonite Church (hereafter MC) leader Daniel Kauffman had edited *Bible Doctrine* (1914), which took a fundamentalist approach to general Christian doctrines and distinctive Mennonite

comfort, but this can happen by the Spirit alone for those who cannot read or understand Scripture, “for the Spirit of God agrees with these [biblical] doctrines.”

¹⁰⁰ For the text, see Loewen, *One Lord*, 71-72.

“ordinances” (e.g., baptism, footwashing, head coverings) and “duties and restrictions” (e.g., nonconformity and nonresistance). This book exercised a powerful influence in the MC for decades to come. A section on the Holy Spirit in the lead chapter on God, written by J. S. Hartzler, affirms that the Spirit is one of the divine triune persons and that Christians should worship the Spirit.¹⁰¹ Later on, water baptism is said to be a “symbol” of Spirit baptism, and the purportedly biblical order of Spirit baptism followed by water baptism is insisted upon (one might think in response to Pentecostal doctrine, given the date).¹⁰² The Spirit is also connected to sanctification, Christian worship, mission, nonconformity, and purity of speech.¹⁰³

Whereas the authors of *Bible Doctrine* typically amassed proof texts to make their arguments, MC theologian J. C. Wenger offered a more creative and moderate fundamentalism in his *Introduction to Theology* from 1954. Like his Goshen College colleague Harold Bender, Wenger sought to resource his church with historical Anabaptist thought, and his book contains lengthy quotes from Menno, Dirk, and other early leaders. Although the text is not deeply pneumatological, a chapter on “God as Sanctifier” provides an overview of the doctrine of the Spirit and discusses the universal call to salvation, election, conversion, regeneration, justification, union with Christ, assurance, “a successful Christian life,” and the Christian relation to government.¹⁰⁴ Typical Anabaptist-Mennonite themes include the affirmation of the priority of the Spirit’s work in conversion (272-73) and the inclusion of nonresistance, nonconformity, and separation in the description of the Christian life (313-19). Although *Introduction to Theology* is no longer influential in many of the churches that belonged to the MC, like *Bible Doctrine* it continues to command respect from more conservative Mennonites, who reprint both works.

Wenger was also the primary drafter of the “Mennonite Confession

¹⁰¹ J. S. Hartzler, “God,” in *Bible Doctrine: A Treatise on the Great Doctrines of the Bible pertaining to God, Angels, Satan, the Church, and the Salvation, Duties and Destiny of Man*, ed. Daniel Kauffman (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1914), 40-42. Kauffman also compiled and largely wrote a revision of this text in 1928.

¹⁰² A. D. Wenger, “Baptism,” in *Bible Doctrine*, 366-67, 370-71.

¹⁰³ Various authors in *Bible Doctrine*, 263, 492, 503, 531, 621.

¹⁰⁴ John Christian Wenger, *Introduction to Theology* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1954), 259-325.

of Faith” adopted by the Mennonite Church in 1963.¹⁰⁵ This Confession was intended as another restatement of the Dordrecht Confession, yet it goes beyond Dordrecht by elaborating how the Spirit is intrinsic to the nature and function of the church, Christian mission, and discipleship and nonconformity. Article seven on “The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life” depicts in some detail how “Christ . . . does his work through the Holy Spirit.” The article on “Christian Baptism” states in familiar terms that water baptism “symbolizes the baptism of the Holy Spirit.” From a pneumatological perspective, this document represents an advance in the Dordrecht confessional tradition. The encounter between Mennonites and fundamentalism, therefore, may have led to some fairly shallow and schematic pneumatological statements, but it also gave rise to at least one important development in the history of Anabaptist-Mennonite pneumatology.

Conclusion

This story of historical Anabaptist-Mennonite pneumatology has taken many twists and turns, and a concise summary is required to make sense of it. If Anabaptism was born as a dynamic Spirit-oriented movement—with strongly pneumatological understandings of mission, conversion, the nature of the church and the life of discipleship, and eschatology—perceptions of spiritual excess led to reactions that minimized the experience and manifestations of the Spirit. Against common narratives that suggest that the reactionary movements simply won out, we find developments of all of the early pneumatological themes in the Swiss-South German and Dutch-Russian Mennonite traditions. Confessions, catechetical materials, and devotional books (including martyrologies) were occasions for testing and debating differing conceptions of the relationship between the Spirit and the Word, and for articulating the extent to which the Spirit is behind the day-to-day life of the church. Contact with Pietist and Revival movements, and even with fundamentalism, could undermine Anabaptist-Mennonite emphases on communal discipleship, but those movements could also provide new impetus for spiritual renewal in distinctly Anabaptist-Mennonite terms.

¹⁰⁵ For the text of this confession, see Loewen, *One Lord*, 73-77, and [http://anabaptist-wiki.org/mediawiki/index.php?title=Mennonite_Confession_of_Faith\(Mennonite_Church,_1963\)#Background_to_the_Confession](http://anabaptist-wiki.org/mediawiki/index.php?title=Mennonite_Confession_of_Faith(Mennonite_Church,_1963)#Background_to_the_Confession).

Minimizing reactions did continue through this period, and exercised major influence through sources such as the Dordrecht Confession, the Mennonite Brethren's June Protocol, Christian Burkholder's addresses, or "The Christian Fundamentals" endorsed by the (Old) Mennonite Church. But they by no means had the last or only word.

From this story might be distilled three major pneumatological themes that have characterized Anabaptist-Mennonite history up to 1963. The first of these themes concerns the relationship between the Spirit and the Christian life, which is conceived of in distinctively communal terms. The Christian life is initiated and empowered by the Spirit and takes shape in and as disciplined community. The Spirit convicts believers of sin and leads them to repentance. This initial experience has generally been interpreted as "baptism of the Spirit." Water baptism follows Spirit baptism, and then participation in the common life of the church. Ecclesial belonging involves joining in mutual discerning discipline, a process that is directed by the Spirit to conform believers to Christ, who himself was accompanied by the Spirit. The inspired, disciplined community unites in the Supper and in service (sometimes ritualized in footwashing); shares goods within (and sometimes without) the community; and witnesses to its faith by its words, deeds, and testimony of nonconformity (including nonresistance). The disciplined community of the Spirit is prepared to suffer, and finds the Spirit present amidst suffering for comfort and empowerment.

The second theme is a tension throughout Anabaptist-Mennonite history between Word and Spirit. Word (Jesus, Scripture) has been elevated above the Spirit some of the time, but there has also been a persistent witness to the reality of the Spirit's work. Prophecy, visions, and other charismatic experiences have at times been important in the Anabaptist-Mennonite heritage. Many Anabaptist-Mennonites have affirmed a pneumatological hermeneutic, in which the Spirit is required to direct believers to correct biblical interpretation. Significant strands within the tradition have criticized biblicist tendencies and the often harsh disciplinary practices that follow them. Some Anabaptist-Mennonites have sought to deepen their experience of the Spirit through contact with other pneumatic movements, and although this contact has sometimes led to division and weakened their identity, it has also occasioned significant spiritual renewal within Anabaptist-Mennonite

circles. This “relational” dimension is constitutive of, not incidental to, historical Anabaptist-Mennonite pneumatology.

The third theme is perhaps a minor one, but must be noted given its prominence at the tradition’s beginning. The connection between Spirit and eschatological consummation was central for early Anabaptists, although this theme has only reappeared occasionally in later Anabaptist-Mennonite history (e.g., in the Jan Cents Confession and the original editor’s preface to *Golden Apples*). The theme points to the conviction that what the Spirit is doing in the present community is intrinsically connected to what the Spirit is doing to bring God’s ultimate plans for creation to fulfillment. It could be seen therefore as complimentary to the more prevalent themes of pneumatological ecclesiology and the attempts to hold Jesus-centered, Scripture-rooted discipleship together with life in the Spirit.

I have concluded the story in 1963 because, as I mentioned at the outset, the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century feature major shifts that require separate investigation. These shifts include especially the increasingly intense interactions between Mennonites and Pentecostal and charismatic movements, particularly as former mission churches in Latin America, Africa, and Asia have developed their own identities in part through contact with such movements.¹⁰⁶ The shifts also involve the growth of “neo-Anabaptism,” a movement largely inspired by Bender’s “Anabaptist Vision” and related attempts to claim 16th-century Anabaptism as a directly relevant model for the present-day church. Neo-Anabaptism has proved appealing to many who had no historical or ethnic ties to European Mennonites.¹⁰⁷ While some neo-Anabaptists find their

¹⁰⁶ In addition to resources mentioned in the introduction, see, for instance, Jaime Adrián Prieto Valladares, “Pentecostal Experiences in the Anabaptist Churches of Latin America (1971–1999),” *Mission Focus* 10 (2002): 71–85. Other important late 20th-century resources include George R. Brunk II, ed., *Encounter with the Holy Spirit*, (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1972), and Cornelius J. Dyck, ed., *The Witness of the Holy Spirit: Proceedings of the Eighth Mennonite World Conference, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, July 23–30, 1967* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite World Conference, 1967). See also John A. Lapp and C. Arnold Snyder, eds., *Global Mennonite History Series*, 5 vols. (Kitchener, ON: Pandora 2003–2012).

¹⁰⁷ The title of Stuart Murray’s book *The Naked Anabaptist* sums up for many the promise and peril of “neo-Anabaptism”: on the one hand its welcome accessibility, and on the other hand the possibility that it becomes accessible only by oversimplifying the difficult, complex historical and cultural character of Anabaptism. Stuart Murray, *The Naked Anabaptist: The*

appropriated faith compatible with charismatic piety, others consider the neo-Anabaptist emphasis on communal ethics to be a welcome alternative to the charismatic focus on personal spiritual experience.¹⁰⁸

The story told above suggests that charismatically inclined Anabaptist-Mennonites today have a deep pneumatological tradition to draw from as they seek to make sense of the relationship between contemporary charismatic movements and historic Anabaptism. If the pneumatological narrative is not simply continuous, neither is it simply one of decline. Anabaptist-Mennonites engaging the Spirit today do so in the good company of Anabaptist-Mennonites from centuries past—and not just from the 16th century. It is certain that the current movements have much to teach us about the Spirit; it is likely that the past may help orient us as we move forward together. As for those Anabaptist-Mennonites who do not emphasize the Spirit—they can indeed claim some significant grounding in the tradition, but they are arguably missing out on an extremely vital component of their own history.¹⁰⁹

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Bare Essentials of a Radical Faith (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2011).

¹⁰⁸ I speak from personal experience here, having come to the Mennonite church through neo-Anabaptist currents swirling around Fuller Theological Seminary in the mid-2000s. For a Pentecostal attempt to relate neo-Anabaptist and charismatic theologies, see Jody B. Fleming, “Holistic Pneumatology in Mission: Anabaptism and the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement,” *Anabaptist Witness* 4, no. 1 (April 2016): 11-30.

¹⁰⁹ This article originated as a paper given at the Mennonite Church USA-Church of God (Cleveland) ecumenical dialogue, held at Lee University in Cleveland, Tennessee, in October 2016. I am grateful to two anonymous reviewers who pointed out additional resources, corrected errors, and suggested various thematic developments.