Provenance


Ratcliffe

1. The Most Separated Brethren

Anabaptism was a socio-religious movement that was neither Catholic nor Protestant. It was a Christian movement of the most radical sort in that it questioned virtually all the assumptions upon which sixteenth century society, culture, and church rested—WALTER KLAASSEN[1]

THE MENNONITES, first known as Anabaptists, emerged in history about 450 years ago as the most "separated brethren" of the Protestant Reformation.[2] They were separated not only from the Catholics but also from the Protestants, and sometimes from each other. Most pronounced and problematic of all was their withdrawal from the surrounding society and from the state. The resulting tensions, often persecutions, had the effect of dispersing them over all of Europe and overseas. Eventually they were found in over 40 countries, including Canada, where their number is approaching 175,000.

The origin of the Anabaptists as separatists in the above sense is crucial to the later development of the Mennonites in Canada and to their continuing self-understanding. It becomes necessary, therefore, to travel back into history and to take a closer look at the times in which they arose and the dynamics which gave them their unusual, often paradoxical, character for centuries to come.

Anabaptism was only one of several major and numerous minor fragmentations which characterized the era of reform and

counter-reform. In some ways the divisions of sixteenth-century Europe were inevitable. The unity of the Middle Ages was eroding on all fronts. As the new era dawned, it became impossible to hold the united world of the Holy Roman Empire together, though both pope and emperor tried their best. Newness and change were evident everywhere.

The imperial and papal authorities had difficulty understanding the ferment. The unified European world of church, state and society had been developed with great diligence and a deep conviction that this represented an unfolding of the kingdom of God. After all, the holy Roman world had brought the civilizing influence of Christianity to a barbaric Europe and was now protecting that same Europe from a universally feared external invader — the Ottoman Turks. At the beginning of the 1500s the Turks were, so it seemed, threatening the entire continent with an alien culture and imperial domination.

However, for many people there were more immediate concerns; to some the greatest threat to truth and to their welfare and security lay much closer to home. Whatever enemy might be pushing from the East, he could not be as great a problem as Rome itself. It was Rome that was exacting the heavy taxes and tithes which did not bring the promised forgiveness of sins. It was Rome that was drawing young men into mercenary armies from throughout the continent. It was Rome that assigned luxury to some and poverty to others, in the name of religion. And it was Rome that suppressed the truth by persecuting its proponents and by insisting on a single authority — its own. As good as a single kingdom and a unified world might be, this one had not been put together correctly. To the dissenters, the Roman world with its concentration of religious truth, political power and material wealth represented an unacceptable synthesis.

Although the frustrations of Europe were focused in Rome, there was among the dissenters no commonly advocated solution or even a commonly felt motivation. Some people wanted more truth, others more power and still others more wealth; some, as in the case of the peasants, simply wanted less poverty. There was, therefore, no common identification of the total enemy and, consequently, no easy coalition against that single foe. The resulting multitude of responses to the problems of the day produced not so much a shattering reformation as they did a great separation.

For instance, the kings of England rebelled against the papacy. By his Parliament's Act of Supremacy, King Henry VIII was

declared to be the Supreme Head of the Church of England. The act was called a religious reformation, but it was little more than an institutional separation. The assumptions underlying the new Church of England varied little, if at all, from those supporting the Church of Rome.

The king of France, on the other hand, could fulfil his ambitions for power without excluding himself from Rome. In 1516 Francis I negotiated the power to appoint his own bishops and abbots, thus freeing France to act separately from Rome without departing from it completely. Spain also benefited from a continuing, more intimate relationship with Rome. In 1519 the link between the Spanish church and crown was made more secure than ever; Charles, the Spanish king whose family was tied to the House of Hapsburg, was elected Emperor. Committed to the Church of Rome, he now served as the secular power of the Holy Roman Empire. Both the secular and the sacred embraced each other in the face of the common enemy, the Ottoman Turks.

The unity, however, could not be complete since various small Germanic entities in central Europe had doubts about both the religion of Rome and the power of the Hapsburgs. Most concerned about the power arrangements were the princes in states such as Saxony, Brandenburg and Bavaria. Sharing their anxieties were the imperial free cities, about 50 of them, all commercial and financial centres beginning to enjoy the gold that was flowing from the new world. There were also the thousands of lesser knights and nobles who controlled small territories and manors, paid taxes, and provided men for the Emperor. Why, they all asked, should so many taxes and so many mercenaries go for the protection of Hapsburg power and Roman institutions?

Even more powerless, however, was the bottom socio-economic layer of society, those hundreds of thousands of peasants whose tears, sweat and blood benefited the noblemen, knights, princes, kings and emperors, as well as the abbots, bishops and popes. A peasants' revolt, sparked in the Black Forest, quickly spread throughout the Holy Roman Empire, only to be extinguished in May of 1525 when the radical leader and priest, Thomas Muentzer, was captured and promptly executed.

The peasants' main grievances were directed at their immediate overlords, whose major complaints in turn were laid before emperor and pope. These, in turn, thought that all of western Europe should unite with them against the Turks. It was a mixed-up situation. The confusion resulting from this manifold struggle for

power and wealth was compounded by an equally intense search for truth and by the strange alliances arising from this likewise multi-dimensional encounter.

The new paths to truth had been pioneered by Renaissance philosophers such as Leonardo da Vinci, who found insight and enlightenment, not only in the documents of religion, but also in nature and in the great human classics. For some, these wider sources of reality had a secularizing effect while others became better equipped, thereby, to revitalize religion. Included in this latter category was the foremost representative of the Renaissance in northern Europe, Erasmus of Rotterdam. An ordained priest, Erasmus studied at Oxford and lectured at Cambridge, where he produced a new Greek text of the New Testament. Published in 1516, the new Bible not only showed Christendom some of the fallibilities of the Latin Vulgate Bible, thus undermining traditional authority, but also laid the foundation for Martin Luther's German popularization of the Bible. For this reason it was already said at that time that "Erasmus laid the egg that Luther hatched."

Luther, however, became the leader and central figure of the religious-political revolution which challenged the church of Rome and the authority of its pope, a challenge very much to the liking of rebellious German nobles. In the end he was threatened with excommunication by the Pope and banishment by the Emperor. The elector of Saxony and other north German princes, however, were themselves sufficiently independent by this time to grant protection to Luther. Slowly but surely his movement for religious reform and their political revolt made a common cause. The new alliance went to war against the Emperor and when it ended with the Peace of Augsburg a new principle of religious and political organization had triumphed. "Whose region, his religion" indicated that the princes could decide which religion would dominate in their own areas.

The result was a reorganization of Europe. Lutheranism was the choice of most of the northern German states and of a few in the south. The Baltic states and all of Scandinavia became Lutheran and, like England, integrated church and state. Lutheranism for the princes meant Lutheranism for all their subjects as well, and dissenters often had as little freedom in Lutheran areas as they did in the Catholic states. In both situations, entrance to both church and state was gained by baptism which was required of all newborn babies. In these and other ways the German

Reformation, like the English one, was little more than an institutional division that resulted in political realignment.

Meanwhile, a Swiss contemporary of Martin Luther was attempting a similar reform in cooperation with the civil authorities in Zurich. He was Ulrich Zwingli whose studies in Vienna had introduced him to Erasmus, to his humanism, and to his Greek Testament, of which he became very fond by the time he was appointed priest at the Grossmuenster in Zurich. Like Luther, he preached against the system of indulgences, and clerical celibacy, as well as against mercenary armies which had drawn so many Swiss youths into unwanted wars and early deaths.

The civic leaders of the Canton of Zurich were generally in agreement with reforms proposed to keep men and money at home. They soon persuaded the cantons of Berne, Basel and Constance to join with them in an evangelical federation known as the Christian Civic League. Twice the League went to war against the Catholic regions, and in 1531 Zwingli himself was killed in the decisive battle at Kappel which permanently divided Switzerland into Protestant and Catholic territories.

Thus in Switzerland too there was a separation and, to some degree, a reformation. Zwingli was genuinely interested in a renewed society in which God's word was proclaimed and properly applied. In his scheme, the prophet of God and the magistrate of the city cooperated for the benefit of all. Like other men of the Middle Ages, he thought of society as a single Christian body. In that corpus Christianum the pastor and the magistrate worked together to achieve the rule of God on earth, the civil order being the external framework for the church. Zwingli envisioned a community pervaded by divine teaching which would transform the entire society. The Christian man became a good citizen, and the Christian city was the Christian church.[3]

As time passed, some of Zwingli's own disciples, more radical than himself, had difficulty accepting his approach to reformation, and that difference led to the greatest separation of all. They agreed with him on "the abolition of the mass, the rejection of celibacy, the dissolution of monasteries and convents, and the use of the vernacular instead of the Latin in baptism."[4] On the other hand, they quarrelled with his tolerance of images and pictures. Most of all, however, they challenged the assumptions that an entire community could adequately represent Christianity and that civic authority should be decisive in matters of religion.

The preacher of Grossmuenster looked to his city council as a

theological court of appeal. The resolution of differences between himself and the radicals, which he willingly debated in public, was assigned to the council. But the submission of theological and moral issues to civic authorities was precisely what the dissenters were not ready to do. In the words of Simon Stumpf, their spokesman at a public debate in 1523:

> "Master Ulrich, you have no right to refer this question to the Council; the matter is already settled, the Spirit of God has decided."[5]

Zwingli, however, continued to refer matters to the Council, as he proceeded to form a non-Catholic reformed state church in which, as in Lutheranism, the entire society in a given geographic region was enrolled. The dissenters turned elsewhere for their authority and discovered in the New Testament a church different not only from Catholicism, but also from Lutheranism and Zwinglianism.[6] Meeting frequently in private homes for the study of the Bible, they concluded that true reformation could not proceed from the entire society but rather from a dedicated nucleus of true believers who lived their faith. True believers were people who, at a mature age, voluntarily became disciples. They were not those who as infants and without conscious decision were baptized into the church.

The group of dissenters whose Bible studies were resulting in such conclusions was small at first, consisting mostly of ecclesiastics and academics. Debater Stumpf, for instance, was a pastor. Balthasar Hubmaier was a theologian and former university rector and was one of the first to preach against infant baptism. Wilhelm Reublin, the first of the Zurich priests to take a wife, insisted on carrying the Bible in public processions, instead of the relics of the church. A monk, George Blaurock, became known as "Strong George" for the vigour with which he took up the cause of the dissenters. The distinctive blue coat which he insisted on wearing gave him the name of Blaurock. He was not the last of the radicals to insist on non-conformist dress.

Two of the youngest men associated with the group were Felix Manz and Conrad Grebel, both well educated and from prominent families. Manz was the son of the canon of the Cathedral Church, and Grebel was the son of a Zurich councilman. Both had been recommended by Zwingli for teaching positions in Hebrew and Greek at a theological school he proposed to found in Zurich.

Educated at the universities of Basel, Vienna and Paris, and

probably influenced by the humanism and pacifism of Erasmus, Grebel was attracted to Zwingli for his integration of classical antiquity and biblical Christianity.[7] And until they discovered the variance in their respective positions Zwingli was attracted to Grebel. That difference focused on infant baptism, both as a test of where authority lay and as a point of dispute regarding the nature of the church.[8] Some priests had already persuaded many parents in their parishes to withhold baptism from their infants, and Hubmaier and Zwingli debated the issue publicly. On January 17, 1525, Zwingli and the Zurich council staged a public debate to settle the matter and to silence the opposition once and for all. The following day, council ordered baptism within eight days of all unbaptized children, the end of special Bible study meetings, and the banishment from the city of non-resident radicals.

The opposition would not be silenced that easily, however. Within a few days and while the brethren were together for study and prayer, George Blaurock asked Conrad Grebel to baptize him with "the true baptism" on the basis of voluntary faith. Grebel complied with the request, and Manz, Reublin and Grebel were then baptized by Blaurock.[9] In the context of city council policy, the event could not help but draw public attention. It had a two-fold effect. It made the Council more determined than ever to suppress the new movement, and, at the same time, became more attractive to certain of the masses. New laws calling for punishment of dissenters were written into the statute books. Parents not permitting the baptism of their infants were fined one silver mark for a first refusal and threatened with exile if they repeated the offence. The preachers against infant baptism, as well as the rebaptizers (*Wiedertaeufer* or Anabaptists, as the Zwinglians called them) faced imprisonment. Grebel, Manz and Blaurock soon found themselves incarcerated and sentenced to remain so "until they rot," though all escaped with the help of sympathetic jailers.

More drastic measures followed against the brethren. Felix Manz, the first martyr of the Anabaptist cause, was forcibly drowned in the Limmat River on January 5, 1527, when he refused to recant. Had Grebel not died of the plague, he would probably have met the same fate. George Blaurock was stripped, whipped out of town and, two years later, executed. Hubmaier escaped Zurich only to be burned at the stake in Vienna.

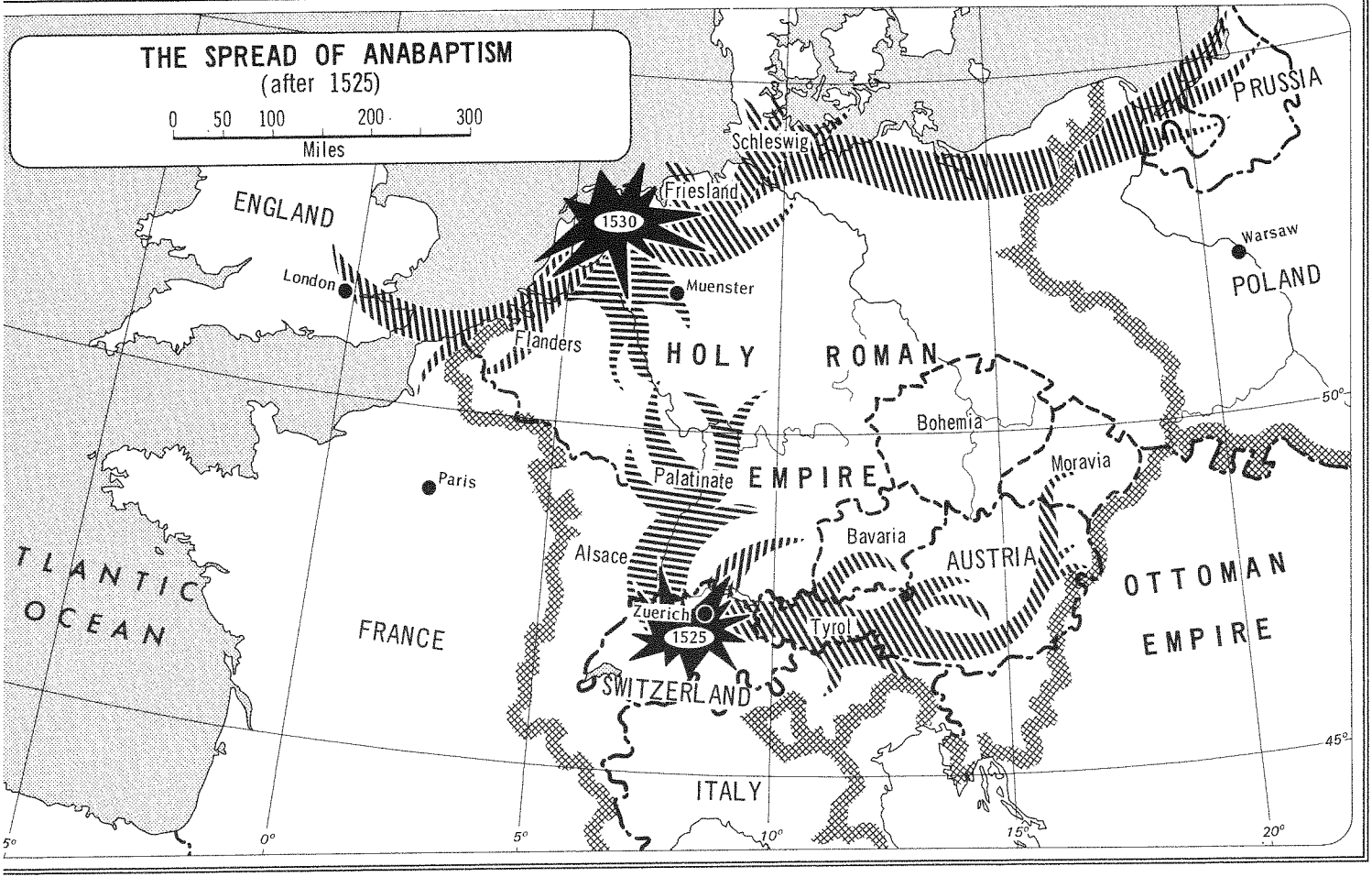
City councils, princes and kings, as well as bishops and popes,

saw the movement for what it was — a non-recognition of civil and ecclesiastical authority in matters of conscience and faith. To them the Anabaptist invalidation of infant baptism was much more than liturgical or even theological deviance. For them, and they probably assessed the situation correctly, the new baptism was an anarchical threat to the maintenance of a united, homogeneous, obedient and serene society. Infant baptism, it must be remembered, was not only the channel into the church but also into the state. The ecclesiastic and civic authorities, faced by such a fundamental threat to the social system by which they controlled and "saved" the masses, saw no alternative but to have it rooted out. In this they were supported by the imperial diet which, in 1529, outlawed Anabaptism throughout the empire.

The banishment of Anabaptism, however, was no easy task because its very threat to authority made it attractive to the masses, who were rebelling for their own reasons against the authorities and systems of the day. The movement advanced rapidly in Southern Germany, Tyrol, Austria and Moravia, as well as into regions of the Upper Danube, the Rhine Valley and all the way down to the Netherlands. Not all historians agree on the magnitude of the movement. Perhaps the truth lies somewhere between the claim of one chronicler that "their teaching soon covered the whole land" and another's insistence that it was only "a minor episode in the history of sixteenth century German society."[10]

The attractions of the movement were several. For those seeking truth and a genuinely reformed church, the Anabaptist movement clearly offered an alternative to Lutheranism and Zwinglianism, which had disappointed many of those who had tasted humanist and biblical enlightenment. It also appealed to those who were rebelling against the estabishment for economic reasons. It is no coincidence that Anabaptism began in the year of the Peasants' Revolt, that historians subsequently identified Anabaptism with Muentzer, and that so many of the weak, the poor and seekers-after-truth were attracted to those who dared to stand up to the powerful Zwinglian, Lutheran and Catholic coalitions.

The simple life-style advocated by the Anabaptists and so radically exemplified by the leaders and preachers of the movement was also attractive. They went about their work in Pauline fashion, requiring little to live, asking little of their followers, and ready to endure any deprivation for the sake of the Gospel. The fundamentals of the Anabaptist faith itself were first systematic-


THE SPREAD OF ANABAPTISM
(after 1525)
0 50 100 200 300
Miles
ENGLAND
London
Friesland
1530
Schleswig
PRUSSIA
Warsaw
POLAND
Muenster
Flanders
HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE
Bohemia
Moravia
Paris
Palatinate
Bavaria
AUSTRIA
Alsace
Zuerich
1525
Tyrol
OTTOMAN EMPIRE
FRANCE
SWITZERLAND
ITALY
ATLANTIC OCEAN
50°
45°
5°
0°
5°
10°
15°
20°

ally outlined at Schleitheim in Switzerland in 1527. A meeting of "brethren" under the direction of Michael Sattler, an ex-monk, resulted in what they called the *Bruederliche Vereinigung*, the confession of faith for the Swiss and South German brethren.[11] The confession dealt with baptism, the ban or excommunication, breaking of bread, separation, worldly abominations, pastors in the church, the sword, and the oath, meaning the act of ultimate loyalty to kings and rulers.

In August of the same year another conference of about 60 Anabaptist leaders was held at Augsburg in Bavaria. Although no statement was issued, doctrine and practice were discussed, and those present committed themselves to be faithful even in the face of persecution and death. Most of them were later called upon to honour that commitment, as they were put to the sword or burned at the stake. For this reason, the meeting became known as the Martyrs' Synod.[12]

The early agreement on the fundamentals of the faith — believers' baptism, the life of discipleship, nonresistance, etc. — did not mean complete uniformity among the Anabaptists. The geographic isolation of the groups, the frequent loss of their leaders, the lack of a tested tradition, as well as independent thought, contributed to extensive diversity. Besides, everywhere in Europe the reforms, revolts and renewals were characterized initially by disintegration of the old rather than by a unified integration of the new.[13]

In Moravia, where hundreds of Anabaptists found refuge on the estates of sympathetic nobles, much emphasis was placed on the proper economic organization of the new brotherhood. On one such estate, Jacob Hutter organized an entire community along communistic lines. Although he died at the stake, his influence remained, and after him this wing of the Anabaptists became known as Hutterites. Like other Anabaptists, the Hutterites were strict on the non-use of the sword, although one of their leaders once made allowance for it, should the Lord request it directly to help the Turks bring in the millennium, a period of righteousness in which Christ would rule the earth.[14]

The confluence in these early stages of Anabaptism of a strong millennial expectation, elements of economic communism and allowance to bear arms also occurred in central Germany. Thomas Muentzer of Peasants' Revolt fame, for instance, opposed infant baptism and the two state churches (Lutheran and Catholic), and advanced revolutionary political doctrine which would bring

in the new age. Hans Hut, another prominent Anabaptist, shared Muentzer's belief in an early millennium. If necessary, the new age would come by "the little company of true Christians" using force, if perchance "the Turks fail to destroy the princes, monks, priests, nobles, and knights."[15]

Much more precise in his millennial beliefs was Melchior Hoffman, a former preacher at the court of Denmark. He calculated that the Turks would bring about the cataclysm which could usher in the new Jerusalem at Strassburg in 1533. He also predicted that he would be imprisoned for six months if his calculation became a reality. Hoffman was only partly right. He was imprisoned, not for six months but for life. And 1533 marked the beginning of a cataclysm, not at Strassburg but at Muenster, a city of Westphalia, which at first was Catholic, then Lutheran, and finally almost Anabaptist. It happened when Jan Matthys, who accepted Hoffman's millennarianism but not his nonresistance, undertook by force to set up the new Jerusalem at Muenster.

In the annals of reformation history, Muenster the city, like Muentzer the man, became the symbol of a violent, revolutionary, and chiliastic Anabaptism. Enemies of the Anabaptist movement forever identified Muenster as its centre; friends of the movement forever tried to disown the city. The Reformation, like other great social upheavals in history, produced a spectrum of human responses, few of them completely right, none of them completely wrong. Anabaptism, like Protestantism, was and remains such a spectrum. Some historians identified as many as 40 Anabaptist groups known by such names as Muentzerites, Muensterites, Staebler, Free Brethren, Silent Brethren, Holy Brethren, Bare-footed Brethren, Hoffmanites and Hutterites.[16] There were even some Anabaptist nudists and polygamists!

Eventually, considerable organizational and theological unity was achieved in one wing of the Anabaptist movement by Menno Simons (*c.* 1496–1561), from whom the followers derived their more permanent name. A Dutch Catholic priest, Simons was embracing the Anabaptist faith just as the Muenster episode was running its course. Ironically, it was Muenster and a similar incident at Bolsward, where 300 died, including his brother, that contributed to his conversion. He renounced the Catholic priesthood in 1536, the same year in which John Calvin, another of the great reformers, was publishing the *Institutes*. Menno accepted rebaptism and ordination as an Anabaptist elder; he also married,

though his family life was constantly disrupted. Menno became a hunted man after 1542, when Charles V issued an imperial edict offering 100 guilders, a priest's annual salary, for the apprehension of the Anabaptist fugitive.[17]

Menno Simons spent much of the next two decades hiding from his persecutors, studying the scriptures, and writing treatises and letters for friend and foe alike. Two of his most important books, written in 1539 and 1541, were *Foundations of Christian Doctrine* and *True Christian Faith*; both portrayed the church as a disciplined community of the redeemed.[18] During the same time he visited the small groups of Anabaptists, counselled their leaders, baptized, and otherwise built up the congregations, first in Holland and later in other areas of northern Europe. Occasionally he entered into debates with Lutheran and Calvinist ministers.

Menno Simons turned the northern Anabaptists in the direction of passiveness and civil obedience, but this did not erase their revolutionary image or lessen their threat to the authorities. Not even the new name, Menists, which was first used in 1544 in the Dutch province of East Friesland, to distinguish the peaceful Anabaptists from the Muensterites, deflected the wrath of the imperial and ecclesiastical hierarchies. The consequence of their relentless hostility was a sustained and bloody persecution which all but wiped out the faithful, although Menno himself died a natural death in 1561. In northern Europe, as in the south, many survived only because they hid or moved about, eventually finding it most secure farther east and in the distant west.

The Anabaptist threat to the establishments of the day was both imagined and real. In the minds of the rulers, all Anabaptists were linked to the Peasants' Revolt and to the violent attempt at Muenster to establish a new kingdom. The followers of the movement as it had been re-fashioned by Menno Simons, however, were totally peaceful, shunning the sword even in self-defence. They were generally obedient to their overlords, holding back only when an oath or other acts of ultimate loyalty were demanded. Menno's followers had no intention of overthrowing any government, and he himself firmly believed that the righteous reign of God which had to come on earth could not come about through unrighteous means. In that context, the rulers were fearing a nonexistent threat to their authority.

In another sense, however, the Anabaptists, and especially the peaceful Menists, had unleashed an ideological force that frightened the establishment. By creating a new, though small, society

under the discipline of Christ (i.e., the church), they judged as un-Christian the old societies, which would not easily be persuaded of their own errors. By naming every believer a priest, they started European humanity on the road to democracy. By their egalitarian teachings and brotherhood structures, they undermined established totalitarian authority. By their rejection of infant baptism, they destroyed conventional social control. With their life-style they exposed hypocrites and unsettled the rich. Through their nonresistance they confounded their enemies, and by their exemplary obedience short of an oath they thoroughly frustrated magistrates and monarchs.

One of those monarchs was Emperor Philip who, like his father Charles V, was determined to prevent further erosion of the empire. The territorial losses suffered by the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 represented defeat already too bitter. Philip, therefore, forbade all laymen to teach the scriptures under threat of execution. For women who taught the forbidden, he decreed death by burial while still alive. Burnings at the stake were ordered for both men and women if they persisted in their witness.[19]

In this bitter attack the emperor was supported by the Catholic Inquisition which crushed Anabaptism completely in the province of Flanders by the end of the century. The Dutch martyrologist van Braght, whose famous record of 1500 Anabaptist executions was published 100 years after Menno's death, counted at least 400 from Flanders alone. The frightful manner in which many of them met their death is illustrated by one of the accounts from this *Martyrs' Mirror*:

> Also sentenced to death with him was a woman named Levina with six children. Arriving on the scaffold, David attempted to pray but they were immediately driven to the stakes. A little bag of gunpowder was tied to each of them, whereupon they were strangled and burned. David was still seen to move his head. The executioner thrust a fork three times into his bowels and bound him to the stake with a chain and broke his neck.[20]

These bitter persecutions from 1531 to 1597, when the first and last Dutch executions occurred, sent a continuous flow of Anabaptist refugees from the lowlands into areas of greater safety. Although they fled in all directions, including across the North Sea to England, their main route led eastward to the

fringes of the Holy Roman Empire. Thus, in the same way that southern Anabaptists found refuge to the north and east in Bohemia, Moravia and beyond, so the northern Anabaptists found security in the eastern territories, and for a time in Tudor England. Most of the congregations which later appeared in northern Germany, Prussia, Poland, and Russia arose directly or indirectly from these northern refugee movements.

This eastern Anabaptist thrust played such a prominent part in Canadian Mennonite history that it must be given more than just a passing reference. The competing Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed landlords soon discovered that the value of Anabaptist virtues far exceeded the danger of their so-called heresies. At first the refugees were serfs and labourers only; later they were granted leases as managers, and eventually they came into full possession of their own lands in the vicinity of Danzig, Elbing and Koenigsberg. By 1608 a Lutheran bishop was compaining that the whole delta was overrun with Mennonites.

The complaint was virtually useless, however, since the landlords were mainly interested in the economics of their settlement policies. Although at first a derogatory epithet — a name born in derision and oppression — the Mennonite label had become proper and respectable and was proving its usefulness. They were Mennonites, not Muensterites, a most helpful introduction to anxious noblemen. Wherever the name guaranteed a certain open reception and above all escape from persecution, they learned to accept it, cherish it, and defend it.

Not all of the Anabaptists in the lowland provinces had fled, however. Those who stayed and survived increased their numbers and improved their status, especially after 1576 when the noblemen of the various provinces united under William of Orange to drive out Philip II and the Spanish imperial influence. Several important changes resulted. Calvinism replaced Catholicism as the dominant religion, and the Netherlands became a national entity.

The greater tolerance for the Dutch Anabaptists or *Doopsgezinde*, as they preferred to be called, arose not so much from the official change of religion as from the political need of the Dutch to recognize the exceptionally large religious minorities, including the Catholics, in their midst. This also meant tolerance for small minorities. All were invited to participate in the building of a new national life. This Dutch nationalism soon developed a commercial focus beyond the seas with the founding of the Dutch

East India Company in 1602, and overseas colonies such as New York in 1612. Amsterdam became the commercial and financial centre of Europe. The economic opportunities that arose and the growth of political tolerance had real significance for the Doopsgezinde. Before long they were participating fully in the cultural, economic, and political life of the Netherlands. From their ranks emerged leading Dutch poets, painters, businessmen, bankers, and civic leaders, including mayors of large cities, governors of the Dutch West Indies and, by 1795, cabinet ministers.

The enthusiastic participation in the national life and commercial activities had the effect of diluting Anabaptist theology; but it also led to an effective intercession on behalf of persecuted Anabaptists elsewhere. During the early centuries this influence benefited mostly the Anabaptists of England and Switzerland, but generous works of relief, especially on behalf of their brethren, has remained characteristic of the Dutch throughout their history.[21]

In their intercessions, the Doopsgezinde were often joined by their national leaders. One Dutch statesman, William of Orange, on becoming King of England in 1689, also became the first of the English monarchs to side with dissenters when he pleaded the Mennonite cause in 1694.

The close relationship between the Netherlands and England was, of course, partly determined by geography. Anabaptists by the hundreds had found their way to England, their movements being joined to a steady stream of Dutch immigrants who were attracted there for a variety of reasons. Henry VIII tolerated the dissenters, but only until he discovered that their protest affected him as much as it affected Rome. When, in 1534, he became aware of the presence of Anabaptists among the other immigrants, he and his successors (until William III) ordered them exiled or imprisoned and executed. Thirteen were burned in different parts of England in 1534 alone. The English bishops, loyal to the Crown and objecting to Anabaptist views on the oath and baptism, cooperated in their exclusion or punishment.[22]

Thus, in Anglican England, as in Catholic Flanders, the Anabaptists disappeared from the scene, though not without planting the seeds of separation and nonconformity. Their presence led directly to the founding of the Baptist Church in England which, like the Anabaptists, insisted on a "voluntary, democratic church, composed of newborn men and women, entirely free from the state, granting to all freedom of conscience in matters of relig-

ion."[23] The two groups maintained some fellowship in Amsterdam, but union was out of the question since the Baptists held different doctrinal views on the oath, government, war, and baptism.[24]

The influence of Anabaptist separation was later acknowledged by the Congregationalists, but with no other group did the Anabaptists have as much in common as with the Quaker dissenters who emerged in England in the 1640s. Quite early the Quakers, followers of George Fox, established contact with Anabaptists on the continent and a mutual helpfulness resulted.

In southern Europe the struggle to reverse or advance the political results of the Reformation continued a whole century after the Peace of Augsburg had supposedly settled the matter. The Swiss brethren did not achieve complete toleration and full citizenship until the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Their struggle for liberty had lasted 300 years, less 10.[25]

In southern as well as in northern Europe, the persecution of the Anabaptists became the basis of a rich literary and musical heritage for the church. As the northern executions had inspired the *Martyrs' Mirror*, so the southern imprisonments produced a group of hymns which became the foundation of the well-known *Ausbund* hymnal. Both resources accompanied the descendants of these groups of persecuted Anabaptists through many generations of spiritual pilgrimage from one country to another.[26]

In times of severe persecution in Switzerland, the Dutch Mennonites interceded on behalf of their brethren, sending delegations to the Swiss councils and to the prisoners, at first to no avail. The Swiss responded in 1671 with the expulsion of 700 men, women and children, of whom 100 ended up in Alsace and the rest in the Palatinate. In addition to the Lutheran nobles of the Vistula, the Calvinist counts of the Palatinate and the Alsace recognized the Anabaptists as builders and, in this case, the right kind to build up a countryside almost totally devastated by the war.

The ultimate sociological destiny of the majority of the Swiss as well as Dutch Anabaptists was affected, however, not only by the migrations but also by internal divisions. Because of its prevalence among the Anabaptists, this tendency to fragmentation was called the *Taeuferkrankheit* (the Anabaptist sickness). Menno Simons had once identified the essentials of the Anabaptist movement but, for his followers, the nonessentials had a way of moving to higher priorities.

For reasons other than differences in language, dress and other customs, the Flemish Anabaptist refugees, after Menno's death,

could not be integrated with the Frisian Anabaptists. The Flemish were less rigid in the use of the ban and less autocratic in their ministerial elections and practices. The Frisian-Flemish divisions were carried into Prussia and later to Russia, and separate congregations were maintained for nearly 200 years.

Although all groups held similar views on baptism, the oath, and war, even more liberal in their ministerial practices than the Flemish were the Waterlanders. Between the Waterlanders and the Flemish stood the Upper Germans, and these divisions were sub-divided, not so much from basic theological differences as from varying approaches to congregational discipline and liturgical practices:

> The Flemish and Frisian . . . each developed left and right wings. Thus, the former party sprouted an "Old Flemish" offshoot, and this offshoot was later subdivided into "Groniger" Old Flemish and "Danzig" Old Flemish wings. The Frisians in turn expanded into a "Hard" and a "Loose" or "Young" Frisian party.[27]

The reasons for this original and continuing atomization among the Anabaptists — the old ones were carried with the migrations and many new ones appeared along the way — are not hard to find. To begin with, the geographic, economic and cultural divisions of Europe at the time of the Reformation were more pronounced than Rome or the Empire had ever been prepared to acknowledge. Besides, the time of reformation and revolution was itself a process of atomization, as indeed such times have always been in the experience of man. A society which discards en masse an old way of putting the world together normally produces a wide range of responses before a new one is synthesized.

Among the Anabaptists the variety of responses and the resulting bifurcations were almost endless. Two paradoxical principles to which they adhered contributed to the divisions. On the one hand, they recognized no external religious authority such as was enjoyed by the Catholics, Lutherans and Calvinists. They had no popes or princes. The new authority of the Anabaptists was the Christ of the Bible, but since they all were priests, at least in theory, there tended to be as many interpretations of the Bible as there were Anabaptists or Anabaptist leaders with strong opinions and leadership.

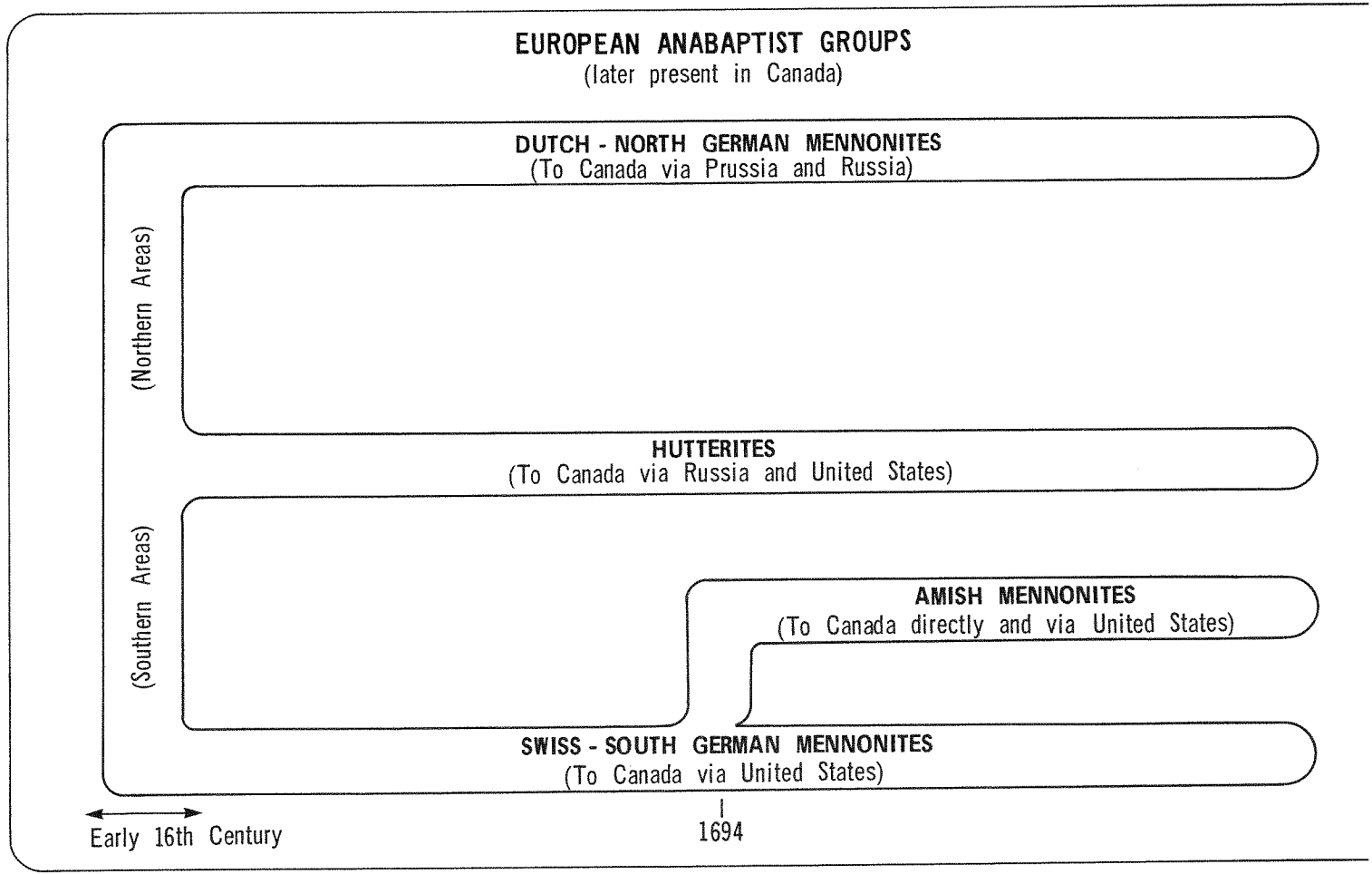
Secondly, they also insisted on a pure church. Reacting to the undisciplined state churches, they exercised rigorous discipline,

frequently carrying to extremes their concern for correctness in liturgical, cultural and moral practices. Having rejected the normal flesh-and-blood battlegrounds of the state churches, the Anabaptists often found their contest with the evil one within the Anabaptist kingdom itself.

Fortunately for their own sake, the Anabaptists also recognized this tendency toward internal fragmentation as one of their main problems. The southern gatherings for doctrinal unity, as at Schleitheim and Augsburg in 1527, had their early-sixteenth-century parallels in the north. Numerous confessional statements were drafted to bring about a measure of internal unity to protect against unwanted foreign influences and to explain the Anabaptist position to outsiders. The most lasting of these were the eighteen articles of a confession drawn up at a "peace convention" in Dordrecht in 1632.[28] For a while this statement became normative, not only for some Dutch Mennonites but also for the Swiss who had moved up into Alsace, the Palatinate, and the Lower Rhine where they received Dutch help and came under their influence.

While Dordrecht contributed to unity, its doctrine of excommunication, or the ban, became a source of contention before the end of the seventeenth century. The controversy began when two Swiss leaders, Hans Reist and Jacob Ammann, expressed different views on such matters as foot-washing and the ban. Being the stricter of the two, Ammann insisted on two foot-washings a year and the extension of the ban to all social intercourse. Reist thought the ban could and should effectively be limited to eating and drinking at communion.[29]

According to Ammann, a total social discipline was necessary to guard against the encroachment of new social customs and re-absorption into society. Such re-entry into the world was sure to follow the attendance of funerals in the state church and the adoption of new fashions such as fancy clothes, a clean-shaven face, and long hair. After all, shaving the beard, and perhaps, wearing a moustache instead, meant erasing the distinction between themselves, the Christian community, and the culture, particularly military culture, surrounding them. Ammann travelled extensively in Switzerland and elsewhere, advocating this point of view. While the Reist view prevailed among the majority in Switzerland and in the Palatinate, Ammann's viewpoint of ecclesiastical strictness and cultural conservatism was adopted by the congregations throughout the Alsace.


EUROPEAN ANABAPTIST GROUPS
(later present in Canada)
DUTCH - NORTH GERMAN MENNONITES
(To Canada via Prussia and Russia)
(Northern Areas)
HUTTERITES
(To Canada via Russia and United States)
(Southern Areas)
AMISH MENNONITES
(To Canada directly and via United States)
SWISS - SOUTH GERMAN MENNONITES
(To Canada via United States)
Early 16th Century
1694

In 1694, those whom Ammann could not persuade to his point of view were placed by him under the ban. Under the leadership of Reist, the "excommunicated" community returned the compliment and, although reconciliation attempts were made by both sides for nearly two decades, the division remained. The differences on the ban could not be overcome in Europe for two centuries, and in North America they remained even longer.

The Alsace concentration of the Amish, as Ammann's followers came to be known, was disrupted by a 1712 expulsion order issued by Louis XV. The result was that the Amish were on the move throughout the eighteenth century, establishing congregations in southern Germany, France, Holland, in the Austrian provinces of Volhynia and Galicia and in North America.

In the greatest separation of all — the migration away from the European continent and westward across the ocean — the Amish had been preceded by other Dutch and Swiss Mennonites. Anabaptists first appeared on the North American continent in 1643 as Dutch traders to New Netherlands, later known as New York. Their appearance in Manhattan, Long Island, the Delaware shores and perhaps in the Maritimes was not of permanent duration, however.

The first permanent Mennonite settlement in North America was founded in 1683 at Germantown, later a part of Philadelphia. At that time the Quaker, William Penn, was setting up his "holy experiment" in the lands which he had received from Charles II in 1681 in lieu of debts which the monarch had owed Penn's father, an admiral of distinction in the English navy. A man of wealth and aristocratic sophistication, and yet a devout, William Penn was anxious to apply his talents and resources to a religious cause. The land which he had inherited was to become a place of righteous government among men and a place of civil liberty for the oppressed. As his first citizens he selected the persecuted Quakers of England, and other troubled nonconformists, such as the Mennonites on the continent.[30]

News of the tolerant state and abundant land spread to Europe and soon thousands of immigrants were hoping to make their homes anew in the Colony of Penn. They included hundreds of German religious dissenters and, among them, Swiss Mennonites and Amish, whose migrations to Pennsylvania extended, with some interruptions, over two centuries (see Table 1).[31] Between 1710 and 1756, over 3000 Mennonites settled in the regions of Bricks, Chester, Montgomery, and Lancaster counties. The

Amish, about 300 in that initial immigration, also chose the Lancaster area, though farther north and west than the Mennonites.

TABLE 1

MIGRATIONS OF SWISS MENNONITES(M) AND AMISH(A) TO AMERICA

	DATE	NUMBER	ORIGIN	DESTINATION
1.	1683–1705	100*M*	Lower Rhine	Germantown
2.	1707–1756	3-5000*M*	Palatinate and Switzerland	Franconia and Lancaster
3.	1815–1880	3000*A*	Alsace, Bavaria, and Hesse	Ohio, Ontario, Indiana, Illinois
4.	1830–1860	500*M*	Switzerland	Ohio, Indiana
5.	1861–1865	300*M*	Palatinate	Ohio, Indiana, Illinois

Thus began a benevolent and promising era for the Swiss Mennonites. As agriculturists they now had an abundance of land in the "paradise of Pennsylvania." As nonconformists they enjoyed the tolerance of a Quaker state which, like them, was opposed to fighting and swearing. Like their Quaker hosts, they were exempted from the judicial oath. As German-speaking peoples, the new immigrants were not immediately threatened by absorption into an English world. By 1776, they were among about 100,000 Germans, which comprised one third of the entire Pennsylvania population, and with whom they eventually shared a Pennsylvania *Deutsch* culture.

Behind all of these aspects of immigration to Pennsylvania was the British Crown which, though not agreeing with the religious dissenters, had come to tolerate and accept them after they were identified as assets to the British Empire. In Pennsylvania, as in faraway Prussia, the minorities were welcomed because they were useful. The new British tolerance for dissent made such a deep impression on the Mennonites on both sides of the Atlantic that they would seek refuge under its wide umbrella again and again — eventually in Canada — in the years to come.

FOOTNOTES

1. Walter Klaassen, "The Nature of the Anabaptist Protest," *Mennonite Quarterly Review,* XLV (October 1971), p. 311.
2. Term used by Pope John XXIII (1958–1963) to identify Protestants as he initiated a new relationship with them. See Whelan's *Separated Brethren.*
3. Robert C. Walton, *Zwingli's Theocracy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), p. 218.
4. C. Henry Smith, *The Story of the Mennonites,* 3rd ed. (Newton, Kans.: Mennonite Publication Office, 1950), p. 4.
5. John H. Yoder, *Taeufertum und Reformation in der Schweiz* (Karlsruhe, Germany: Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein, 1962), p. 20. Translation by Smith, *op. cit.*
6. Walter Klaassen, *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic Nor Protestant* (Waterloo, Ont.: Conrad Press, 1973).
7. Harold S. Bender, *Conrad Grebel 1498–1526: Founder of the Swiss Brethren* (Goshen, Ind.: Mennonite Historical Society, 1950), p. 73.
8. On the nature of the theological dispute see: Bender, *op. cit.*; John H. Yoder, *Taeufertum und Reformation im Gespraech* (Zurich: EUV-Verlag, 1968); and Franklin H. Littell, *The Origins of Sectarian Protestantism: A Study of the Anabaptist View of the Church* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1964).
9. For a delightful account of this story see: Fritz Blanke, *Brothers in Christ* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1961).
10. Claus-Peter Clasen, *Anabaptism: A Social History, 1525-1618* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), p. 428.
11. John C. Wenger, "The Schleitheim Confession of Faith," *Mennonite Quarterly Review,* XIX (October 1945), pp. 247–53 (translation).
12. Regarding Anabaptist martyrdom, see: T. J. van Braght, *Martyrs' Mirror* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1950). English translation 1964.
13. See the concluding chapter in George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962).
14. For an introduction to the Hutterites see: Victor Peters, *All Things Common: The Hutterian Way of Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965).
15. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 40; James M. Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword* (Lawrence, Kans.: Coronado Press, 1972).
16. Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 79–80; Claus-Peter Clasen, "Anabaptist Sects in the Sixteenth Century: A Research Project," *Mennonite Quarterly Review,* XLVI (July 1972), pp. 256–79.
17. Ernst Behrends, *Der Ketzerbischof* (Basel, Switzerland: Agape-Verlag, 1966), pp. 61–5.

18. J. C. Wenger, ed., *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons* (Scottdale, Pa.: Mennonite Publishing House, 1956), p. 670.
19. See extract of 1556 decree in T. J. van Braght, *Martyrs' Mirror*, pp. 552–53.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 549.
21. Nanne van der Zijpp, "The Dutch Aid the Swiss Mennonites," in C. J. Dyck, ed., *A Legacy of Faith* (Newton, Kans.: Faith and Life Press, 1962), pp. 136–58.
22. Irvin B. Horst, *Anabaptism and the English Reformation to 1558* (Nieuwkoop , Netherlands: B. de Graaf, 1966); Fred J. Zerger, "Dutch Anabaptism in Elizabethan England," *Mennonite Life* (January 1971), pp. 19–23.
23. Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 196–97.
24. For an introduction to the controverted issue of Anabaptist-Baptist relationships see: William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1963), Chap. XI.
25. Delbert L. Gratz, *Bernese Anabaptists* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1953).
26. Rudolf Wolkan, *Die Lieder der Wiedertaeufer* (Nieuwkoop, Netherlands: B. de Graaf, 1965); Paul M. Yoder, *et al., Four Hundred Years with the Ausbund* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1964).
27. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 174.
28. van Braght, *op. cit.*, pp. 38–44.
29. John A. Hostetler, *Amish Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1963).
30. Edwin B. Bonner, *William Penn's "Holy Experiment": The Founding of Pennsylvania, 1681–1701* (New York: Temple University Publications, 1962), pp. 1–23.
31. H. S. Bender, "Migrations of Mennonites," *M.E.*, III, pp. 684–87.