
Concern for Holiness in the Mennonite Tradition

by Myron S. Augsburger

The Mennonite Church was born in the Anabaptist movement of the 16th century, a movement called by George Williams of Harvard “the Radical Reformation.” Although at least fifteen groups were called Anabaptist, by 1550 all but three of them had disappeared. These three, the Swiss Brethren, the Holland Mennonites and the Hutterites make up the stream of Christian thought known among the Peaceful Anabaptists, a perspective on the Christian Faith expressed today by the Mennonite Church. Theirs was an existential faith which grew out of their experience with the living Christ. They developed a Christological hermeneutic by which they interpreted the full Scriptures, seeing levels between the Testaments and interpreting the nature of Christian thought Christologically. While accepting the ‘Sola Scripture’ of the Reformers, it may be said that their emphasis was Sola Christus, for Jesus as the Christ is the center of faith.

For the Anabaptists the Christian life meant discipleship in the freedom of Christ, an identification of the total life with Jesus Christ, and a commitment to walk in the Spirit. Holiness is not seen to inhere in the object itself but in its relation to God. And so, for them, holiness of life meant discipleship, an obedience to Christ, a separation of the life of the believer from the world in an active pursuit of the priorities of the Kingdom of Christ.

These Radical Reformers were not seeking the reformation of the State-Church, but the re-establishment of the New Testament Church, a free Church founded upon relationship with Jesus Christ rather than upon institutional Christianity. Robert Friedmann suggests three forms of Christianity in the 16th century: sacramental Christianity, theological Christianity, and existential Christianity.¹

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His use of ‘existential’ is to engage a 20th century word to interpret a 16th century Anabaptist emphasis on experiential participation with Jesus Christ. The 16th century Anabaptist, Hans Denck is often quoted, “No one knows Christ truly except he follow Him daily in life, and no one can follow Him daily in life except he knows Him truly.”²

The Anabaptists were deeply committed to the authority of the Scripture, the Word Written, but they rejected a “flat-book” view of the Scripture and saw the Old Testament relating to the New as promise to fulfillment. They also strongly emphasized the necessity of the inner work of the Spirit in the lives of the regenerate for correct interpretation of the Scripture. For most of them this meant the Spirit’s insight to interpret and did not mean another “inner Word” which could be placed over against the Word Written as was the case with the spiritualizers. While there were tensions over this issue, as evidenced by the Scheitheim Synod, Feb. 27, 1527, “the appeal to the written Word of God enabled the true Anabaptist to avoid the pitfalls of spiritualistic subjectivism.”³ Their strong emphasis on the centrality of Jesus Christ and relationship with Him as the essence of Christian experience means that one only understands the Holy Spirit in the Jesus Christ revealed in Scripture.

The court records of their trials and of disputations reveal the nature of their differences with the Protestant Churches of the times. Similarly the literature from the pens of Anabaptists point this out. They were martyred by the thousands in the first half century of the movement by both Protestants and Catholics. As something of a “people’s movement” they spread down the Rhine and across Europe. The Baptist historian, Roland Bainton, has said that both Catholic and Protestant were afraid that all of Europe would become Anabaptist. They evangelized the Netherlands before the Calvinists ever got there, and later many of them joined the Remonstrants. They were critical of the institutionalized Christianity of the State-Churches both Catholic and Protestant, and called persons into a voluntary fellowship by repentance and a changed life. They were especially critical of the lack of ethical emphasis among the Protestants, seeing the call to a holy life being ignored.⁴

Theologically they saw the Protestant position as misunderstanding the nature of salvation by grace, emphasizing God’s forgiving grace (mediated through the sacraments) but minimizing God’s transforming grace (mediated through Word and Spirit). The

Anabaptists emphasized a free response to Christ rather than a determinism. This voluntarism of faith led to a new creation by being born of the Spirit, the consequent indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the dynamic of fellowship in a covenant community. As Cornelius Krahn says, "Anabaptism at its best was a component of individual freedom obtained through Christ within the fellowship of disciplined members which received their direction through Christ, the Head of the Church."⁵ They were assured of God's grace in the experience of the sanctification of the total life. As Friedmann expresses it, central to their difference was the question as to whether believers are "declared righteous" (*gerechterklärung*) or are "made righteous" (*gerechtmachung*).⁶ The question is whether the grace of God works an actual change in the life of the believer which makes one righteous. This is a basic question if we are to understand Mennonite concern for holiness (i.e. To what extent does grace change us?).

Due to intense persecution, the Anabaptists were never able to fully develop a written statement of their theology. One of the earlier writings of any size and distinction was the work by Pilgrim Marpeck on hermeneutics, "The Differences Between the Testaments". The writings of Menno Simons, who was converted and joined the movement eleven years after its inception, are clear expressions of Anabaptist Biblicism and are available material. But the records of numerous lengthy disputations provide us with a broad survey of their thought. They had a position on grace prior to the Calvinist-Arminian controversy, a position which could be called semi-Augustinian. They held that salvation is alone by God's grace, but that grace is God's gracious action on our behalf in which He has moved to us and thereby enabled a freedom for us to move next. Their anthropology saw mankind as sinful, as depraved in the sense of a condition of sinfulness, but not to the total absence of the *Imago Dei* and the possibility of responding to the expression of God's grace in Jesus Christ. They stressed the new birth and the inner baptism with the Spirit when this was not being emphasized in the State-Churches. They created a Free-Church amidst a State/Church Constantinianism two hundred years before this became politically acceptable in America. Amidst an emphasis on justification by faith that had not adequately emphasized sanctification they were aggressively teaching and demonstrating holiness of life. Confronted with a State/Church identification, they were developing communities of disciples who lived by love and non-violence. While the

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Protestant churches regarded the “Great Commission” as only applicable to the early Church, they took Jesus’ words as a mandate for mission and spread across Europe.

The Anabaptist Vision, as interpreted by Dr. Harold Bender in his address to the American Society of Church History in 1944, consisted of three points: (1) the rediscovery of the Christian life as discipleship, (2) the understanding of the Church as a voluntary fellowship of the re-born, and (3) the way of love and non-violence as a Christian life-style.⁷ Writing of the basic emphasis on discipleship, Dr. Lawrence Burkholder says that it consists of at least four convictions: obedience to the great commission, the emphasis on love and nonresistance, suffering in the spirit of cross-bearing, and the separated life of holiness.⁸

For the Anabaptists in this pre-Wesleyan setting, holiness was directly related to the Lordship of Christ and obedience to Him less than to a more subjective experience. It meant walking in the Spirit, but even here the word most often used was “obedience”, frequently described as “yieldedness”. The use of the word “sanctification” was limited, as also was the use of the word “justification”. Holiness also meant for the Anabaptists a decisive loyalty to the Kingdom of Christ with a consequent separation from the world. Even their enemies gave witness to the holiness of their lives, as in the case of Pieter Titelman, dean of Ronse, Flanders, and the official inquisitor in 1546. At the trial of some Anabaptists he admitted that “the moral conduct of the Mennonites was irreproachable, and that they were justly praised because of their peace, love, and charity; ‘but’ he said, ‘what is the good of it . . . if you have not the (right) faith?’”⁹

Two hundred years later, in the revival under the Wesleys, a fresh movement of renewal and experiential relationship with Christ enriched the Church. John Wesley developed a friendship with the leading Mennonite Pastor of Amsterdam, Jeme (Johannes) Deknatel, and spent some time in Deknatel’s home on several occasions. Wesley wrote of the friendship and reported that on one visit in 1738 he was impressed with a sermon by Deknatel and took notes on it.¹⁰ Both movements, the Anabaptist and the Wesleyan, two hundred years apart, were accused of perfectionism. It is frequently stated that the charge was denied by the Anabaptists, as in the case of Felix Manz when being questioned by Zwingli. Another Anabaptist stated, “I am not perfect, but the Spirit who dwells in me is perfect.”¹¹ In a similar way Wesley is reported to have written to *The*

London Times, “I tell you flat, I have not achieved the perfection of which I speak . . .”¹² The Reformed Church historian of Switzerland, Fritz Blanke, has said of the Anabaptists that the fact of their strong emphasis on discipline in the church, with the use of the ban, is evidence that they were not perfectionists. This is discussed by Harold Bender in his article on “Perfectionism” in the Mennonite Encyclopedia. He wrote:

Often those Christians and groups of Christians who have honestly and earnestly sought to live a life of high dedication, obedience, and holiness have not only been misunderstood but also frivolously condemned as hypocrites or self-righteous. The attempt to strive toward perfection (“Be ye therefore perfect even as your heavenly Father is perfect”) has often been erroneously labeled perfectionism. The Anabaptists and Mennonites have suffered under this charge from the beginning.¹³

The Anabaptists were theologians of praxis rather than of reflection. Theirs was not a rationalistic theology conditioned by categories of Greek thought, but an existential biblical theology of relationship.¹⁴ Their relationship with Christ, declaring a newness of life described as “walking in the resurrection”,¹⁵ found much of its content in the synoptic Gospels. They took seriously the presentation of Christ in the historic accounts as a Model as well as a Redeemer. They interpreted reconciliation with God in Christ as a walk in a new life of discipleship and cross-bearing. Menno wrote:

“The regenerate, therefore, lead a penitent and a new life, for they are renewed in Christ and have received a new heart and spirit. Once they were earthly-minded, now heavenly; once they were carnal, now spiritual; once they were unrighteous, now righteous; once they were evil, now good; and they live no longer after the old corrupted nature of the first earthly Adam, but after the new upright nature of the new and heavenly Adam, Christ Jesus, even as Paul says: Nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. Their poor, weak life they daily renew more and more, and that after the image of Him who created them. Their minds are like the mind of Christ, they gladly walk as He walked; they crucify and tame

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their flesh with all its evil lusts.”¹⁶

It should be noted that in dealing with the problem of sin and sinfulness, the Anabaptists rejected some aspects of the interpretation of original sin as interpreted by the Reformers, holding that each person is accountable for his own sin as expressed in the 18th chapter of Ezekial. They held that children were ‘safe’ until the age of accountability when persons sin “after the similitude of Adam’s transgression.”¹⁷ This meant that original sin was not seen as a fatalism, but that something of the *Imago Dei* remains in every person enabling the hearing of God’s call of grace and the response to, and in, love. This anthropology was in partial agreement with Erasmus of Rotterdam on freedom, but actually found this freedom possible only because of God’s act of grace in moving to us rather than a freedom inherent in man. The implication of this view of depravity for sanctification is that man is a sinner by his disobedience rather than by a state of being totally worthless as sinner, and the correction of the problem centered not in ‘eradicating’ an Adamic depravity as much as in obedience to the new life in Christ.

Of the Anabaptists difference with the Protestants on this matter, Hans Langenmantel of Augsburg, martyred in 1528, wrote:

Daily we must hear from the leading (Protestant) preachers and from many persons everywhere: ‘we would gladly do right if we had the grace from God . . . Many cry out and preach: ‘he whom God has predestined to be saved will be saved and whoever is predestined to be lost, will be lost.’ These two statements (namely that God’s grace which is needed to forsake sin is not extended to all, and that only those predestined for salvation can be saved) are identical in meaning. Let all men through God in Jesus Christ, His Son, be cautioned that this is a great but unrecognized blasphemy against God, of which Christ has faithfully warned us.¹⁸

In Mennonite theology, divine grace is seen as acting to release man from sin (the negativism of disobedience) by infilling the believer’s life with love (the positive expression of righteousness). A basic emphasis in this theology is on love as a lifestyle. The first and second commandments as given by Jesus are taken with utmost seriousness, developing an ethic of love. This ethic includes loving all

persons including enemies, as taught by Jesus in several of His sermons (Luke 6:27-36, Matthew 5:38-48) and as seen in the story of the Good Samaritan where the disciple are taught to be neighbor to all people. But this understanding of an ethic of love is ultimately based on the person of Christ and his modeling of love in His life and death. This means that the holiness of Christ supplies the content for the agape quality of love. Should we think in terms of a hierarchy of attributes, the ultimate value or attribute would be holiness as Incarnate in Jesus Christ. Love, mercy, forgiveness, justice, salvation, et. el. are all conditioned by holiness, by the wholeness known in Him who is “all in all.”

At the risk of reading back into the 16th century, it is probably safe to say that this perspective on holiness added ethical dimensions to the Anabaptist emphasis on the new creation (new birth) and the resultant life of discipleship. For them discipleship was possible only for the reborn. Menno Simons, for example, built his theology on the new creature, arguing from this for a life of separation from the world, for a disciplined church, for love and non-violence toward enemies, and for witness to the unregenerate.

On February 27, 1527, the Anabaptist Synod at Schleithem agreed on seven points in a confessional statement drawn up by Michael Sattler, reflecting the nature of their commitment to discipleship. The Confession does not deal with classical theological issues on which they were in basic agreement with the Reformers, but rather with the implications of their theology for Christian discipleship.¹⁹ The seven points are set in contextual notes recognizing the reality of the Holy Spirit’s presence and transforming power, the quality of the resurrection life, the priority of Christ’s Kingdom over the powers of the State, and a Biblical hermeneutic that is Christological. The confessional statement reflects this hermeneutic in ethical guidance for the community of disciples. The call to holiness of life was a charge to the congregations to practice discipline among the brotherhood, to secure the purity of the Assembly, and to safeguard the integrity of their witness to the world.

Of this emphasis on holiness of life, J.C. Wenger writes of the 16th century difference with the Protestants:

The real difference of opinion centered in the doctrine of sanctification. The Anabaptists, although recognizing that

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they always stood only by grace, nevertheless believed that Spirit-filled Christians could live a significantly higher level of Christian life than was found in so many members of the State Churches . . . as regenerated and ‘Spirit-baptized’ sons and daughters of God we are not always simultaneously justified and sinners.²⁰ For Example, Martin Weninger of Schaffhausen lamented that the Reformers taught that one cannot be free of sin and live in righteousness, to which he responded by quoting many texts to show that Christians are able in Christ to live holy lives.²¹

Among various issues in a theology of holiness, one should at least note the following: the relation of regeneration to sacramentalism, the relation of sanctification to justification, the personal in relation to the corporate experience with the Holy Spirit, the concept of ‘original sin’ and release from its dominance, the grounding of ethics as other than works-righteousness, the nature of the Church as a discipling brotherhood, and the possibility of “perfection in love”. Adequate attention cannot be given to each of these in this brief study; however, a few references on each will place them in context to better understand the specific interpretation of the last point as it bears on a theology of holiness.

The Anabaptist view of regeneration as the transforming work of grace in the believer’s life placed the emphasis on relationship with Christ, on the beginning of a new life in discipleship. This superseded conversation about justification by faith. The Anabaptists held that the Reformers were claiming a privilege in justification without an actual justifying relationship of an obedient faith. And this emphasis excluded trusting in sacramentalism, for saving faith was relational and not mediated through sacramental rites of infant baptism or the Lord’s Supper. The new birth wrought the change, an actual change in one’s life, and the Lord’s Supper was a covenant meal of persons relating to Christ and one another in a covenant of faithfulness. A spokesman at the disputation in Berne, Switzerland, 1538, said, “We founded and established a congregation in which repentance and newness of life were in evidence.”²²

The relation of sanctification to justification may for the Anabaptists have well been placed in that order, seeing sanctification as a complete belonging to God and the ground for claiming justification. Bender says that there are four ways in which persons

think of Christ: (1) as a moral Teacher, (2) as a Being to be worshipped, (3) as a Saviour exclusively, and (4) as everything, Prophet, Saviour, and Lord, the latter making the believer a disciple. Of those who fail to see this fourth way as the way to relate to Christ, Bender makes the following comment:

Justification by faith becomes so great and so wonderful, that sanctification of life and obedience to Christ, and transformation after His image are in effect minimized and neglected. The Lordship is in effect set aside. This has been the peculiar danger of historic Lutheranism and remains the besetting temptation of modern Fundamentalism.²³

This approach is also different from that of the Pietists a century later who saw sanctification as a further work or “blessing” beyond justification dealing with the Adamic nature. For the Anabaptists sanctification was a work beyond in the sense that it was the on-going work of the Spirit in the life of the believer, and justification was the privilege of assurance in this in-Christ relation as the disciple walked in the Spirit and in fellowship with the covenant community. Salvation for them was not an action pronounced but a relationship enjoyed. They were sure of their salvation because of God’s grace in Jesus and their relationship to Him. To express it another way, they accepted the objective factor of justification in faith and concentrated on the subjective aspects of sanctification as obedience of faith.

The Anabaptists spoke of two baptisms, the inner baptism with the Spirit and, in contrast, the outer baptism with water, the latter being only a sign of the former.²⁴ The emphasis was upon His presence in the life of the one identifying with Jesus as Lord and initiated thereby into the body of Christ. The Spirit was not assumed to be affecting them through the corporate community, but was known by each disciple who was thereby placed by the Spirit into the community of disciples as a functioning member. Pilgrim Marpeck wrote,

We recognize as true Christian faith only such a faith through which the Holy Spirit and the love of God come into the heart, and which is active, powerful, and operative in all outward obedience and commanded works. We believe that one is made the child of God and free from the law and the bondage of sin only through such faith by which

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the Spirit, as the power of God, lives in the heart and does His work. There, then, is liberty.²⁵

Only by the Spirit could they interpret the Word, walk in obedience and bear fruit, fellowship and discipline one another in the “brotherhood”, and proclaim the evangel. Menno Simons wrote,

For it is clear that the regenerate do not willfully live in sin, but through faith and true repentance were buried by baptism into the death of Christ, and arose with Him to a new life. Also, those who have the Spirit of the Lord bring forth the fruits of the Spirit.²⁶

The Anabaptists believed in the doctrine of original sin, but did not see baptism as annulling the guilt of original sin.²⁷ The release from the bent to sin which is in all lives is experienced by the new birth and the positive actions of obedience to Christ. Sattler wrote of two kinds of obedience, legalistic obedience of the slave as to the law, and filial obedience of the son to the father as in the freedom of the sons of God.²⁸ For them sin meant disobedience and its correction a relationship with Christ in obedient faith. Each person is called to be a disciple, this ‘nachfolge’ being the essential expression of the new life.²⁹ They said, “Our obedience is not an external or a legal one, but the result of our new relation to God, that is, it is freedom and strictness in one.”³⁰ They spoke more of the holy life than of sanctification, their holiness finding its form in Jesus as the Model and its possibility in the transforming power of His Spirit, in the actions of faith in cross-bearing, and in witness by life and word to Jesus’ rule more than by subjective dimensions of emotional piety.

The Anabaptists’ concern for ethics was one for the integrity of membership in the Kingdom of heaven. Michael Sattler’s letter to the Strassburg Reformers, Capito and Bucer, lists twenty reasons why he could not identify with them lest he compromise his fidelity to the Kingdom of Christ.³¹ Most significantly, the Anabaptists stressed the Christological nature of ethics, that is, they related ethics to Christ in the same way that they related salvation to Christ. One behaves Christ as one believes Christ. Stressing obedience, they answered those who accused them of works-righteousness by an emphasis on grace, which affirmed that they had no doubt or anxiety about their salvation this Christ had wrought for them on His cross, but being

‘saved’ they now sought to live the new life in Christ with the quality which He had modeled. They placed special emphasis on bearing the cross, on suffering in the world because of following Christ, and on humility and yieldedness (*Gelassenheit*, i.e. inner surrender). The character of holiness was for them subjective in this yieldedness and objective in identification with the Jesus known in the Gospels in faith and love.

Their quest for a pure Church was a further expression of their commitment to holiness. However the word ‘pure’ meant first a fellowship that was truly Church, and secondly it meant pure in the sense of a holy life. But that the latter was meant, and important, is evidenced by their insistence on discipline with the use of the ban. It was a voluntary church, recognizing that each person decided the issue of faith for himself/herself. As such, it was a visible church, a fellowship which made visible the expression of Christ, the visible expression of the Kingdom in the rule of Christ. This was placed over against the view of the Reformers who saw the visible church as the peoples’ church (*Volkskirche*) made up of all people having been baptized as infants, the invisible church being the truly elect known only to God. It was only by an emphasis on a believer’s church that they could speak of the true church as visible. But it is at this very point that Mennonites have had a particular problem, externalizing the measures of spirituality, making separation from the world a matter of behavioral patterns which can be determined and judged by the church.

It is on the issue of perfection in love, to use Wesley’s concept of two hundred years later, that the interpretation of the Anabaptists was unique. The Anabaptists believed that love was and is a possibility for the community of disciples. As Dr. Paul Peachy has said of this position,

If love was possible without the Gospel we would need no Gospel; if love were not possible with the Gospel there would be no Gospel; that love is possible through the Gospel is what the Anabaptist vision was and is all about.³¹

The question may be asked as to whether Wesley did not speak of the ‘perfection of love’ with more of a devotional content than an ethical content? In Wesley’s piety, love carried an evident subjective element, while for the Anabaptists, love had primarily an objective focus on praxis. An Anabaptist affirmed,

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Our church is the pure and spotless Church of Christ on earth. Since our people also are intent on godliness and holiness of life, because we separate ourselves from the godless world and alone constitute a holy little group and church in the world.³²

For them there was little focus on a specific “second work of grace,” for a release from inner bondage to sin, but rather they emphasized yieldedness, surrender, death to self-will and to a spirit of autonomy with a positive act of walking in the Spirit and sharing obedience in suffering love. J.C. Wenger says, “Among European Mennonites Perfectionism (q.v.) or the doctrine of ‘total eradication’ has had little influence, although the Anabaptists were often accused of holding this position because of their staunch insistence on holy living.”³³

But in many ways the emphasis on love as a lifestyle is similar in Anabaptists and Wesley (for example, devotion to Christ, openness in a personal way to the Spirit, obedience to His Word, love of neighbor and the primacy of the fellowship group of believers). It was the Anabaptist emphasis on loving one’s enemies as Christ did, in dying for His enemies, which carried a different application as the Anabaptists applied this to non-participation in war, as well as to evangelistic concern. For the Anabaptists, separation of Church and State meant that these two were on two levels, with the disciple operating on a level answering to the mandate of Christ, abstaining from war and the use of violence, and the State operating on another level to protect the innocent and punish the evil. The Anabaptists would witness to the State to live up to the highest level of justice and love which they have espoused, but held themselves to live by the higher mandate of the Lord to whom they were committed. The Schleithem Confession distinguishes between the disciple as living “within the perfection of Christ” and the State as functioning “outside of the perfection of Christ”.³⁴ Menno Simons wrote of the regenerate, “They are the children of peace who have beaten their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, and know war no more. They give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s.”³⁵ And of the magistrates, he said he desired that they,

be so taught and trained by the Spirit and Word of God that

they may sincerely seek, honor, fear, and serve Christ Jesus, the true head of all lords and potentates; so that they may rightly administer and prosecute their office and use the sword given them of God in His fear and in brotherly love to the praise of God, to the protection of the good, and to the punishment of the evil according to the Word of God.³⁶

From his significant research, John Horsch wrote specifically on the Anabaptist belief regarding the call to holy living:

The brethren held that the believer, having experienced regeneration through the Word and the Spirit, and having been endowed with the Holy Spirit, and having consecrated his life to the service of God, will not be the servant of sin. They believe that, while the life of the believer cannot be perfect before God, since human weakness will not be fully overcome, there is nevertheless no excuse for committing sin. They believe it essential that the Christian life be unstreflich (irreproachable), and held that it is possible for the believer to keep the commandments of the Lord, though not to perfection, and to lead a consistent Christian life. They believed that the true Christian life is a holy life of separation from sin and the world, a witness to the saving and keeping power of Christ, and that such a life alone is consistent with the Christian profession.³⁷

Since the Wesleyan movement the Anabaptist/Mennonite Church has been enriched by the emphasis on holiness espoused by this tradition. Several groups quite fully accepted the “second work of grace emphasis”; however, the larger body of Mennonites have kept the language of discipleship as primary. Similarly the Mennonite Church was enriched by the Great Awakening and saw a revival of their earlier emphasis on the new birth and assurance of salvation. Later in the Fundamentalist/Modernist controversy they held themselves somewhat aloof, maintaining their Biblicism without accepting the more narrow statements of Fundamentalism and serving in the social aspects of the Gospel without accepting the Social Gospel premises of the Liberal movement.

With the developments of the modern science of psychology and attention to the nature of inner religious experience, the Mennonite

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Church has had to develop its Anabaptist Theology in relation to new insights. Similarly Calvinist theology has adjusted its interpretation of total depravity to now mean the total person is affected by sin rather than to say that persons are totally corrupt, the new position being quite acceptable to Mennonites. Also most holiness theologians have adjusted the earlier emphasis on eradication of the 'sin nature' to be more realistic in relation to our understanding of human personality and of God's manner of releasing us from the dominance of sinfulness. With the Charismatic movement many Mennonites have accepted the emphasis on the personal experiences with the Spirit, however this movement has hardly spoken at all to the meaning of sanctification and holiness. Further, there is a change in the Mennonite emphasis on separation, with an adjustment of the more external and legalistic expressions to a more careful examination of inner attitudes and an emphasis on holiness as wholeness.

J.C. Wenger, writing of the Mennonite understanding of sanctification as yieldedness to Christ and the Spirit-filled life, shows how Mennonite theology, while rejecting perfectionism strongly, emphasizes victorious Christian living as the fruit of union with Christ. The sphere of the Christian is "in Christ", a relationship actualized by the indwelling Spirit and expressed in righteousness and holiness.³⁸ This is to place the emphasis on the fruit of the Spirit, on the positive aspects of the sanctified personality. A very outstanding treatment of discipleship as "participation" or "correspondence" appears in the work of John Howard Yoder, showing that the believer's behavior or attitude is to correspond to that of his Lord.³⁹ This treatment shows the Pauline passages of "in Christ" as the relationship which identifies the disciple with the image of Christ as Model.

An interpretation of a key passage, Romans 6:6, illustrates contemporary Mennonite approach to holiness: "Knowing this that our old man is crucified with Him, so that the sin potential may be devitalized, that we should no longer serve sin" (translation mine). For a Mennonite this is a central affirmation of the inner sanctification which sets us free in Christ. The "old man" is crucified, that is the realm of life in which sin reigned is put to death by God through the cross as we surrender to Him. The "sin potential" in us can no longer operate with the earlier license under the reign of sin, for now with the "new man" under the reign of the Spirit we are

released to serve Him. This is not the continuation of an inner “civil war” between two natures on an equal basis. Rather by an in-depth surrender or yieldedness in a deliberate commitment of faith, it is a release or freedom to serve Christ in love. And this same concept is expressed by Paul to the Colossians: “Seeing that ye have put off the old man” (Colossians 3:9) there is now freedom and power in the new man to deal with expressions of the self-nature which are still a problem (Colossians 3:5-11).

Another passage which emphasizes the victory of freedom through the indwelling Spirit is Galatians 5:16-18, especially if verse 17 is carefully interpreted from the Greek. The verbs are in the present tense, meaning that the self continues to desire to have its way but the Holy Spirit is continually there desiring to have His way. The key is in the next sentence, with a subjunctive form in the Greek, which means that since the Spirit is always present we cannot do what we would do if He wasn't present! This is the sanctification of a superior power granting us freedom to be Christlike. In fact, the matter of freedom is the essential positive praxis of holiness.

There are several key issues which will summarize this interpretation of an Anabaptist/Mennonite theology on holiness. (1) Interpreting salvation relationally rather than sacramentally, their emphasis is on a faith identification with the risen Christ, meaning a walk in the resurrection. (2) Interpreting depravity as sinfulness affecting the whole person, but not as meaning an entirely corrupt person with no capacity to respond to God's call of grace, they didn't need to focus on the eradication of the “Adamic nature” but on freedom in the Spirit. (3) Interpreting the baptism with the Spirit as a personal indwelling, they believed His presence rather than some experience of ontological change is the power for the new life in Christ. (4) Interpreting ethics Christologically, they saw the holy life expressed in love, a costly, sharing, self-giving, suffering, non-violent service to all people. And (5) Interpreting the Church as a voluntary fellowship of the reborn living by the priorities of the Kingdom, the rule of Christ, they related holiness directly to responsible sharing in a covenant community which shares in discipling each of its members.

The mystery remains as to what ontological aspects of change the Spirit works within the believer in regeneration and sanctification. But we believe that He does a work of changing us in love, peace, joy, etc. (I John 3:6,9). And such change doesn't happen automatically,

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but it happens as we go further than the initial experience of salvation or forgiveness, a step of surrender, of yieldedness, of what Peter calls the “death route” (I Peter 4:2). The Mennonite emphasis on holiness calls for a deliberate surrender of our will to His will. The conviction is dominant that we are to “be conformed to the image of His Son”. This vision calls us to “follow holiness”, to “go on to perfection.”
Sola Deo Gloria!

Footnotes

¹Robert Friedmann, *The Theology of Anabaptism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1973), pp. 29 f.

²G.F. Hershberger, ed., *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision* (Herald Press, 1957), p. 100.

³Jerold K. Zeman, “Obedience of Christ: The Heart of Evangelical Anabaptism” *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, Vol. XXI, (Spring, 1979), p. 44.

⁴H. Bullinger *Der Wiedertauferen, Ursprung, Furgang, Secten . . .* (Zurich, 1561), Appendix which quotes six Anabaptist writers as to why they do not share in the State-Church.

⁵Hershberger, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

⁶*Op. cit.*, p. 87.

⁷Hershberger, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-54.

⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 135-151.

⁹*Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. IV, p. 728.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, Vol. II, Deknatel.

¹¹R. Friedmann, *Mennonite Piety Through the Centuries* (Goshen, IN: Mennonite Historical Society, 1949), p. 44.

¹²J.C. Wenger, Lecture, Eastern Mennonite College, 1972.

¹³*Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. IV, p. 1115.

¹⁴Friedmann, *Mennonite Piety . . .* p. 82.

¹⁵“The Schleithem Confession”, Tran. J.C. Wenger, MQR Vol. 19, 1945.

¹⁶Menno Simons, Tran. by J.C. Wenger (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956), p. 93.

¹⁷Friedmann, *The Theology . . . op. cit.*, p. 92.

¹⁸John Horsch, MQR, Oct. 1931, p. 144.

¹⁹J.C. Wenger, *Even Unto Death* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1961), p. 57.

²⁰J.C. Wenger, *Our Christ-Centered Faith* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1973), p. 51.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 52.

²²John Horsch, MQR, Oct. 1931, p. 249.

²³H. Bender, MQR, Jan. 1950, pp. 27-28.

²⁴T.J. van Braght, *Martyr’s Mirror* (Thomas van Imbroeck Mennonite Publishing Co., Elkhart, IN, 1886), pp. 355 f.

²⁵J. Horsch, MQR, Apr. 1931, p. 137.

²⁶*Op. cit.*, p. 97.

²⁷John Horsch, MQR, Apr. 1931, p. 137.

²⁸MQR, Jan. 1947, Tran. by Dr. J.C. Wenger.

²⁹R. Friedmann, MQR, Apr. 1942, “New Findings . . .” p. 90.

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- ³⁰*Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. IV*, Sattler.
- ³¹Lecture, Eastern Mennonite College, Harrisonburg, VA.
- ³²R. Friedmann, *Mennonite Piety . . . op. cit.*, p. 44.
- ³³*Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. II*, p. 791.
- ³⁴*Op. cit.*, Article IV.
- ³⁵*Op. cit.*, p. 94.
- ³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 304.
- ³⁷Horsch, MQR, Apr. 1931, p. 138.
- ³⁸J.C. Wenger, *Introduction To Theology* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1954), pp. 292 f.
- ³⁹J.H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 115-131.