

THE PEOPLE ON THE MOVE: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MIGRATION AND
FAITH--AN ASPECT OF MENNONITE LIFE AND FAITHFULNESS FROM THE
SIXTEENTH CENTURY TO THE PRESENT

BY

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ABSTRACT

The story of Mennonite migrations since the sixteenth century is largely the history of some religious people who tried to find the perfect expression of their faith in this world. Initially because of religious persecution, migration to other countries, for those Mennonites, was often a means of survival. Later when religious persecution stopped, migration for some Mennonite groups became a means to preserve the purity of their faith, which was characterized by an emphasis on a holy life and complete separation of the church from the world. Finally, the preservation of Mennonite way of life also became an important factor. This thesis will attempt to give a realistic appraisal of this history in the perspective of the Mennonite's persevering efforts to realize their religious ideal in a generally hostile world. Meanwhile, a historical exposition of the reciprocal effect of Mennonite migrations on their religious beliefs will help us to approach the kernel of the issue in its right perspective.

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The many shortcomings of this work are the author's own.

INTRODUCTION

When we trace the history of the Mennonite movement, we are struck by the fact that there were a few Mennonite groups who were always on the move. At first they migrated because they were forced to flee their homes due to the persecution directed toward them by a world hostile to their religious faith. Later when religious persecution stopped, migration for those Mennonites became a means to preserve the purity of their faith, which was characterized by an emphasis on a holy life and a complete separation of the church from the world. Finally, the preservation of the Mennonite ethnic community also became an important factor. Migration provided security for the Mennonites to keep their way of life unadulterated. This is true for those Mennonite groups who were of Dutch and North German origins. Their migrations from the Netherlands to Prussia, and then to Russia, North America, and again to South America made them a people whose entire existence in the world was characterized by always being on the move.¹ What makes this even more remarkable is that these frequent

¹It might be for this reason that the Mennonites were thought to have a tradition of emigration. See Waldemar Janzen, "The Great Trek: Episode or Paradigm?" The Mennonite Quarterly Review 51, no. 2(1977): 127.

migrations were by a people who were known for their love of the soil--a people who earned their living by cultivating land; in fact, they were thought of as good farmers in both Europe and North America.² Here we surely have to raise a question: why did these people, especially some who had selected farming as their way of life, time after time leave the cultivated soil and give up their organized life? Without doubt, the reasons for the Mennonite migrations are varied. For example, religious persecution often forced the early Mennonites to give up their organized home;³ the devastation caused by war and the subsequent poverty sometimes made the Mennonites seek a new life somewhere else;⁴ meanwhile, a

²Harold S. Bender, "Farming and Settlement," The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. II (Kansas: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1955-1959).

³This particularly can be found in the cases of Austrian and Dutch Anabaptists' fleeing to Moravia and Prussia in 1530s, and Swiss Brethren's emigration from the Canton Bern to the Palatinate in 1671. See John Horsch, Mennonites in Europe (Pennsylvania: Mennonite Publishing House, 1950), pp. 110-111, 146, and also see Cornelius J. Dyck, An Introduction to Mennonite History (Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1967), p. 94.

⁴The migration of the Palatinate Mennonites to Pennsylvania in 1700s gave us such an example. The war between France and Germany from 1688 to 1697 devastated the Palatinate in which the Swiss Mennonites had settled since the end of the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648). As a result, many Mennonites there lost their homes, farmsteads, and all their wealth. However, this was not the only experience that the Palatinate Mennonites suffered at that time. In 1708, a winter cold beyond the precedent of a century killed many fruit trees in the Palatinate. It resulted in such a serious consequence that many Mennonites lost their living resources. All this contributed to the mass emigration of the Palatinate Mennonites to Pennsylvania and other countries in 1700s. See John Horsch, Mennonites in Europe (Pennsylvania: Mennonite Publishing House, 1950), pp. 266-270, and also see Harold S.

search for land and the desire for wealth also motivated some Mennonite migrations.⁵ However, at this point, recognizing that material interests might have been an important motive in the history of Mennonite migration, it seems wise not to lapse into the quagmire of material determinism⁶ when inspecting the whole issue. This is because every historical event is correlated with others in the same time period. The different aspects of human existence--economic, political, and religious--are so interlocking that no institution can impose its characteristic form upon all the others. Everything which happens has to be considered as interconnected in the immensely complex causal nexus. It might be the case that economics, politics, religion, and other social factors besides, act and react upon each other, each in various ways influencing the others and being influenced by them. Therefore, if we accept Marx's view of human behaviour, we

Bender, "Causes for Emigration to America," in J.C. Wenger ed., The Mennonite Church in America (Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1966), pp. 43-56.

⁵More detailed comments about the economic motivation of Mennonite migration can be found in Albert Koop, "Some Economic Aspects of Mennonite Migration: With Emphasis on the 1870s Migration from Russia to North America," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 55, no. 2(1981): 143-156.

⁶According to Karl Marx, All human behaviour is powerfully conditioned by material circumstances. People behave in ways that enhance their own self-interests. Here economic forces were particularly viewed as the principal factors in determining the social existence of human beings. See Karl Marx, "Preface to the Critique of Political Economy," in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Works, Volume I, the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute of Moscow ed. (London: Lawrence and Wishart Ltd., 1950), pp. 327-331.

should not limit our perceptions of human self-interests to the material realm. Something else, for example, a religious self-interest, or the concern over salvation, could also motivate people. This factor might well be demonstrated in the case of Mennonite migrations, because those migrations often happened as movements, or more exactly, they were migrations of religious communities. In other words, the Mennonites developed their community not only into an economic and social unit with a uniquely ethical structure, but also into a religious fellowship with a considerable group solidarity. Religious experience is so closely bound up with the social existence of the Mennonite migrants no matter where they migrated. Thus, when we explore all Mennonite migrations, we must ask to what extent Mennonite faith affected those Mennonite migrants' social behaviour, or more generally their life-style; and more significantly, what part, if any, their faith played in their decisions to migrate. The following chapters will attempt to give a realistic appraisal of the question in the perspective of the Mennonites' persevering efforts to realize their religious ideal in this world. But, it will also be necessary to investigate how Mennonite belief was in turn influenced in its development and its character by the totality of social conditions.⁷

⁷Considering that the motivations which caused Mennonite migrations were very complex, this thesis will focus mainly on those migrations that had more direct religious causes in order to make a clearer sense of the relationship between the Mennonite daily life and their religious beliefs. For this

When we review Mennonite life and thought, which broke away from the pattern of established religion and society, we can find the Mennonites were very enthusiastic for establishing the "true Christian life" upon the apostolic pattern as they understood it. In other words, they attempted not only to reconstitute the relationship between human beings and God, but also to restore a proper behavioral pattern for directing their daily life. This enthusiasm resulted from their belief that the followers of Christ were "called out" from "the world" to live lives of holiness as members of the kingdom of God. While acknowledging the legitimacy of government to be in charge of the "affairs of this world," they asserted the primacy of the claims of God over the claims of government. This understanding of the relationship between their church and the outside world contributed to the development of a "two kingdom" ethic, emphasizing the separation of church and state. It was later expressed in the form of general withdrawal from the world. By this way, they sought to arrange their life as much as possible in accordance with their faith, and with as little interference from the outside as possible. Thus, all discussions about Mennonite beliefs will lead us to see how Mennonite convictions played a decisive role in determining their attitude to the world at

purpose, the following argument basically will follow the development of Dutch Mennonites, namely, their thought, life, and migrations even though giving appropriate consideration to other Mennonites.

large, and how they affected the Mennonite migrations under certain political and economic circumstances. At this point, our reflections will begin with the Anabaptist break from the Roman Catholic as well as the Reformation churches. Special attention will be paid to the Schleithem Confession and its view of "believers" and "the world."

From George Blaurock's baptism "on his faith and recognition of the truth"⁸ in January of 1525 to Menno Simons' defection from the Roman Catholic Church in 1536, the Anabaptist movement experienced ruthless persecution from both the Roman Catholic church and the Lutheran and Reformed state churches. Under the mounting pressure of persecution, this diverse movement was severely threatened with disintegration. On the one hand, execution and prison made the movement lose almost all of its important leaders. For example, of the original leadership circle, Felix Manz, Georg Blaurock, Hans Schäffer and Jacob Hutter were executed due to the persecution. Melchior Hoffman was imprisoned and later died in prison. Conrad Grebel and Hans Denk died of illness. Others were widely scattered to escape the search by the authorities. On the other hand, the persecution pushed the religious enthusiasm of some Anabaptists into emotional excesses in the name of special revelation or fanatic belief. It was at this time that Menno Simons arose as one of the most

⁸The Hutterian Brethren, The Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren (New York: Plough Publishing House, 1987), p.45.

important leaders in the first generation of the Anabaptist movement. He helped to give the movement more new energy, and to shape its distinctive form by his outstanding theological contributions to the movement. Among these contributions, the most important is his view of faith and its effects, namely, discipleship. Menno thought that faith consisted of several different steps, namely, hearing the Word of God, submitting the mind and heart to the leading of the Holy spirit, giving love toward God and man, obeying the commands of God, and following Christ in daily life. According to this understanding of faith, he insisted that faith not only was spiritual commitment, it also was to be characterized by the establishment of a special relationship with Christ marked by discipleship to Christ. Therefore, it is practical and working. In other words, it is the holy life in this world. This view of faith clearly indicated the prerequisites for membership in the Mennonite church. At the same time, a Mennonite response to the outside world, namely, complete withdrawal of their church from the secular society, was also suggested.

During the process of purifying the Anabaptist movement from the Münsterite fanaticism, not only did Menno play an important role, so did Dirk Philips. The goal desired in purifying the church was to have a church where each member truly qualified to be a member, and to put out of the church those members who did not qualify. Menno, by his view of

faith, gave each member a subjective test that they could apply to themselves to see if they qualified. Dirk developed the doctrine of the church and provided some basic principles that the leaders of the church could apply to each member to see if they qualified. Moreover, Menno drew a clear line of demarcation between the Mennonite church and the outside world in his theology. Dirk, on the other hand, made a real boundary between the Mennonite church and the outside world by the establishment of church discipline. Through sketching Dirk's life and his religious practices in Danzig, chapter three will draw an outline of his role in changing the radical Anabaptist movement into a peaceful church community in which the religious faith and life were merged in a united form. Meanwhile, by explaining Dirk's thoughts about the doctrine of the church, especially on avoidance or shunning, we will also seek to arrive at a clearer understanding of the distinctive model of the Mennonite church and the distinguishing features of Mennonite community life. All these will serve to account for the Mennonites readiness to forsake newly found economic security when faced with the pressure to deny their understanding of the faith.

From the 1530's on, Dutch Mennonites began to find refuge in Prussia. They built some settlements on the estates of sympathetic noblemen. Their earliest congregations were also established during that period. Several historic meetings of Mennonites were held in these settlements. The Mennonite

model of life was developed into a definite pattern during that time. In other words, this was the period in the Mennonite movement which produced a great impact on the succeeding generations. When chapter four reviews Mennonite history during that period, the main goal will be to formulate the key characteristics of the Mennonite way of life that kept the Mennonites in a critical tension with the surrounding society.

The experience of the Mennonites in Russia continued to reflect the way of Mennonite life. It can even be thought of as a kind of vivid summary of the entire history of the Mennonites. Having previously observed how faith was nurtured in times of persecution and hardships, chapter five will now explore the changes of the Mennonite convictions in the face of one of life's biggest challenges--material success. At the same time, we also try to see how some Russian Mennonites fought to hang on to the Mennonite fundamental beliefs, for example, the principle of separation, when their life in Russia was experiencing big changes due to the fact that the society in which they were living was changing drastically.

Due to Alexander's policy of compulsory military service, the Russian Mennonites once again had to make a choice concerning their future. Even though most Mennonites decided to stay in Russia after the Russian government made some compromises in its new policy of military service, about one third of Russian Mennonites, or more exactly, 18,000

Mennonites, crossed the Atlantic into Canada and the United States.⁹ For those Russian Mennonite immigrants, they made their own choice to secure for themselves the freedom to continue living the Mennonite way of life. The experience of those Mennonites in North America will tell us much about their pursuit of a pure religious faith as well as a successful secular life.

Yet the story of the Mennonite migrations does not conclude with their arrival in North America although Russian Mennonites obtained almost everything they wanted in North America, such as religious freedom, peaceful life, and even wealth. In the twentieth century the history of the Mennonite migration repeated itself in many ways. There were more migrations from North America to South America. Chapter seven will particularly focus on the migration of 6,500 Old Colony Mennonites from the Canadian prairies to the Mexican plateau--the Mennonites who conservatively insisted that the whole purpose of their life was to maintain their Mennonite religious and cultural identities in the world. Here again some Mennonites sought escape from unwelcome impositions and impingements through the traditional device of emigration even though others were trying to adjust to the prevailing conditions around them.

Following the insights gained thus far, we will come to

⁹Cornelius Krahn, "Kansas," The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. III (Kansas: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1955-1959).

the conclusion that for the centuries to come, the experiences of some Mennonite groups were closely linked to their trek around the world. And this trek, in some degree, could be seen as a unique expression of their understanding of themselves and of the outside world. Initially, religious persecution forced the Mennonites to flee their homeland. They had to seek asylum from one place to another so that they could escape execution or prison. In other words, the forces of circumstance pushed them from one unfamiliar world into another. When the movement received its new energy, namely, the principles of Mennonite brotherhood and separation from the world, from some of its famous makers, such as Menno Simons and Dirk Philips, theological concerns supplied a more focused dynamic that kept the Mennonites on the trek. Migration, in certain circumstances, was thought of as the only way to maintain their religious identity. However, as time went on the Mennonites merged their religious beliefs, such as discipleship of Christ, separation from the world, and the disciplined church, with their way of life and values. As a result, religious separation from the world became geographical and social isolation within the society in which they were living. The Mennonites established their own socio-religious society that was neither "in the world" nor "of the world." Migration, at this point, gave them an opportunity to rebuild their traditional life-style when it became undermined or threatened by their host society. Since some Mennonites

often fastened on some specific aspects of their tradition, such as the village community, the German language, and the private school, migration also became a means of their resisting social reform. In those cases, these conservative Mennonites insisted that everything that they had learned from their forefathers be preserved as an integral part of their way of life. The result was that many migrations and resettlements happened when they faced political and social pressure. However, it seems to be only a matter of time until the Mennonites found that the available parcels in which they could build their self-sustaining communities became less and less due to the political and economic development of the whole world. Most Mennonites learned that their traditional isolated life-style had passed into history and could not be re-established again.

Although the Mennonites generally lost their early enthusiasm for mission and sought isolation in order to escape ruthless persecution, some Mennonite missionaries began to enter China in the 1890s. In the following years, several Mennonite churches were established in different provinces of China. As a Chinese, I am particularly interested in the Mennonite experience of converting Chinese people who had a completely different cultural tradition. I also want to share my interest with all the people who are concerned about the Mennonite missions in China. Since the topic does not belong to the main body of the thesis, a brief historical review of

the Mennonite missions in China is placed in this thesis as an appendix.

CHAPTER 1

FROM THE SWISS BRETHREN TO THE MENNONITES

The first step towards a better understanding of the Mennonites is to trace the development of the movement. By understanding the history of the movement we can discover the role it played in the Reformation, and then, we can also understand the religious and social aspects of the movement.

1.1 Anabaptism and the Reformation

The Mennonites, first known as Anabaptists, were dissenters from both Roman Catholicism and the established Protestant churches during the Reformation period. One of the earliest roots of the movement goes back to the Anabaptist movement in Zürich, which came out of the earlier Zwinglian reformation movement in Switzerland in 1525. For several years the earliest leaders of the movement, known as the Swiss Brethren, were loyal followers of Zwingli. Essentially, it is their attempt to bring to fulfilment of Zwingli's hope for the

restoration of a primitive Christian church.¹

However, with the further development of the Zwinglian reformation, the Swiss Brethren came to disagree with Zwingli's strategy and timing to reform the church.² They felt that Zwingli was going too slowly and too mildly in his reformation. Greater earnestness was required, they thought, than Zwingli was manifesting.³ By 1523, it appeared that this feeling of dissatisfaction had gone deeper, and that a tinge of disappointment began to colour the Swiss Brethren's attitude toward Zwingli. They realized that Zwingli had failed to provide the leadership necessary to set up truly apostolic church, because he failed to free the church from the power of the civil authorities.⁴ When it became evident that Zwingli had chosen a course that would necessarily lead to a union of church and state, a rupture took place.

The split first came into evidence during the second disputation with the Catholic churchmen at Zürich in October of the same year. At this disputation, the Swiss Brethren looked for the immediate abolition of images and of the mass,

¹Hajo Holborn, The Social Basis of the German Reformation, quoted in Walter Klaassen, "The Nature of the Anabaptist Protest," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 45, no. 3(1971): 291.

²Ibid., p. 118.

³John Christian Wenger, Glimpses of Mennonite History and Doctrine (Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1959), p. 19.

⁴Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church, fourth edition (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1985), p. 448.

which the city authorities were not prepared to do.⁵ Conrad Grebel, one of the founders of the Swiss Brethren, in demanding the abolition of the Mass without further hesitation, declared: "It would be futile if they did not begin to change the mass. Much has been said about the mass, but there would be no one who would be willing to stop this great abomination to God."⁶ However, Zwingli, at that time, felt that a union of church and state would best serve his reformation program in Zürich.⁷ He therefore was prepared to make only such changes as he could bring about with the approval of the city council. This led Zwingli to reply to Grebel: "Milords will discern how the mass should henceforth be properly observed."⁸ This statement, in the eyes of the Swiss Brethren, was absolutely unexpected and very disappointing because it contradicted Zwingli's earlier teaching that the civil authorities were not to rule over the Word of God.⁹ It also made the Swiss Brethren believe that Zwingli had seriously modified his earlier reformation program

⁵John Horsch, Mennonite in Europe (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Mennonite Publishing House), 1950, p. 36.

⁶Leland Harder ed., The Sources of Swiss Anabaptism (Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1985), p. 242.

⁷Horsch, John, Mennonite in Europe (Pennsylvania: Mennonite Publishing House, 1950), p. 38.

⁸Leland Harder ed., The Sources of Swiss Anabaptism (Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1985), p. 242.

⁹Ibid., p. 38.

as well as his doctrinal position.¹⁰ He was going to compromise the revealed truth in the Bible in deference to a secular power. Without doubt, for the Swiss Brethren, this only meant that the authority of the Word of God would be sacrificed on the altar of political expediency. As a result, the Reformation in Zürich would necessarily be put under the control of the secular authorities, and eventually lead to an aberration of apostolic Christianity no less serious than the papal system. In other words, the Swiss Brethren believed that Zwingli's compromise with the secular authorities was actually a betrayal of the true ideals of the Reformation. About this point of view of the Swiss Brethren, a contemporary chronicle of the Anabaptist movement gave a historical demonstration when it commented on the compromising nature of the Lutheran and Zwinglian Reformation: "As soon as they began to cling to worldly power and put their trust in human help, they were just as bad--like someone mending an old kettle and only making a bigger hole They struck the jug from the pope's hand but kept the broken pieces in their own."¹¹

It was not hard to see that the Swiss Brethren now were put into an embarrassing situation. In other words, as Zwingli's loyal followers, they would be asked to hand themselves over, body and soul, to a secular power, even

¹⁰Horsch, John, Mennonite in Europe (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Mennonite Publishing House, 1950), p. 21.

¹¹The Hutterian Brethren, The Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren (New York: Plough Publishing House, 1987), p. 41.

though they were striving to put off the control of the papal system so that the sole authority of the Scriptures might be recovered. In fact, the real issue here was not the disputation of the liturgy, but rather a bitter and irreducible struggle between two mutually exclusive ideas of the church. So Simon Stumpf, another founder of the Swiss Brethren, cried out: "Master Huldrych! You have no authority to place the decision in Milords' hands, for the decision is already made: the Spirit of God decides."¹² It was from this time that the Brethren declined to follow Zwingli in his departure from his former position. In the following days, despite continuing attempts to discuss the matters of the liturgies, the gap between the two parties widened.

1.2 The Final Break and the First Believers' Baptism

Finally, at the beginning of 1525, a complete rupture took place. This resulted in the rise of the Swiss Brethren movement. The trigger point that touched it off was the controversy over infant baptism. After the second disputation in 1523, a serious question had developed amongst the Swiss Brethren regarding the validity of infant baptism. Wilhelm Reublin, the first Swiss priest to marry, began early in 1524 to preach against infant baptism. As a result of his

¹²Ibid., p. 242.

agitation, several parents declined to present their infants for baptism.¹³ This resulted in a serious crisis between the Swiss Brethren and the Zwinglians. Several disputations were held on the issue. However, it was readily seen that behind the controversy of baptism the more basic question was still the role of the civil government in the reformation of the church. Baptism became important just because it was the most obvious dividing line between the two parties. There was no question but that both Zwinglians and secular authorities would not accept the believers' baptism, because, to accept it would require going against the state church. Therefore, a civil decree was issued on January 18, 1525. All unbaptized children were ordered to be present for baptism within eight days after their birth. On January 21, the city council published another mandate to order the cessation of unauthorized preaching and all illicit gathering for worship.¹⁴ To the Swiss Brethren, the decisions of the city council meant nothing more than the challenge of an earthly power against the Word of God. It also convinced them that it would be vain to further hope for their ideal of re-instituting a completely new type of church organization within the Zwinglian reformation movement. Now it was time to withdraw from it and to begin their own reformation program.

¹³George Huntston Williams, The Radical Reformation (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1952), pp. 96-97.

¹⁴John Horsch, Mennonite in Europe (Pennsylvania: Mennonite Publishing House, 1950), p. 48.

In the evening of that same day, a small group of Zwingli's former followers gathered at a house near Zürich. "They prayed that God grant it to them to do His divine will and that He might have mercy on them."¹⁵ After the prayer the famous event in which Grebel baptized Blaurock occurred. By that action, the Brethren cut themselves loose from the rest of Christendom-- Protestant as well as Catholic. The historical description of this memorable occasion was preserved in The Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren:

"George Blaurock stood up and asked Conrad Grebel in the name of God to baptize him with true Christian baptism on his faith and recognition of the truth. With this request he knelt down, and Conrad baptized him Then the others turned to George in their turn, asking him to baptize them, which he did. And so, in great fear of God, together they surrendered themselves to the Lord . . . This was the beginning of separation from the world and its evil ways."¹⁶

With this first believers' baptism, the earliest congregation of the Swiss Brethren was constituted. It signalled the Brethren's final repudiation of the established church. For the first time, a new type of church organization had become a reality in the history of Christianity.¹⁷ This action by the Swiss Brethren therefore was also thought of as the most radical of the Reformation, for it questioned

¹⁵The Hutterian Brethren, The Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren (New York: Plough Publishing House, 1987), p. 45.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁷Tim Dowley ed., Eerdmans' Handbook to the History of Christianity (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), p. 400.

virtually all the assumptions upon which sixteenth century society, culture, and church rested.¹⁸

The reason the Swiss Brethren split from the established church over the issue of baptism was because they understood Christianity and baptism in a totally different way. The Swiss Brethren understood Christianity in terms of following Christ in all of their life, and accepting His full lordship with consequent absolute obedience. The church, according to the Swiss Brethren, was a voluntary and exclusive fellowship of truly converted believers in Christ, committed to follow Him in full obedience as Lord. It was a brotherly, disciplined, and separated body with all members being responsible for its total life.¹⁹ Therefore, the doctrine of the inwardly disciplined but externally free apostolic church was rightly recognized as one of the common marks of the movement.²⁰ This concept of the church was held in sharp distinction from the prevailing inclusive concept of both Catholic and Protestant state-churches. They thought of Christianity as "a certain phase of civilization, controlled and bounded by the agreement of princes."²¹ The church was

¹⁸Walter Klaassen, "The Nature of the Anabaptist Protest," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, 45 (1971), p. 311.

¹⁹John C. Wenger, "The Schleithem Confession of Faith," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 19, no. 3(1945): 247.

²⁰George H. Williams, The Radical Reformation (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962), p. xxix.

²¹Franklin Martin Littell, The Anabaptist View of Church (Boston: Star King Press, 1958), p. 18.

transformed into a great mass institution, or became a mere department of the state. All the citizens of a state were to be formally incorporated into the church by universal and compulsory infant baptism without regard to the personal attitude of the individual.²² However, the concept of believers' church resulted in the Swiss Brethren being in tension with the state church and the society around them. It brought them merciless persecution that was characterized by imprisonment, deportation and even drowning. Certainly, this persecution also deeply affected their way of life and their view of "the world."

1.3 The Schleithem Confession and A New Way of Life

On February 24, 1527, in order to combat aberrations from within the movement and to resist challenges from without, the Swiss Brethren called a meeting. This meeting, which was held at Schleithem near Zürich, was thought of as the first synod of the Protestant Reformation.²³ The leading figure at this meeting was the former Benedictine prior, Michael Sattler. He drew up the principles of the Swiss Brethren in seven

²²Harold S. Bender, "Church," in The Mennonite Encyclopedia 1st ed.

²³Tim Dowley, Eerdmans' Handbook to the History of Christianity (Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), p. 400.

articles, known as the "Brotherly Union" or the Schleithem Confession. The articles accurately presented the faith and practices of the Swiss Brethren, and so, they were adopted unanimously at the meeting. It became a highly significant document and was "recognized as a watershed articulation of certain Swiss Anabaptist distinctive."²⁴ The articles were copied and circulated quickly and widely among the Brethren.²⁵ During the next decade, most Anabaptists in Switzerland and South Germany came to agree with the beliefs it laid down.

Strictly speaking, the Schleithem Confession was not an entire body of religious doctrines. It did not attempt to present a doctrinal formulation.²⁶ There were no strictly theological concepts given in it. Many basic theological issues were not discussed. The major subjects covered in the articles were order and discipline within the congregation.²⁷ As a representative statement of the Swiss Brethren, the Schleithem Confession defined the Brethren's view of baptism, ban, the Lord's Supper, separation from the world, leaders, government, and the taking of oaths. Baptism, in the Confession, is made a symbol of Christian faith and of those

²⁴Harold S. Bender ed., The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. V, p. 797.

²⁵ John C. Wenger, "The Schleithem Confession of Faith," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 14, no. 3(1945): 243.

²⁶Ibid., p. 246.

²⁷William R. Estep, The Anabaptist Story, p. 42.

who intend to live a life united with Christ. It is to be administered to those who manifest divine regeneration in their manner of life, who believe in their forgiveness in Christ, and who want to be baptized. Infant baptism is labelled "the highest and chief abomination of the pope."²⁸ The church is regarded as being composed only of baptized or regenerated Christians, who united as the body of Christ by the common observance of the Lord's Supper. Church discipline is to be exercised over those who have united with the brotherhood and who fail to realize in their lives their high calling in Christ. The duties of the pastor are clearly defined. His chief responsibility is to read the Scriptures, teach and help all the members toward advancement in their spiritual life. He leads in prayer, administers the Lord's Supper, and undertakes the general oversight of the congregation. He is to discipline the careless, to excommunicate those who refuse spiritual help. While civil government is held to be a necessity in this imperfect world, Christians who are called by Christ must withdraw from its every institution. "A separation shall be made from the evil and from the wickedness that the devil planted in the world."²⁹ Christians are to follow the law of love as taught by the New Testament, and to leave the worldly sword to the officers of the state. They also should not take any form of

²⁸Ibid., p. 248.

²⁹Ibid., p. 249.

an oath, for only God is able to fulfil His promises and human beings cannot do even the tiniest thing on their own.

As mentioned above, the Schleithem Confession did not attempt to treat the entire scope of Christian doctrine. It was a summary of differences between the Swiss Brethren and the state-church Reformers of the time. Those differences were clearly revealed by its view of two important concepts: "believers" and "the world." In a great measure the Swiss Brethren's understanding of these concepts determined their divergence from most of Christendom and the surrounding world. Their understanding of these concepts also had a wholesome effect on their understanding of religious and social values. It is from this starting point that the Swiss Brethren broke completely away from the medieval concept of the state church, and drew a clear line between the church and the general social order.

1.4 The "Believers" of Walking in Christ's Footsteps

The Schleithem Confession didn't directly give a definition of "believers," but its true implication was disclosed in the discussion of several central themes, like baptism, the ban and the Lord's Supper. In the first article of the Schleithem Confession, which is concerned with baptism, the Brethren treated baptism as an outer sign that

the old life of sin had been abandoned and a new life of following Christ had begun. According to the Schleithem Confession, the person who was baptized should not be anyone but a "believer." Infant baptism therefore was "no baptism at all but only a 'water-bath'."³⁰ Thus, baptism itself implied some basic requirements for a candidate of baptism. This means that before baptism can take place people first must learn about repentance and the amendment of life, and then truly believe in the personal forgiveness of sins through Christ. Baptism is only for those who want to "walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ," and who "wish to be buried with Him in death."³¹ In other words, true faith is the prerequisite of baptism. Not only does baptism confirm regeneration and belief in Christ, it also inducts the believer into the body of Christ on earth. It in fact puts a seal on the believer's willingness to follow Christ for his whole life--to walk in Christ's footsteps. Therefore, the real essence of baptism is a commitment to faithfully imitate Christ. These two aspects of baptism--faith and imitation--provide for us the Brethren's definition of "believers." It is also this conviction of the Swiss Brethren, namely, that baptism should follow a confession of faith and an expression of commitment to imitate Christ, which constructed the

³⁰Harold S. Bender, "Baptism," in The Mennonite Encyclopedia 1st ed.

³¹Ibid., p. 248.

cornerstone of their separatist ecclesiology.

In the second article of the Schleithem Confession, the ban was formulated. For the Swiss Brethren, the introduction of the ban was a subsequent truth to their principle of believers' baptism. That was because the "believers," in the Schleithem Confession, were clearly assumed to be those who had an experience of conversion and devoted themselves to God in a new life through baptism.³² However, according to the Schleithem Confession, only when the church was in a state of purity, it would be possible for all the believers to do the will of Christ and keep themselves without sin.³³ The ban thus was thought to be necessary to preserve the purity of the body of believers. As an instrument of church discipline, the ban "shall be employed with all those who have given themselves to the Lord, to walk in His commandments, and with all those who are baptized into the one body of Christ . . . and yet who slip sometimes and fall into error and sin, being inadvertently overtaken."³⁴ What we should pay special attention to is the potential meaning regarding the ban. That is the act of "walking in Christ" was put in a much more important place than the pious promise of believing in the forgiveness of sins. The former is, in fact, a basic

³²Ibid., p. 249.

³³Ibid., p. 248.

³⁴John C. Wenger, "The Schleithem Confession of Faith," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 14, no. 3(1945): 248.

requirement of life for all believers.

In the article concerning the Lord's Supper, it appeared clearly that all the "believers" should be unified "by baptism in one body of Christ which is the church of God and whose head is Christ."³⁵ In other words, the "believers" were those who were "called by one God to one faith, to one baptism, to one Spirit, to one body, with all the children of God's church."³⁶ Here a special community, which was "called unto God out of the world,"³⁷ became necessary for the "believers," because there was only one Lord's Supper, and it was celebrated only among those who had been identified with the "one body" by the "one baptism."

From the above we can draw a picture of "believers" as defined by the Swiss Brethren faith. The "believers" first should be "learned" people, who have experienced inner repentance and amendment of life through their knowledge of God. After being committed to Christ, they should be baptized by their own voluntary request. This would then incorporate them into the earthly body of Christ, of which He is the head. In the body of Christ they were to keep pure from sins and be separated from "the world." This was made possible by the means of the ban and the Lord's Supper. They committed

³⁵Ibid., p. 249.

³⁶Ibid., p. 249.

³⁷Ibid., p. 249.

themselves to Christ, "conformed to the image of Christ,"³⁸ and "walked in the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

In a word, the result of the Schleithem Confession was that the Swiss Brethren transformed their entire faith into a special community which was fashioned after the teachings and example of Christ. The members of this community, as the committed and practising disciples of Christ,³⁹ pledged to live according to the highest standard of the New Testament, insisted on doing everything according to God's will, and made manifest God's grace in their behaviour. They were completely resolved to render obedience to Christ as their Lord, and to carry out Christ's doctrine in their lives. As Sattler himself said in a letter, the "believers" were "the members of the household of God and fellow citizens of the saints, and not of the world."⁴⁰

1.5 The Dualism of the World-View

Parallel to the concept of "believers" as the committed and practising disciples of Christ, who lived in nonconformity

³⁸John H. Yoder trans. and ed., The Legacy of Michael Sattler (Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1973), p. 22.

³⁹John C. Wenger, "The Schleithem Confession of Faith," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 14, no. 3(1945): 247.

⁴⁰John H. Yoder trans. and ed., The Legacy of Michael Sattler (Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1973), p. 23.

to the worldly way of life, "the world," in the Schleithem Confession, was viewed as "the evil" and "the wicked," which was not united with God and Christ.⁴¹ The Swiss Brethren, according to their understanding of the Scriptures, declared that since the devil had been planted, "the world" belonged to "Belial," and was "bad," "dark," and "unrighteous." From it, nothing but abominable things could spring forth.⁴² Moreover, its existence was a secular order, or a state outside the believers' community. It was ordained by God for the punishment of criminals and the promotion of order. The "believers" had nothing in common with this dark and sinful world. It is clear that the Swiss Brethren set up a line of demarcation between "the world" of "darkness," which was presided over by Belial, and the kingdom of Christ which was united with God. The kingdom of Christ, according to the Swiss Brethren, was both a coming world, ardently expected, and a world already in the making here and now by the practice of brotherly love.⁴³ It was composed of those who were united with God in Christ through baptism, discipline, and the celebration of the Lord's Supper. However, "the world" was composed of the followers of Belial, who did not walk in the

⁴¹John C. Wenger, "The Schleithem Confession of Faith," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 14, no. 3(1945): 249.

⁴²Ibid., p. 249.

⁴³Robert Friedmann, "The Essence of Anabaptist Faith," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 41, no. 1(1967): 9.

obedience of faith, and did not wish to do God's will.⁴⁴ It was "carried on in flat contradiction to the command of God;"⁴⁵ therefore, it was also "outside the perfection of Christ."⁴⁶ This view of "the world" was clearly expressed in the sixth article of the Schleithem Confession with a discussion of the sword:

The sword is ordained of God outside the perfection of Christ. It punishes and puts to death the wicked, and guards and protect the good. In the Law the sword was ordained for the punishment of the wicked and for their death, and the same [sword] is [now] ordained to be used by the worldly magistrates.

In the perfection of Christ, however, only the ban is used for a warning and for the excommunication of the one who has sinned, without putting the flesh to death, ---simply the warning and the command to sin no more.⁴⁷

This formulation makes clear the particular world-view within which all the teachings of Schleithem Confession must be placed.⁴⁸ It represented a judgment on the secular social order, which they called "the world," as non-Christian. In other words, it was also a negative expression of the positive requirement of "believers."

According to the Schleithem Confession, the Christian

⁴⁴John C. Wenger, "The Schleithem Confession of Faith," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 14, no. 3(1945): 249.

⁴⁵Ibid., p.249.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 250.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 250.

⁴⁸Arnold C. Snyder, The Life and Thought of Michael Sattler (Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1984), p. 119.

community and the worldly society could not have any partnership with each other.⁴⁹ "The world" would not tolerate the practice of the "believers" in the society, and the community of the "believers" could not tolerate the practice of worldly ways amongst its membership. Therefore, the only way out was to "shun" and "flee" from "the world," namely, to create a community that was different from the world, and in which the Christ's way could be practised. As the Schleiteim Confession formulated: "We shall not have fellowship with them [the wicked] and not run with them in the multitude of their abominations."⁵⁰ The body of Christ thus "may remain complete and united to its own advancement and upbuilding."⁵¹

From the Schleitheim Confession, it also can be seen that the Swiss Brethren strived to meet the standards of the Christian life as they understood them to be laid down in the teachings of Jesus and the apostles and by example in His life. Thus, the Scriptures, particularly the New Testament, for them, was regarded as not only the Gospel, but also as containing God's plan for the righteous individual and the community. Therefore, we can say that the Schleitheim Confession's view of "believers" and "the world" gave an

⁴⁹John C Wenger, "The Schleitheim Confession of Faith," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 14, no. 3(1945): 249.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 249.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 251.

initial model of the Mennonite's understanding of themselves and the surrounding world. These ideas were developed by their successors, especially by Menno Simons and Dirk Philips, through their understanding of the Scriptures and of the practice of the true Christian life. It was under their leadership that the movement flourished and received its definite character. However, the starting-point of the well-trodden path is here--the Swiss Brethren and the Schleithem Confession.

CHAPTER 2

MENNO SIMONS AND MENNONITE CHURCH

From the earliest years, the Swiss Brethren made their great goal the establishment of a true church patterned after the apostolic model. This was not only the primary challenge to Reformation by the Brethren, but also a step that influenced the whole course of the Anabaptist movement. This movement, however, did not everywhere remain on the same course. For example, the overzealous actions of the Münsterites led to the most violent and tragic episode in the history of the movement. As a result of it, almost all European churches and governments of the time exploited Münsterite excesses to make Anabaptists an all-embracing by-word for fanatics. However, we should remember that the mainstream of the Anabaptist movement always projected its goal by means of a peaceful withdrawal from "the world," in which it expressed both its dissatisfaction with the existing social order and its enthusiasm for a new life. For a considerably long time, this original pacifist current had maintained the ascendancy until a persistent and merciless persecution gradually gave the opposite tendency a vast increase in power. Finally, in 1534, a group of extreme

Anabaptists gave the tendency a revolutionary expression and directed the fanatic tragedy in Münster. With the fall of Münster, the movement came to return to its original pacifist path. A distinctive model of the committed community of believers, which would theoretically exist without any political involvement, began to develop into shape. During that process, Menno Simons' accession to Anabaptism gave the movement more energy to disassociate from its fanatical elements. His contributing labours put an important cornerstone for building a biblical Anabaptist church.

2.1 Menno Simons and His Early Writings

It has been often said that there is no greater name among the evangelical Anabaptists of the sixteenth century than that of Menno Simons. "As an author and exponent of the faith, as a defender of the church against the calumnies of the opponents and persecutors he outranked by far all other writers."¹ His life and teachings are so inseparably linked with the development of the movement that it is impossible to treat one without the other.

Menno Simons was born in the village of Witmarsum near Friesland of the Netherlands in 1496. He was consecrated as

¹John Horsch, Mennonite in Europe (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Mennonite Publishing House, 1950), p. 205.

a priest at Utreht, when he was twenty eight years old. In 1536, having experienced a series of inward struggles,² Menno renounced the Catholic church and took the step to join the people--who had been briefly outlawed and condemned to death--in a life of homelessness, poverty, and danger. It was probably early in 1537 that Menno was ordained as an elder by his brethren.³ After then, this former Catholic priest spend about six years to labour in the Netherlands while enduring "excessive anxiety, oppression, affliction, misery, and persecution."⁴ From 1543, Menno devoted the rest of his life to labours in northern Germany, during which time he, as a hunted heretic, travelled extensively in various parts of Holstein and the Baltic seacoast region.⁵ He visited the scattered Anabaptist groups and inspired them with his attractive preaching. After a lengthy sickness, his death came on January 31, 1561, twenty-five years after becoming an Anabaptist.

With Menno's rising influence, almost the whole of the dissenters in northern Germany and in the Netherlands accepted his formulation of Anabaptist teachings. At the same time,

²William R. Estep, The Anabaptist Story (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), p. 118.

³John Horsch, Mennonite in Europe (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Mennonite Publishing House, 1950), p. 193.

⁴John Christian Wenger ed., The Complete Writings of Menno Simons (Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1984), p. 647.

⁵William R. Estep, The Anabaptist Story, p. 122.

the Anabaptist movement, under his leadership, safely went through the time of great tribulation.⁶ From that time on, the evangelical Anabaptists came to be known as Mennonites, although he was not the founder of the movement. The establishment of Menno's leadership in the Anabaptist movement therefore is thought of as the sign of the beginning of a new era in the history of Anabaptist movement.⁷

During the initial period of Menno's ministry, the Anabaptist movement was experiencing merciless persecution. The odour of death from the Münster tragedy was still heavy. The notoriety of Münsterite fanaticism threatened the existence of the movement. For the sake of clearing the Anabaptists of Münsterite connotations, and returning the movement from the radical trend, Menno wrote several important books, especially Foundation of Christian Doctrine (1539) and The True Christian Faith (1541). In these writings, Menno gave a simple and forthright presentation of Anabaptist faith and practice, and stated clearly the principles of the Anabaptist brotherhood. Some fundamental doctrines of Christianity such as repentance, faith, the new birth, and holiness were explored in depth. At the same time, Menno sternly refuted what he thought to be the false doctrines, held by Roman Catholicism, established Protestantism, and

⁶John Horsch, Mennonite in Europe, p. 208.

⁷William R. Estep, The Anabaptist Story (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), p. 115.

fanatical Anabaptism.

Menno's writings reveal a man with a passionate devotion to truth who earnestly pursued those issues that separated him from other Christian leaders. They also reveal a man of personal strength of character who was not ultimately pulled down by the rigors of his life as a leader, by the mortal danger in which he lived for so long, and by the charges of heresy and false teaching with which fellow Christians attacked him.⁸ Menno, therefore, gained a great influence with the common people, and his writings were widely read, although he did not write systematic treatises.⁹ He did a great service by defending, on biblical grounds, the beliefs of his brethren, and by building up the Anabaptist movement in terms of doctrinal correctness and strength. He thereby confirmed the faith of many who were disturbed by some conflicting questions of the day. Menno's clear vision of the nature of Christianity, particularly of the practical life of holiness and the high place of the church in the life of the believers, continued to separate between the "believers" and "the world," and enriched their characteristic features in a great measure. His teachings of faith and its effects, namely, the realistic and physical "imitation" of Christ's life and work in the context of the real world, shaped the

⁸John Christian Wenger ed., The Complete Writings of Menno Simons (Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1984), p. 28.

⁹John Christian Wenger ed., The Complete Writings of Menno Simons (Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1984), p. 29.

model of Mennonite church and distinguished it from other fanatical Anabaptist groups.

2.2 Menno's Teachings of Faith and the Reborn Man

Like all his contemporaries, Menno regarded faith as central. He thought that it was through grace and faith that people accepted the Gospel that announced the love of God and the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ. They awakened from "their past vain lives and conduct," and became able to "hear and believe the Word of the Lord." Then, their hearts were "renewed, converted, justified, and became pious, peaceable and joyous." As a result of it, they were reborn as "the children of God," and became "the joint heirs of Christ and the possessors of eternal life" to approach with full confidence "the throne of grace."¹⁰ Therefore, Menno claimed that faith "is more precious than gold, silver, or precious stones," and "nothing can be compared with it."¹¹ It brings man "a new converted, and changed mind,"¹² transplants him to Christ, and identifies all his thoughts and works with "the Spirit, Word, and ways of the Lord."¹³ Faith, according to

¹⁰Ibid., p. 114.

¹¹Ibid., p. 116.

¹²Ibid., p. 659.

¹³Ibid., p. 659.

Menno, was the prerequisite of having access to God, and the starting-point of forgiveness of sins. All righteousness would issue from it.¹⁴ In other words, it is the foundation of Christian existence. All the substance of Christianity, like the new birth, true repentance and salvation, depends on it.

According to Menno, all human beings experienced that they were prevented from hearing the true Gospel of God by "this foolish, blind world"; for in it there was nothing other than worldly "truth" that was false and was against Christ and His Word. People were taught to "seek and love dross more than gold, chaff more than wheat, lies more than truth, and darkness more than light."¹⁵ However, since man is born of the Word of the Lord through the Spirit, God has provided a way for the blind people to overcome their blindness. In other words, God offers all human beings a "glorious and divine gift of His wisdom."¹⁶ The gift gives them confidence, courage and wisdom to triumph over "the vanquished serpent and his seed--the despisers, liars, and blood-shedders." Furthermore, it enables the awakened people to enter upon "the path of peace, beneath the easy yoke of the Gospel."¹⁷ This gift is faith. All who receive the gift from

¹⁴Ibid., p. 116, 240.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 324.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 325.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 324, 328.

God "receive Jesus Christ, forgiveness of sins, a new mind, and eternal life."¹⁸ They will yearn to "walk in the commandments of the Lord, to do the will of the Lord."¹⁹ Therefore, Menno thought of faith as "a tree loaded with all manner of good and delicious fruit."²⁰

However, according to Menno, faith is by no means just intellectual assent to the facts about the salvation of God. It also cannot be grasped with the eyes and senses of human flesh.²¹ It is an experienced reality or a process in which the individual takes an active part. In other words, it does not only change the status of man before God, but also transforms him. It "manifests itself in all righteousness and works of love," namely, in living unblamably according to God's blessed will and working in God's divine commandments.²² Therefore, Menno believed that this process coming to faith in God consisted of several stages.

First, man must hear the Word, and impress it upon his heart.²³ This is particularly necessary, for when man knows neither God nor Christ and is a stranger to the life of God, he is like a lost sheep who cannot find the truth of the

¹⁸Ibid., p. 116.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 307.

²⁰Ibid., p. 116.

²¹Ibid., p. 328.

²²Ibid., p. 307.

²³Ibid., p. 337, 342.

kingdom of God. Yet, when he is confronted by the proclamation of the gospel, he becomes to know his sinfulness and disobedience and calls for obedience and discipleship. It is in this sense that Menno particularly emphasized that man at first must grasp the true regenerating knowledge of the Gospel. This is also the major reason that Menno opposed infant baptism, for he thought an infant was not able to hear any word of God and learn any knowledge of Christ.²⁴ Moreover, according to Menno, the learning of the knowledge of Christ is done only through "the unction of the Holy Ghost,"²⁵ for man by nature cannot understand the things of God unless the Spirit enlightens him.²⁶

Secondly, man must truly believe the Word of God and sincerely repent of his sins.²⁷ In other words, the gospel is heard as the promise of forgiveness and everlasting life just for those who are willing to obey it. This means accepting all the words of God, both "the threatening commands" and "the consoling Gospel," and trusting in them "as the true and sure Word of God."²⁸ Man thus comes to know the judgment and wrath of the Lord against all the transgressions of God's will. This brings forth the fear of God. The fear of

²⁴Ibid., p. 241.

²⁵Ibid., p. 328.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 327-328.

²⁷Ibid., p. 241, 329, 337.

²⁸Ibid., p. 659.

the Lord as "the beginning of wisdom"²⁹ then becomes a real power that roots deeply in the heart of man and leads him to mortification of the desires of the flesh and drives out all his sins.³⁰ This is true repentance, and it leads man into obedience to the Word--not to do or agree to anything that is forbidden by the Word. As Menno concluded: "The true evangelical faith that makes the heart upright and pious before God, moves, changes, urges, and constrains a man so that he will always hate the evil and gladly do the things which are right and good."³¹ This is the new birth of man, and the beginning of faith.

After receiving faith, man is sealed through the Word in his conscience, which bears the witness of God's righteousness, grace, and mercy to him. He is inwardly changed, and a new life is brought to him.³² This new life makes him "a new being." "All manner of precious fruits of righteousness is present, such as the fear and love of God, mercy, friendship, chastity, temperance, humility, confidence, truth, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."³³ He is able to know the love of God, then respond to the love of God with

²⁹Ibid., p. 337.

³⁰Ibid., p. 337.

³¹Ibid., p. 337.

³²Ibid., p. 336, 341.

³³Ibid., p. 342.

love toward God and man.³⁴ In this final stage of faith, "the ardent love of God" results in doing what God commands and what Christ examples "with body, soul, possession, and blood."³⁵ This transformed life is the natural expression of being united with Christ's divine nature. Therefore, the evidence of true faith is good works or fruits of faith--obedience to God's commands.³⁶ Thus, "the fruitless faith," according to Menno, is "useless, vain, and dead." In other words, where works of faith are not in evidence, there is no true faith.³⁷ Here we can see that Menno put his emphasis upon the experiential nature of faith, or the moral and ethical life of a believer. He insisted that faith must precede the fruits such as the love toward God and man, and the imitation of Christ in daily life. It must manifest its nature through the expression of human life. "It works ceaselessly in love, enters willingly into righteousness, mortifies flesh and blood, crucifies the lusts and desires, rejoices in the cross of Christ, renews and regenerates."³⁸ Generally speaking, spiritual reality by its very nature must express itself. It cannot stay hidden but finds expression. According to Menno, God's Word knows of no other faith than

³⁴Ibid., p. 329.

³⁵Ibid., p. 338.

³⁶Ibid., p. 339.

³⁷Ibid., p. 241, 328.

³⁸Ibid., p. 116.

the powerful and fruitful one that regenerates human heart and renews his life.³⁹ This idea, to a great degree, is the starting point of Menno's understanding of the nature of Christianity and the Christian life. It leads to one of the key concepts of Menno, namely, his idea of the non-continuity of the church with the society in which the church stands. He believed that the best way for a Christian to live out this transformed life was to live in a special community--a community made up only of the followers of Christ, and that was disciplined and socially separated from "the world." This is one of the greatest distinguishing marks of the Mennonites compared to the rest of Christendom.

It should be noted that, according to Menno, this obedience to and imitation of Christ are not arbitrary or forced. They are the inevitable consequences of true faith. In other words, they are prompted by love toward God and the hunger for God's grace. The nature of the new life and the new birth includes a strong willingness and hearty desire for obedience and imitation. Obedience indicates the believer is changed into "newness of life," and he is walking "by the gift of grace" in the power of his new faith. His spirit is now of God, and it is open to the leading of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁰ In some aspects, this obedience also reflects the extent of human faith, for man obeys the commands of God only according to his

³⁹Ibid., p. 328.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 505.

understanding of God's grace and love, that is, "according to the measure of faith."⁴¹ Imitation, in the same way, gives evidence that the believer is walking with Christ in newness of life. He is in Christ and Christ is in him, therefore he lives no longer "in the old life of sin," but "in new life of righteousness that comes by faith."⁴² He is "taught, ruled, and driven by the Holy Spirit."⁴³ It appears that, in Menno, the process of one's conversion is completed both in the change of inner spirit and in its outward expression. Man becomes a "new creature," so that his life is changed to a new life. Faith begins with hearing the Word of God, submitting the mind and heart to the leading of the Holy Spirit. From this starting-point, man heartily believes in Christ as Saviour and repents of his sins, feels fear before God and accepts God's love, gives love toward God and man, and trusts in the saving work of Christ. This faith finds its highest expression in the action of loving God, obeying the commands of God, and following Christ. "It manifests itself in all righteousness and works of love."⁴⁴ It characterizes a special relationship with Christ marked by discipleship to Christ. Therefore, it is a living, working and practising experience, both inward and outward.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 505.

⁴²Ibid., p. 506.

⁴³Ibid., p. 123.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 307.

2.3 The "New Life" and the Discipleship with Christ

In his view of faith, Menno paid more attention to the "new life" than any other part of faith. He pointed out that if people walked in Christ, they would become companions and heirs of Christ, partake in the body of Christ, "flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone," and share his heavenly nature.⁴⁵ In the new life, people become "a chosen and holy people," who are called "out of darkness to His marvellous light,"⁴⁶ serve God in love and accept the love of God, and finally enter into the kingdom of God.⁴⁷ On the contrary, those who are blind regarding the Word walk in the way of evil and their lusts. They "diligently follow, teach, and promote all manner of falsehood, deceit, fraud, and idolatry."⁴⁸ It is obvious here that the people who were renewed are completely different from the rest of the world. Individuals outside the group cannot enjoy the righteous life within a special community. Therefore, the participation in the nature and body of Christ itself implies a real discipleship with Christ himself. Christ, for the believer, is not only a divine being for worship, and not just a Saviour but rather the Lord who should be followed and obeyed. With Him, the believer enters into a

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 328.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 326.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 116, 328.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 306.

covenant to control his whole life. From now on, his life is just an expression of Christ's life and teachings in the world. These demands to the believer will inevitably lead to a special twofold relationship both among the believers themselves and between the believer and the world. For the believer himself, he receives a new nature as a result of responding to the call of Christ and forsaking his sins. He and his brethren gather together under the call of Christ and compose a body, pledging to the highest standard of Christian life. The true brotherhood and love among the believers become the natural expression of community life. It should be noted that, according to Menno, this idea of mutual brotherhood and love had some special meaning to the believers. It is that they should have concern for each other both in spiritual and material matters. But to those outside of the "body," the way to express love was by preaching the gospel and by the testimony of their life and works. This view of Menno in some measure contributed to the formation of the Mennonite church model and affected their attitudes to the surrounding world. It is therefore thought of as "the most characteristic, most central, most essential and regulative concept in Anabaptist thought."⁴⁹

Menno's emphasis upon discipleship as a witness of the regeneration has some more important implications. He thought

⁴⁹Harold S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Theology of Discipleship," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 24, no. 1 (1950): 27.

that the Christian's relationship with Jesus Christ must go beyond inner experience and acceptance of doctrines. It must involve a daily walk with God, in which Christ's teaching and example shape a transformed style of life. In other words, Christ is not only the indispensable object of faith but also the model of the Christian life-style. This flowed directly from Menno's idea of the living faith necessarily brought forth the real fruit. Its basic meaning is that of unconditional obedience to the commands of Christ, and making the whole of life subject to the lordship of Christ. It includes two fundamental principles: First, the believer's relationship to Christ; second, the believer's relationship to the world. In their relationship to Christ the believer is to take the example and teachings of Christ as positive commands and as the guide for their life and practice. This means fulfilling them in one's entire way of life, even in how one lives in society. In their relationship to the world, they are to separate from and not to conform to it. Menno's primary focus was on the relationship of the individual Christian to Christ. He emphasized that those who received the true regeneration through the seed of the Word should persevere in that new life unto the end, and continue to heed to the calling of Christ in "a new, godly walk." They should "ponder the law and will of God with all earnestness," and "with body, soul, possession, and blood" obey and follow Christ, do "what He has commanded" and "leave undone that

which He has forbidden."⁵⁰ They must remain steadfast and perfect as "the chosen children of God," and overcome all the enemies of the kingdom of God, although they have united with Christ, and become "holy vessels of honour, useful and ready to every good work."⁵¹ We can learn from Menno that the inner experience of the forgiving and cleansing grace of God in Christ is just the first step in the whole experience of salvation, although it is the essence of the whole experience. Salvation, according to Menno, is not primarily the attainment of a right status but rather the production of a right life. Christianity does not only mean the enjoyment of forgiveness and peace with God through justification, it means much more. The key characteristic of the true Christianity is that it transforms the whole way of life. It transforms the lifestyle of the individual who embraces Christianity and creates in him a desire to see the people in his society embrace Christianity as well. In other words, its true meaning lies in its inseparability of faith and practice, belief and life. Therefore, to Menno, faith is not just the entrance into salvation, the means by which a new life is produced; it is the practice of the new life. This expresses the whole substance of faith. That is to say, the true faith, according to Menno, is both a process of believing in Christ as Saviour

⁵⁰John Christian Wenger ed., The Complete Writings of Menno Simons (Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1984), p. 338.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 58, 59.

and a process of living in a holy life. The essence of Christianity is the realization of God's will in the lives of Christian disciples, and the redemption must inevitably bear rich fruit in daily life. Without holiness of life and effective witnessing, there is no real Christianity. In a word, the new birth means a new life. To partake of Christ means to take His spirit. Obedience to Christ means to carry out His principles and follow His living. To repentant of sins means to live a holy life.

2.4 The Believer's Cross and the Separated Church

From the idea of walking in the "new life," Menno went a step further to the concept of the believer's cross. According to Menno, being a new creature in Christ results from the gift of grace. The believer is born of God, and becomes one with Christ "in Spirit, faith, life, and worship."⁵² Yet, he quickly learns that he is living in a "haughty, avaricious, proud, idolatrous, blood-drunken world"-a world made up of people who do not know the Word of God, and participate in all the sinful ways of life. The people who live in the world must "wrongfully oppose and persecute the heavenly doctrine of Jesus Christ," because they cannot bear the true Christians' testimony of the truth and their

⁵²Ibid., p. 225.

protest against the wicked world.⁵³ So, it is impossible for all who live with and for Christ to expect peace and freedom in this world. Namely, there is no path which will lead a believer through the door of life other than that of the cross. Hostility and persecution from without will become their daily experience in the world. In fact, it had never been otherwise: "The fearful tyranny of this blind world has always lain upon the neck of the children of God."⁵⁴ Therefore, the true Christians, according to Menno, must prepare "to take upon themselves the cross of Christ, and to forsake father, mother, husband, wife, children, possessions and self, for the sake of the testimony of His holy Word when the honour and praise of God require it."⁵⁵

At the same time, Menno believed that a true Christian "has not learned Christ except by suffering."⁵⁶ Suffering and persecution would reveal "the noble, pure truth," give believers "a glorious joy" of manifesting righteousness and strengthen their confidence in following Christ.⁵⁷ He also thought of persecution as the witness of pious faith and realization of eternal life.⁵⁸ In persecution it is shown

⁵³Ibid., p. 306, 610.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 597.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 527.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 49.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 307.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 194.

sufficiently that the regenerated Christians are among the elect. Without suffering and the seal of blood in persecution, the Word would not be declared and observed.⁵⁹ By suffering and entering into glory, Christ left people an example of what would characterize the life of those who want to follow Him. Indeed, Menno did not believe that he was living in a period better than that of the Apostles. For him, one is not to be surprised at persecution.⁶⁰ The persecution just proves that the pure faith, for a true Christian, is of such great importance that it transcends the worth of life in this world. It gives insight into the believer's ultimate values of life.

As mentioned above, Menno saw the cross of the believer as the witness of pure faith. To Menno, the cross of the believer also resulted in a clearer understanding of the Word. He thought that the Word could not be sought from "the writing of the learned ones," also could not be conceived in terms of human wisdom and intellect.⁶¹ It was grasped through the cross, suffering, and death.⁶² Persecution accompanies the believer's receiving of Christ's divine nature. Like the life of Christ, the believer's eternal life must be through suffering and persecution. Out of them a purified being would come--one who is nearer to Christ, and more ready for the

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 109.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 194.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 278, 279.

⁶²Ibid., p. 278.

glory of God. To become more like Christ is good, according to Menno, because he believed that Christ was the revelation of the true being or reality, that is, He was the perfect expression of God's wisdom, and filled all things.⁶³

Another part related to the concept of discipleship is Menno's idea of the separated church. Living a holy life after Christ and bearing the cross, according to Menno, meant to be in conflict with the world. The church, as an exclusive fellowship of truly converted believers in Christ, must be separated from the sins and evils of the world. In order for the church to create a pure community of love and holiness within its brotherhood circle, it must fight the sins and evil without. Since a holy life is the major witness of following Christ, then separation must be the distinctive character of a holy life. So Menno pointed out that the world was diverse from Christ's life and example, it was nothing but a "new Babylon." Therefore, Christians should separate themselves from it.⁶⁴ The true Christian must "hear Christ, believe in Christ, follow His footsteps, . . . be of the same mind as Christ, walk as He did, . . . take up His cross and follow Him . . . He must not love the world and the things therein, nor conform to the world."⁶⁵ It is clear that, according to Menno, the true believer has no fellowship with the

⁶³Ibid., p. 429.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 181.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 100.

unbeliever. The disciple of Christ lives "according to Christ's Word, and according to the unblamable example of Christ."⁶⁶ On the contrary, the world depends upon human doctrine and false worship. It rejects, hates, persecutes the disciples of Christ. Without doubt, all these dictate that it is inevitable that the disciples of Christ must make a clean break with the world and all those ways of life that will invalidate their discipleship. The only people who can be considered as the members of the body of Christ are those who have made a commitment to Christ and follow Him forever. It is constituted for the people belonging peculiarly to God. It operates as a distinctive social group dedicated to God.

According to Menno, Christians would be led to "an upright, irreproachable, pious life," and they would act "in all things according to the will of the Lord."⁶⁷ Thus, maintaining the purity of believers becomes necessary in the sinful world, although the church cannot be perfect in the sense of being entirely free of unworthy members. It is the responsibility of the church to put forth every effort to restore those who revert to a life of sin. If they continue their sinful life in spite of earnest entreaty, it becomes obligatory for the church to make known to them that they have placed themselves outside the church. This is what Menno emphasized: "We must practice exclusion or the ban, according

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 101.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 101.

to the Scriptures."⁶⁸ Menno makes it clear that church discipline will descend on "those living or teaching offensively in the house of the Lord." Its aim is to make them ashamed at heart and win them back.⁶⁹ Moreover, such a discipline is "a tremendous source of strength for the individual and in turn for the entire body."⁷⁰ It contributes to the cohesion of the church that multiplies the strength of the individual.

Menno Simons thus caught a clear vision on two basic issues: the nature of the Christian life, and the nature of the faithful practice of the Christian way of life. According to Menno, only those who were repentant and knew by experience the grace of God should be baptized and join the church. Evidence of the new life then should be seen in the serious attempt to live as disciples who had committed themselves fully to Christ as Lord. On the nature of the church, Menno insisted that since the church was the representative of Christ on earth, it must be a voluntary gathering of believers, and keep itself holy and pure in life and doctrine. Church members were bound together only by their discipleship with Christ and their love for each other. Their life as disciples would completely separate them from the sin of the

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 101.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 414.

⁷⁰Harold S. Bender, "The Mennonite Conception of the Church and Its Relation to Community Building," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 19, no. 2(1945): 97.

worldly social order. There was only the ban necessary for them to serve as instrument of love to warn and chasten the erring among them.

In the light of Manno's idea of faith, the Anabaptists in the Netherlands and northern Germany found their rallying point and solid institutional basis. As a result, they created their own brotherly community under the discipline of Christ. They came to differentiate themselves from those radical elements in the movement and came to seek only to be industrious in their farming life and devout in their religious life. Eventually, under the leadership of Menno Simons, they turned the radical movement in the direction of passiveness and civil obedience. They began to be known as the Mennonites, which usually referred to those evangelical Anabaptists. Thus, from the 1530s the Mennonites were tolerated in some areas of northern Germany and Prussia. They settled on the estates of sympathetic noblemen and established their congregations. Moreover, the Mennonites even became welcomed when those noblemen knew their skills to recover the marshy land for farming. This was the first time in their movement that the Mennonites got an opportunity to practise their religious faith and to develop their own way of life in a considerably peaceful environment. Therefore, we can say that, by his clear vision of Christianity, Menno Simons not only saved the Dutch Anabaptist movement from fanaticism and possible disintegration, but also provided the theological

cornerstone of rebuilding the movement. His contributing labours, at the same time, not only gave his followers a new beginning to develop their religious and social identity, but also gave the whole society a new picture of the movement, which eventually changed the hostile attitude of the outside world to the Mennonites.

Moreover, for the whole history of Christianity and the development of the European society, Menno and his movement presented some important messages. In other words, the re-fashioned Mennonite movement unleashed an ideological force that embodied some general trends of social progress. By the rejection of infant baptism and the emphasis on establishing a believers' church, they gave the concept of the separation of church and state the most biblical expression. As a result of it, they destroyed conventional social control of the day. By naming every believer a priest, they started European society on the road to democracy. By their brotherhood community, they undermined established totalitarian authority. With their imitating Christ in daily life, they built a true Christian life-style.

However, in fact, all this did not produce any significant influence, as they appeared, to their contemporary society. Instead of it, Mennonite views of Christianity and the world continued to lead to a tension with the outside world although not all the time such relation was really confrontational. This, in a great degree, resulted from such

a fact that some Mennonites took a radical opinion of the separation of church and state. After all, the original meaning of separation was that the state did not have authority over the religious conscience, could not prescribe religious liturgy and ordinances, and should not conduct or supervise ecclesiastical organization and appointments. For these Mennonites, however, the concept of separation meant, among other things, the pure Christian life and the sinful world. With their definition of the church as an intimate brotherly fellowship of believers, these Mennonites never believed that there could be a universal kingdom of righteousness without committed believers' communities. And they also insisted that these communities could not exist without the complete separation from the outside world and strict discipline of church. Therefore, when they spoke of the allegiance to their church, they thereby took a critical stand in regard to the outside world order, and even to the total value system of the society. Thus, for the sake of building a separate community, these Mennonites had to keep isolating themselves geographically from the world around them. On the other hand, they had to withdraw themselves politically from the life of their host society so that they could keep the purity of their communities in belief and life. As the result, they became more and more alienated from the whole society in which they were living. At the same time, the social forces of assimilation necessary became stronger

and stronger. As a minority group, the only way of avoiding the confrontation with the society was periodic migrations.

When these Mennonites had to confront the social pressures for their radical doctrine of church, some internal problems also arose to trouble their brotherhood. For example, the need to maintain the purity of church and the holiness of life demanded a high authority of church discipline. It therefore became a very complex issue how this authority could be prevented from becoming an unfair judgment of others who were also striving sincerely but found different ways. There would always be differences between different people and groups. When some wanted to try new ideas and practices, others wanted to hold to the tried and true ways of the past. For those who had been accustomed to face death for their faith, they were also often ready to break fellowship with other brothers if they thought them wrong. Sometimes, personality clashes and leadership conflicts increased this potential fragmentation. This weakness of the Mennonite doctrine of church appeared clearer when Dirk Philips placed his theological emphasis on the use of shunning.

CHAPTER 3

DIRK PHILIPS AND HIS ENCHIRIDION

As we have seen, Anabaptism teaches that genuine membership in Christianity begins at the point of the new birth in the Spirit, namely the experience of conversion. In such a perspective, the Anabaptists sought to find a pathway by which they could translate their conversion into a lasting form for daily living. The Swiss Brethren made the first step in this direction by making a radical break from established Christendom and the whole European social order. This action was totally unexpected by all the European churches and governments, and it brought about tragic results. Endless amount of blood and tears were shed for the dream of the true Christian life in the kingdom of God. The rise of chiliasm in the movement, namely, the belief that the kingdom of Christ would come soon, made its tragic colour more pronounced. Soon enough, as the result of its eschatological orientation, the establishment identified this movement with revolutionary and insurgent forces aimed at overthrowing of the government. This claim had some credibility in regard to the Netherlands. From the very beginning, the Anabaptist movement there displayed an eschatological characteristic under the influence

of Melchior Hofmann's chiliastic views. After the imprisonment of Hofmann in Strassburg in 1533, his followers in the Netherlands gradually developed into two distinct parties. With Hofmann, some leaders of Anabaptism, like Jacob van Campen and Obbe Philips, continued to emphasize disciplined Christian living, peacefully enduring all suffering for Christ until his expected second coming. Meanwhile, under the leadership of Jan Matthijsz and Jan van Leiden, some fanatical Anabaptists, later known as revolutionary Anabaptists, took their lead from the Book of Revelation and looked into the future for the kingdom or the new world to come. Unlike other Anabaptists, who would rather wait for the event peacefully, they attempted to realize their eschatological views by force. They tried to speed up the coming of the Lord by calling on the "saints," who were to come to announce the second coming of the Lord, and to help with the establishment of the New Jerusalem--the city coming down from heaven. This radical tendency of the movement first gained its foothold in Amsterdam, and then spread to Leeuwarden and Groningen. However, the centre of revolutionary Anabaptism rapidly moved to Münster in Westphalia.¹ In November, 1533, Jan Matthijsz, who became the real ruler of the city since the beginning of 1534, proclaimed himself to be the prophet Enoch. Jan van Leiden, his

¹Cornelius Krahn, Dutch Anabaptism: Origin, Spread, Life, and Thought (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1981), pp. 120-122.

immediate successor in Münster, made even bolder claims and announced himself to be the king of the world.² The city was regarded as the location where the Lord would meet and protect his faithful children when he returned to this world. The judgment of the Lord was expected to be near at hand, at which time the world would be cruelly punished. Only in the city of Münster would there be peace and security, because the city had been chosen as the city of the Lord, where the Lord would save those who belong to him, and it would be turned into a millennial "New Jerusalem" by Christ.³ Many of the Anabaptists in the Netherlands were caught up in such a prophecy. Their longing for the approaching kingdom of God on earth, which took root in their hearts from the beginning of the movement, was greatly stimulated.

3.1 Dirk Philips and the Fanatical Münsterites

After severe persecution, some Anabaptists naively hoped that somehow they could escape their misery and persecution by finding a promised land in the world. Therefore, when some major instigators of the coming kingdom, such as Jacob van Ossenbrug, Peter Schomecker, and Gyse Scheffen spread the news that God had chosen Münster to establish His kingdom on earth,

²Ibid., p. 134, 141.

³Ibid., p.137.

many sorely oppressed Anabaptists in the Netherlands truly believed that this was a message sent by God. In a short time, from North Holland, South Holland, Utrecht, and even from Zeeland, as many as fourteen to sixteen thousand men and women, including children, travelled by foot or by horse to the city of God in Münster.⁴ Those who chose to follow the invitation extended from Münster thought they were escaping not only the severe persecution of tyrants, but also the great judgment day of God. Instead, they met a frightful calamity. The Bishop of Münster rapidly assembled his army and laid siege to the city. Starvation became the first gift that King John, who was the ruler of the city, and was proclaimed "king of the New Zion" in August of 1534, gave his subjects. By the spring of 1535, conditions in the city were horrifying. People began to eat cats, dogs, mice, grass, moss, old shoes-- following the usual pattern of starving people, and even human flesh.⁵ Finally, on June 25, 1535, after more than a one-year siege, the "New Jerusalem," which used selected portions of the Old Testament as both model and sanction, and introduced a community of goods and polygamy, was betrayed to the armed forces of the Bishop. King John and two of his companions were captured and executed in January of 1536. The bodies of the three men were placed in iron cages on the highest tower

⁴Ibid., p. 146.

⁵John Christian Wenger, Glimpses of Mennonite History and Doctrine (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1959), p. 68.

of the city. Meanwhile, most of the male population in the city were put to death.⁶ This tragic development of Anabaptism greatly affected its existence in the Reformation. It put the radical segment of the movement in a crisis situation.

However, not all Dutch Anabaptists were involved in the radical development of Anabaptism leading to the incident that had occurred in Münster. Those who remained faithful to the original goal of Anabaptism, for example, Menno Simons, Jacob van Campen, Obbe Philips, Dirk Philips, and David Joris, never permitted themselves to be engulfed by the Münsterites' attempt to establish a theocracy by force. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Menno made great efforts against "the abominations of Münster" by preaching "the word of true repentance."⁷ He condemned Jan van Leiden as an "antichrist," because he had put himself in the place of Christ. Menno pointed out that there was but one king and lord both of the earth and of the church, namely, Jesus Christ, since "a plain and clear proof from the Scriptures" had proved that Jesus Christ was the King of kings, the Lord of lords, and the real Head of his church.⁸ God, who had placed Christ as the Head

⁶Hutterian Brethren tran. & ed., The Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren (New York: Plough Publishing House, 1987), p. 133. The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. III, p. 779.

⁷J. C. Wenger ed., The Complete Writings of Menno Simons (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1956), p. 671.

⁸Ibid., p. 38.

of the church, could not tolerate giving this place to someone else.⁹ He also faithfully warned everyone that the Christian had no other weapon but the Scriptures. Christians could not bear arms or fight. They should leave the punishment of sinners to God and the nations of earth. They themselves as the followers of Christ should wait with long-suffering for the second coming of Christ.¹⁰

In the course of preserving the Anabaptist movement from the destruction of Münster, Dirk Philips, another major figure in the movement, who stood by and labored with Menno, played an important role. It is even thought that without Dirk's aid it would have been impossible for Menno to organize and establish the brotherhood that survived the crises of the movement in those years.¹¹ He continually opposed those who formed the revolutionary or fanatical sects in the Anabaptist movement, and worked faithfully to strengthen and to encourage the progress of the peaceful groups among the Anabaptists. If we can say that Menno exercised his influence by returning the movement to the biblical principles through his most heartening itinerant preaching and his popular pamphlets, we also can say that Dirk affirmed the principal ideas of the Mennonites and their distinctive community life. He was both

⁹Ibid., pp. 35-36.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 43-44.

¹¹William Keeney, "Dirk Philips," Mennonite Life 13, no. 2 (1958): 75.

a theologian and a church organizer. He gave one of the most systematic presentations of Mennonite theology of that time through his Enchiridion, which contained a more balanced and understanding statement¹² of the Mennonite position than was found elsewhere.¹³ Meanwhile, through his service to the community in Danzig, he endeavoured to apply his teachings to ethical and moral living in order to maintain the pure and holy life of the individual and the church. In him the theologian and the religious practitioner formed an organic whole. In this way, his life reflected the character of the movement: Religious doctrine must find its expression in daily practice!

Dirk Philips was born at Leeuwarden of the Netherlands in 1504. As a young man he became a Franciscan monk. Among the first generation of Mennonite leaders he was thought to have a better education than the others.¹⁴ He demonstrated considerable ability as a scholar. His writings revealed a

¹²This is especially demonstrated by his ability to balance opposing ideas delicately and where necessary to state a position that clearly excludes extremes which he rejects. Moreover, as a general rule, he did not use too much philosophical and theological terminology, such like "trinity," "logos," and "incarnation," but he could quite clearly deal with such complex theological concepts. He always apply his logical and psychological knowledge very skilfully to persuading his readers.

¹³William Keeney, "The Writings of Dirk Philips," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 32, no. 4(1958): 306.

¹⁴William R. Estep, The Anabaptist Story (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), p. 113.

knowledge of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.¹⁵ Between Christmas of 1533 and January of 1534, Dirk joined the Anabaptist brotherhood in his home town, and was soon afterward ordained by his brother as an elder.¹⁶ After his ordination Dirk became the only one among the Dutch Anabaptist leaders of that time who resolutely opposed the revolutionary tendencies of the Münsterites.¹⁷ In his booklet, Concerning Spiritual Restitution, Dirk accused the revolutionary sects of having done much damage and of bringing much mischief to the movement. He declared that their practice caused all sorts of deplorable errors, such as the use of force to establish the kingdom of God on earth, the introduction of idolatrous ceremonies, and the virtual identification of church and state.¹⁸ According to Dirk, the kingdom of God and the church were essentially spiritual entities. He believed that the church in its fullest sense was the fellowship of holy people totally separated from the world.¹⁹ Therefore, Münsterites' ideas about setting up a worldly kingdom would

¹⁵William Keeney, "Dirk Philips' Life," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 32, no. 3(1958): 173-174.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 175, and also see George Huntston Williams The Radical Reformation (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), pp. 489-490.

¹⁷William Keeney, "Dirk Philips' Life," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 32, no. 3(1958): 175.

¹⁸Dirk Philips, tran. by Abram Kolb, Enchiridion or Handbook of the Christian Doctrine and Religion (Elkhart, Ind.: No publisher, 1915), p. 323.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 369.

necessarily lead them to adopt man-made customs, ceremonies, and doctrines, like king, polygamy, and the use of violence. It would not be possible for them to be willing to endure persecution for the sake of Christ.²⁰

As early as 1537, Dirk became one of the outstanding Anabaptist leaders, especially through engaging in the debate with Joachim Kükenbiter, a Lutheran theologian.²¹ When Obbe Philips withdrew from the Anabaptist movement in 1539 or 1540,²² the leadership of the movement passed to Dirk and Menno. In the following years Dirk took part in almost all of the most important events of the movement. In 1542, Dirk participated with Menno in the ordination of two evangelical elders, Giles of Aken and Adam Pastor.²³ This ordination was thought of as the first attempt both to reorganize the leadership of the Mennonite movement in the Netherlands after the defection of Obbe, and to consolidate its pacifism after the incident of Münster.²⁴ Giles and Adam had been labouring as travelling Anabaptist evangelists in the Liege-Cologne area since the early 1530s'. After the disastrous end of the

²⁰Ibid., p. 362.

²¹William Keeney, "Dirk Philips' Life," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 32, no. 3(1958): 176.

²²George Huntston Williams, The Radical Reformation, p. 359.

²³William Keeney, "Dirk Philips' Life," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 32, no. 3(1958): 177.

²⁴Ibid., p. 177, and also see George Huntston Williams, The Radical Reformation, p. 490.

Münsterite kingdom, this area continued to remain a centre of Anabaptism, but it was deeply affected by the radical Münsterites. Among some of the surviving radical Anabaptists the conviction of being the executors of the wrath of God remained a significant factor even though the religious and eschatological aspect of the kingdom of God gradually disappeared. On the other hand, due to the severe persecution Menno and other major evangelical Anabaptist leaders could not easily get access to this area. The ordination of Giles and Adam gave leadership to the peaceful Anabaptists in the area. Thus, as the major leaders of peaceful Anabaptism in that area, Giles and Adam began to make great efforts to effect a distance from the radical trend of the movement.

Dirk was also one of the major spokesmen in the dispute with Nicholas Meyndertsz van Blesdijk in 1545.²⁵ Nicholas espoused the position of David Joris that in order to escape the persecution one should superficially conform to the established churches. Dirk opposed this option, for he thought it would lead to the tendency to think that the external forms of faith, including baptism, were of little importance.²⁶ Not long after the dispute with Nicholas, Dirk was again involved in a theological debate with Adam Pastor. Dirk and Menno differed from Adam in their views regarding

²⁵William Keeney, "Dirk Philips," Mennonite Life 13, no. 2(1958): 72.

²⁶William Keeney, "Dirk Philips' Life," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 32, no. 3(1958): 177.

church discipline and Christology. Finally, under Dirk's insistence, Adam was banned at the conference of Goch in 1547. This was the first time the split among the Mennonites became evident. This event also showed that in the issue of church discipline Dirk inclined to have a more severe opinion than other Anabaptist leaders. He believed that salvation was guaranteed only through Christ who became flesh without accepting the stain of sin.²⁷ Therefore, a disciplined fellowship must be established and maintained in order to keep the body of Christ "without spot and wrinkle." For this purpose, excommunication and ban became a necessary means not only of maintaining the purity of the church but also of winning back to the fold those who were in error.²⁸ It was from this starting point that Dirk insisted on a strict application of the ban and the subsequent shunning. According to him, the open sinners should be expelled from the congregation if they did not show genuine repentance. They were to be shunned in daily life, and even avoided in marriage because the church of God, which consisted of the elect, must be pure and holy, and it could not yield itself to the world and the flesh. This inclination of Dirk became more evident at the conference of Wismar in 1554. The basic issue

²⁷Dirk Philips, tran. by Abram Kolb, Enchiridion or Handbook of Christian Doctrine and Religion (Elkhart, Indiana: No publisher, 1915), p. 228.

²⁸Cornelius Krahn, Dutch Anabaptism: Origin, Spread, Life, and Thought (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1981), p. 197.

discussed in this meeting was how to mould a truly Christian brotherhood into an ideal Christian community, especially how it could be realized in the world. Dirk played a leading role at the meeting. Although disagreements arose about the degree to which a pure Christian community could be realized in the world, nine articles, later known as Wismar Agreements, were adopted. These agreements reflected both a rather strict position on the use of the ban and a trend of excluding alien views. For example, the first decision stated that a member of church who married someone who was not a member must be "put out of the congregation." Secondly it was decided that the members of the church should shun an excommunicated member and avoid business transactions with him. The third article stated that husband or wife should shun their excommunicated marriage partner unless they could not agree to this because of a "weak conscience." The last agreement made it a rule that no one had the right to go from congregation to congregation teaching and preaching unless he had been sent or ordained by the church or an elder.²⁹ As a result, a distinctive pattern for the Mennonite church was formulated. In other words, while firmly believing that the church was a voluntary and exclusive fellowship of truly converted believers in Christ, Dirk and other Anabaptist leaders emphasized that the church should be composed of practising

²⁹Cornelius Krahn, Dutch Anabaptism: Origin, Spread, Life, and Thought (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1981), p. 231.

disciples who lived a holy life patterned after Christ's example and teachings. It was the duty of the church to establish a fellowship without spot or wrinkle and to assist its members to lead a true Christian life. Therefore, the church had the power to decide the pattern of life for its members, and had authority over the behaviour of the individual Christian. To accomplish this goal the church was to use church discipline, the ban or excommunication, for maintaining the purity of the church.

Meanwhile, for the Mennonite movement, Wismar Agreements also represented a shift from largely personal conflicts and opinions to an organized movement.³⁰ The special emphasis on the use of church discipline and the prohibition of layman's preaching determined the future shape of the movement. Nevertheless, the use of the church discipline brought about the emergence of many problems, recurring with annoying frequency, and subsequently led to serious divisions among Mennonites. The closing days of Dirk's life were deeply involved in the struggle of trying to make the Mennonite congregation orderly and pure, which manifests in its life the kingdom of God to the degree that it can be perfected on the imperfect earth. Indeed, Dirk's life was marked by successive struggles for his high ideal of the Christian life and the church, especially in trying to purify the Mennonite movement

³⁰William Keeney, "Dirk Philips' Life," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 32, no. 3(1958): 181.

from all kinds of pernicious elements that would threaten the existence of the movement.

After Menno's death, Dirk made his headquarters in Danzig, where some Mennonite congregations had existed since the 1530s'. He was active in this area and produced his major works in the relative peace and quiet of his Prussian settlement. He continued to lead most of the Mennonites to construct their community life even while they were confronting increasing internal discord. It was particularly remarkable that he engaged in the dispute with Leenaert Bouwens, who was also a major leader of Dutch Mennonites. Leenaert was accused of giving up the leadership of his flock and being a drunkard.³¹ Since the issue concerned the purity of church and the seriousness of the church disciplines, Dirk and other leaders made a decision to suspend Leenaert as an elder.³²

3.2 The Enchiridion and Dirk's Doctrine of Church

During his struggles with the revolutionary Münsterites and the liberal trends in the movement, Dirk wrote many important treatises that made him "the leading theologian and

³¹George Huntston Williams, The Radical Reformation (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), p. 766.

³²William Keeney, "Dirk Philips' Life," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 32, no. 3(1958): 187.

dogmatician among the Dutch and North German Mennonites of that time."³³ In 1564, he collected what he had written at different times to counteract various threats to the harmony in the movement, and published them in a single volume. This is his Enchiridion or Handbook of the Christian Doctrine and Religion. Here Dirk provided the Mennonites with a convenient handbook that contained a survey of the Christian teachings. It explained not only the most fundamental issues of Christian doctrine, but also commented on the many practical questions confronting the movement. It can be said that the Enchiridion gave a most systematic and comprehensive statement of the Mennonite position of the sixteenth century. Almost immediately, it became a significant guide for the Mennonites of his time, and greatly influenced the following generations.³⁴ It was simple enough that even the least educated people could come to understand Mennonite teaching. It also presented some basic instruction into the Christian faith in which "every reader is confronted with the foundation of faith and a guide to Christian living."³⁵ In his Enchiridion Dirk placed correct doctrine in a decisive role. Yet theology was not his major emphasis. It was more important for him to maintain the pure and holy life of the

³³Harold S. Bender ed., The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. II, p. 65.

³⁴J. ten. Doornkaat Koolman, "The Enchiridion By Dirk Philips," Mennonite Life 19, no. 4(1964): 177.

³⁵Ibid., p. 178.

individual and the church by refuting the views that would compromise the Mennonite ideal of establishing the New Testament church.³⁶ For example, in his Concerning Spiritual Restitution, Dirk rebutted Münsterite faulty interpretation of the Scriptures in defense of their revolutionary action. He pointed out that the Münsterite understanding of the Prophets, namely, the statement that the establishment of the Kingdom of David in Münster would be transferred to the true kingdom of Christ restored and set up again,³⁷ was according to their carnal fancy and reason. It was a false prophecy made by those deceptive prophets according to their embellished and disguised doctrine "with the old leaven of the letter as shadows and figures."³⁸ He stated that the task of restoring "all things to order" could "nevermore be done by anyone but the Lord Jesus Christ alone,"³⁹ because He "is the perfection and completion of all the works of God."⁴⁰ Christians could observe this restitution only by sincere repentance, faith in God, keeping all God's commandments, Christian baptism, the right use of the Lord's Supper, a godly life, and evangelical

³⁶William Keeney, "The Writings of Dirk Philips," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 32, no. 4(1958): 305.

³⁷Douglas H. Shantz, "The Ecclesiological Focus of Dirk Philips' Hermeneutical Thought in 1559: A Contextual Study," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 60, no. 2(1986): 118.

³⁸Dirk Philips, Enchiridion or Handbook, p. 222.

³⁹Dirk Philips, Enchiridion or Handbook, p. 222.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 249.

separation or the ban.⁴¹ He specially emphasized that keeping all the commandments of God meant to love one's enemies, to refrain from seeking revenge, and to accept persecution and suffering rather than to inflict violence.⁴² It is for this reason that the Enchiridion was thought of by the Mennonites as being as important as the Loci Communes of Melanchthon for the Lutherans, and Calvin's Institutes for Calvinists.

The Mennonite movement in the Netherlands was born in the midst of revolutionary turbulence. It was particularly affected by the Münsterite fanaticism, which attempted to establish the millennium by force, claimed prophetic authority to receive new revelations, believed that Christians had the right to take part in violence, linked the church and state, and adopted the Old Testament social patterns and ethics, such as introducing polygamy, community of goods, and crowning a "King of David." When Dirk and other contemporary Mennonite leaders attempted to purge the movement of these errors, they found that it was necessary for the integrity of its witness in real life to combine the subjective responsibility of the individual believer with objective rules. Meanwhile, they interpreted the Christian understanding of love in a twofold way: besides materially expressing it in a concern for another person's welfare, it particularly emphasized spiritual concern

⁴¹Ibid., p. 246.

⁴²Ibid., p. 394.

for the salvation of others by admonishing one another to faithfulness, which means not only a knowledge of the Gospel and the assurance of the forgiveness of sins, but also a holy moral and ethical daily life. In other words, this concern was expressed by keeping the church pure and holy through discipline from those who had deviated from the true Christian life.⁴³ Thus church discipline, or standards of faith and life that are binding upon the individual members and separating from those who no longer belong in the church, became the best means to realize their attempts. For the Mennonites, the concept of church discipline implies that the church is a body with a certain order as an essential part of its life. It is the duty of the church to maintain this order by the exercise of spiritual pressure as well as by the proclamation of standards of righteousness and holy living. The spiritual pressure serves to impress upon the individual the serious nature of sin and transgression against the law of God and the standard of the Gospel as set forth in the standards of the church. It also warns him of dangers and harm to spiritual life resulting from such transgressions, and finally severs him from the fellowship of the body as unworthy of and dangerous to the body.⁴⁴ The procedure of exercising church discipline is based upon Matthew 18, where three admonitions are suggested. One is advised to proceed with

⁴³Dirk Philips, Enchiridion or Handbook, p. 168, 391, 392.

⁴⁴The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. II, p. 69.

private admonitions, then to call in two or three witnesses, and finally if the offender does not respond and repent to bring the matter before the church. Among the first generation of Mennonite leaders no one was more insistent than Dirk Philips on the strict discipline of church members. Unlike Menno and other Mennonite leaders, who regarded the love of God that desires the redemption of the apostate as the starting point of church discipline,⁴⁵ Dirk placed his starting point on the emphasis of God's justice and righteousness, and the demands on purity and holiness.⁴⁶ This was specially manifested in his position on the following issues: The first one was that he insisted on exercise of shunning or avoiding of the apostates even when they were members of one's own family, including husband and wife.⁴⁷ The second one was that in the exercise of discipline he opted to act immediately instead of the procedure given in Matthew 18.⁴⁸ The harsh exercise of disciplinary power in the Mennonite church under the leadership of Dirk even resulted in some people referring to them as "Anabaptists." The ban therefore came to replace baptism as the new focal point of

⁴⁵J. C. Wenger ed., The Complete Writings of Menno Simons, p. 968.

⁴⁶Dirk Philips, Enchiridion or Handbook, p. 228.

⁴⁷Dirk Philips, Enchiridion or Handbook, p. 329, 358, 487.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 237.

Anabaptist ecclesiology during Dirk's time.⁴⁹

Dirk's doctrine of the church was, to a large degree, dependent on his understanding of the concept of discipleship. For example, he included observance of the command of love as essential to the true church,⁵⁰ which he claimed the major Reformers generally did not list. This implies that Dirk's value structure differs from theirs. Dirk contended that the church is "a congregation of holy beings, namely, of the angels in heaven and of the believing reborn men on earth, who have been renewed in the image of God."⁵¹ Since the image of God, according to Dirk, was of an incorruptible and immortal nature, the pre-eminent reason, the fullness of wisdom, the fervency in love, and the knowledge of all the creation,⁵² the members of the church should have an upright and devout nature or a divine character and a true knowledge of God. They should obey, fear, and love God so long as they remained in their first creation and bore the image of God.⁵³ However, Dirk never thought the church would become perfect in this temporal world although there was, from the nature of church, the demand that it should be the pure and holy body of

⁴⁹George Huntston Williams, The Radical Reformation, p. 485.

⁵⁰Dirk Philips, Enchiridion or Handbook, p. 383.

⁵¹George Huntston Williams ed., Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967), p. 229.

⁵²Ibid., p. 230.

⁵³Ibid., p. 229.

Christ on earth. He pointed out that the believer would never reach perfection in this life, even after his regeneration, namely, even when he knows true repentance and amendment of life and his fallen human nature is recreated by the action of the Holy Spirit. Human carnal nature would continue to exist and to affect believer's behaviour in the world.⁵⁴ This sinful nature from Adam made every human being subject to weaknesses and failings. For man, sinlessness was impossible in this present life. He could earnestly seek after it and make progress toward that goal, but he would never attain it in this life.⁵⁵ Therefore, Dirk thought that in order for people to make progress toward that goal, the church must focus more on the daily practice of its members (such as a holy living, separation from the world of sin and evil, full brotherhood in the church, and obedience to the great commission of Christ) than on the service of liturgy. Consequently, he put more emphasises on the examination of all these church practices in the light of the Mennonite principle of discipleship, in order to distance Mennonites from all the long-standing secular customs. Thus, in Dirk, it seems that we can observe a paradox: Since the church is composed of "holy beings," it of necessity must be pure and holy, or "without spot and wrinkle"; but, the sinful nature of some "holy beings" decides it is impossible for it to be without

⁵⁴Dirk Philips, Enchiridion or Handbook, p. 282.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 318.

weakness and defects. This is the twofold nature of church, namely, the divine nature from angels in heaven, and the carnal nature from believers "who have been added thereto."⁵⁶ The former always remain the church immaculate and pure, while the latter necessarily bring some impure elements into the church. Accordingly, to Dirk, God founds His congregation on earth with pure and holy people, who have been created in His image and after His likeness, so the church will not become "a partaker of the sin of outsiders," and cannot be "blasphemed on account of the evils in it."⁵⁷ However, the church is coterminous with society. It has to include those who are not elect, but who through hypocrisy and deceit are included as members, or who may at a later date be elected. At the same time, although some of its members by their knowledge of Jesus Christ can be made partakers of Christ's divine nature by God, it is still possible for them to be turned away from the holy life of walking in Christ because of their carnal nature. Therefore, they have to "escape the corrupting lusts of this world."⁵⁸ Thus, the seeking of purity becomes both the believers' obligation and the duty of the church. The believers must in sincere faith accept the righteousness of

⁵⁶George Huntston Williams ed., Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, p. 229, and also see Dirk Philips, Enchiridion or Handbook, p. 447.

⁵⁷Walter Klaassen ed., Anabaptism in Outline (Ontario: Herald Press, 1981), pp. 225-226.

⁵⁸George Huntston Williams ed., Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, p. 233.

Christ by maintaining the pure and unadulterated Word of God, properly observing the Sacraments, separating from the world, truly loving God and all human beings, and following Christ in daily life. They have nothing to do with those who stain the purity of church. The church meanwhile must supervise the behaviour of its members and help them maintain an upright life according to the teachings of the Scriptures. For this purpose, it must cleanse itself from the impure members by use of church discipline. In other words, the church becomes not only a worshipping fellowship of believers, but also a body with a certain order as an essential part of its life.

3.3 "Avoidance" and the Pure Church

From the very beginning of the Mennonite movement, discipline was one of the most important integral parts of its church doctrine. As we have seen, the Schleithem Confession gave church discipline a special emphasis. However, according to Dirk, the idea of church discipline was given a further expression, and its practice became more strict. Among the Swiss Brethren, church discipline was just defined as the "ban." It was applied only to the exclusion of those who had fallen into error. According to Dirk, the ban became the "avoidance." "It relates to the break in fellowship, both religious and social, which is occasioned by excommunication

from the brotherhood, and which amounts to almost complete social ostracism."⁵⁹ Dirk insisted that Christians have no fellowship with those apostates. They must be separated and afterward shunned by all the church members.⁶⁰ He thought that these "wicked and open sinners" had no part "in the kingdom of God and Christ," and they were not to inherit or possess the righteousness of Christ. If they were allowed to continue to stay in the church, they would leaven the whole pure body of Christ, and the church of God would be defiled. The pure members of the church would become partakers of their sins.⁶¹ Thus, for the sake of protecting the church from the contagion and corruption of the apostates, the church must use its power to "separate, avoid, and shun the false brethren."⁶² According to Dirk, Christ gives the church "the keys of the kingdom of heaven," which are the power to punish, exclude, and put away the wicked, and to receive the penitent and believing.⁶³ Even though Dirk never understood it as meaning that man had power to forgive sins or to retain them, he thought that the church had received the Holy Spirit and the gospel from Jesus Christ, in which were proclaimed and

⁵⁹The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. I, p. 200.

⁶⁰Walter Klaassen ed., Anabaptism in Outline, p. 226.

⁶¹George Huntston Williams ed., Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, p. 246.

⁶²Ibid., p. 252.

⁶³Ibid., p. 247.

promised forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, and eternal life to all who truly repented and believed in Jesus Christ.⁶⁴ Here we can find that Dirk believed that the church had the power, which was received from Christ, to maintain in its members "a holy, pure heart that is fervent in love to God." Besides, the best way to reach this aim is the exercise of church discipline, because it would purify the Christian life and maintain the holiness of the church. Here it is also clear that Dirk was much more inclined to regard immorality as the primary cause for the need to exercise church discipline. This inclination is inseparable from his emphasis on individual obedience to morals and ethics as the outward indication that one has become a partaker of Christ. This inclination governed Dirk's attitude concerning church discipline. He necessarily emphasized that the church was a fellowship of holy beings, and that its members, namely, those who have already received grace and become partakers of Christ's divine nature, must keep the church pure and holy. He concluded: "The kingdom of God is absolutely denied by the Lord Himself to all who are not born again of God, and who are not created by Him anew in the inner being in His image."⁶⁵

On the other hand, Dirk emphasized that, to Christians, the Word of God is not only the gospel but also the law.⁶⁶

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 248.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 234.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 235.

The gospel is the word of grace. It is the message of Jesus Christ, the only Redeemer and Saviour, who can ransom man from the power of Satan, sin, and eternal death, and make man to receive the eternal love and grace of God. As a result, man in his heart is then able to love God, to believe in Him, to trust in His promise, and to become the child of God.⁶⁷ The law is the word of command, given by God through Moses on Mount Sinai. It discloses sin to believers, condemns "the inward uncleanness of nature," and demands righteousness and holiness of the whole created men.⁶⁸ Therefore, it is "the judge in the church over all false brethren, and all disorderly and disobedient persons who after sufficient warning do not better themselves."⁶⁹ With this law a believer can learn "the knowledge of sin," and what is required in order to obey God. This acknowledgement of sin and obeying God results in his salvation. Otherwise, if he does not learn from the law, he will not be able to be born anew of God and stand before God.⁷⁰ Thus, keeping the law of God became indispensable for Christians if they were to receive the divine nature of Christ. This understanding led Dirk to believe that Christians must hold firmly together, "living and conducting themselves according to the same

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 236.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 235.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 248.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 236, 237.

polity, law, and statutes." There must be "the same rule of the divine Word" to govern the walk of them.⁷¹ In other words, the church as the congregation of God, must be in unity of Spirit and faith. It must keep the law of God, and make its members to live a pure and holy life by church discipline.

In addition, the church, according to Dirk, is the body of Christ, which partakes in the divine nature of Christ. All things in the church therefore become new, glorious, and holy. It has no spot and wrinkle, and never compromises with the evils of the world and flesh. It must hold steadfastly on its holy beginnings unto the end, surrender itself wholly to Christ, keep itself clean at all times, and wholly avoid all spiritual adultery, which is idolatry, false worship, disobedience of the commands of Christ.⁷² Dirk, therefore, concluded that no church "can be maintained before God," if it does not "properly and earnestly" exercise the avoidance "according to the command of Christ."⁷³ While emphasizing the strict avoidance of the impure elements in the church, Dirk did not intend to announce this measure just as a harsh punishment lacking love and kindness. He called the avoidance, which means a religious and social break from the brotherhood of the church, a medicine. Its purpose was to bring the sinner to repentance. The starting point of it was

⁷¹Ibid., p. 255.

⁷²Ibid., p. 256.

⁷³Ibid., p. 247.

still Christian love. He even thought of it as "the highest love" and "the best medicine" for those who were fallen in their errors. He pointed out that by the avoidance the offender would be chastised and be made ashamed, then he would repent which would result in being restored in his soul.⁷⁴

Although there was much agreement among the Mennonite leaders regarding the need for church discipline and how it was applied, Dirk still differed from the others. The major difference was in his emphasis on the application of shunning among the families, especially between husband and wife. Dirk advocated an absolute stand on this issue. He thought that the spiritual union of the believer with Christ was firmer, stronger and more binding than natural or carnal matrimony. In other words, carnal marriage and union can destroy, supersede and render invalid evangelical union.⁷⁵ He insisted that if a wife or a husband had fallen away from the truth, the other spouse must cut off the relationship between them until the time when the sinner was again received into the church. This harsh requirement, although starting from pure Christian faith and true Christian love, resulted in much bitterness, misunderstanding, and endless divisions among the Mennonites. It even resulted in Dirk himself being banned by Leenaert and the Frisians on July 8, 1567.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 247.

⁷⁵Walter Klaassen ed., Anabaptism in Outline (Ontario: Herald Press, 1981), p. 228.

Dirk's emphasis on the avoidance of the sinning church member gave the Mennonite principle of separation from the world another expression: The holy body of Christ must separate itself from both the outside wicked world and inside impure elements. A pure church is the prerequisite for the existence of a true Christian church. All things that are not clean, no matter if they are inside or outside, must be removed. Here we see that the moral and ethical criteria played the key role in determining who was of the world or of the church.

Generally speaking, the Mennonite movement was the product of seeking religious liberty. It came from the break with the established authorities, both the religious and the secular. What it wanted was that every human being would be able to express his understanding of the Scriptures liberally, and that the Mennonites would be allowed to build a church according to their understanding of the Scriptures. However, the seeking of a pure church, which in Mennonite mind was the true biblical model of the church, directed the Mennonites to isolate themselves from the world. Certainly, the key issue here was not from whom the separation should be. The Mennonite doctrine of the church implied that a clear line of demarcation must be drawn between their special fellowship and all others. This principle found its best expression in the fact that they established strict moral and ethical criteria as a means to keep their fellowship separating from all the

impure elements, both without and within. Nevertheless, the exercise of the criteria depended on some enforced measures. It necessarily resulted in some legalistic applications of church principles. In this process it was inevitable that some subjective elements would come into play. Namely, the church leaders might enforce their own personal ideas of propriety along with the regulations. Under this circumstance, the discipline of church would be used not only to correct the offender in order to accomplish his redemption, but also as a penal measure to bring him into conformity to some established standards. As a result, personal liberty again came under the control of the administrative authorities of the church. In fact, from Dirk's life, we have already seen this weakness of Mennonite theology. Without doubt, Dirk Philips was striving throughout his whole life to mould a truly Christian brotherhood in the Mennonite church. He was particularly enthusiastic about putting his idea of a disciplined fellowship into practice. However, this led to a big difference between Dirk and other Mennonite leaders as to the degree to which a Christian community could be realized in a world of sin and imperfection. His stern position on the issue also aroused many disputes among the Mennonites, and even led to some divisions. It was his insistence on banning a woman who refused to shun her banned husband that resulted in the withdrawal of the so-called Waterlanders. After that, although some attempts at unifying the Mennonites were made,

especially at Strassburg conference in 1557, Dirk's stricter position was still unacceptable to some groups. Finally, the parties in South Germany were banned by the Dutch and North Germans. It was also because his influence on the Flemish planted a seed of strife between the Flemish and the Frisians in that the two parties banned each other.

Dirk was put into the leadership of the Mennonite movement due to his character of steadfastness and tenacity in holding to an ideal, and his facility to clarify his ideas and the issues faced by the movement. He insisted on a high standard of purity in the life of an individual Christian and the fellowship of the church. This proved to promote the strength that the Mennonites had in the world, although it also carried within itself the seed to make the movement divided. His firmness often became rigid, and this resulted in him being a leader who did not win the affection of his fellows, but became the embodiment of their hopes and ideals.⁷⁶

Thus, when Menno Simons refashioned the Anabaptist movement by his understanding of the world and the true Christian life, Dirk Philips constructed the Mennonite church into a closely knit and corporate existence by his doctrine of the church. The Mennonite movement, at this point, exhibited its distinctive characteristics, notably the believers' church

⁷⁶William Keeney, "Dirk Philips," Mennonite Life 13, no. 2(1958): 75.

that completely separated from the world, the community life that isolated from the outside society, the lovely brotherhood that attracted gathered together all the members of their church into a true Christian fellowship, and the high moral and ethical standards that directed their daily life. Such a theological foundation in the following years significantly influenced the development of the Mennonite movement. It not only directed the Mennonite way of life, but also controlled their relationship to the outside world. However, when some Mennonite groups limited their understanding of the teachings of Menno and Dirk in their literal meanings, their unremitting endeavour to build a true Christian church and to live a holy life became an enthusiasm for pursuing their physical separation from the world. They never allowed themselves into this world, in which, they insisted, there was only evil, even though they had to make their living in it. They also never stopped seeking their own world, in which they believed that they would find true Christian life, although they at times had to give up their organized life. In those cases, migration was often used as a positive choice to save their community or to maintain their way of life, although it was actually a negative reflection on their confrontation with the outside society. Here we can find that migration has already become totally different from the Mennonite flee from religious persecution. At first Mennonite religious beliefs led to their ecclesiastical separation from other Christian

groups. However, their separatist theological ideas produced the most intense reaction and backlash from their contemporary society. It resulted in an intense sociological separation in the form of the most bitter persecution. The fleeing from religious persecution became a by-product of the movement. Under the leadership of Menno Simons and Dirk Philips, the movement totally changed its fanatical image and came to be tolerated in Europe, or at least in some areas and countries. Therefore, after Dutch Mennonites found their asylum in the Vistula Delta in the 1530s, they became settled down and lived a considerably peaceful life. No more religious persecution caused the Mennonite who lived in that area to flee from their home. However, in the following three centuries, Mennonite beliefs, especially the theological heritage that they received from Menno and Dirk, gave their migrations more focused inner dynamic. This also might be a good explanation of the fact that all Mennonite migrations were on a scale involving individuals or individual families in 16th-17th centuries, but when the Mennonites already established their community life, organized group migrations became common.

CHAPTER 4

THE MENNONITES IN PRUSSIA, 16TH--17TH CENTURY

As mentioned in chapter one, the first baptism of the Swiss Brethren had already taken place under the threat of persecution. By 1527, the established leaders of Protestant and Catholic Europe had determined to use all necessary means to root out the Anabaptist movement.¹ To Protestants and Catholics alike, Anabaptists seemed to be dangerous heretics, who threatened the religious and social stability of Christian Europe. Under the rule of the Archduke Ferdinand and Emperor Charles V, Austrian and Dutch Anabaptists were given especially harsh treatment.² Mandates were issued to the local authorities to ferret out and punish the Anabaptists. Special officials were appointed to judge those who were caught. Bands of Anabaptist hunters, whose task it was to find them among the people, were also organized. The punishment to Anabaptists was always death, even to those who

¹John Horsch, Mennonites in Europe (Pennsylvania: Mennonite Publishing House, 1950), pp. 300-303.

²George Huntston Williams, The Radical Reformation (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1952), pp. 166-167.

recanted under torture.³ It was this ruthless persecution that gave rise to the first mass escape of Anabaptists in the history of their movement. In the late 1520s, many Austrian Anabaptists began to flee to Moravia, which at that time was a relatively peaceful and quiet land for them.⁴ Meanwhile, many Dutch Anabaptists fled to the northern seacoast areas of the Netherlands in order to escape a martyr's death. Some estimates gave the number of religious refugees at that time to be as many as sixty thousand.⁵ Without doubt, for those Protestant refugees, the further they were from the control of the Emperor the more secure they were from severe persecution. Prussia was naturally chosen as the best destination. It was a great distance from the centre of the Emperor's power, and it had a close relation with German culture and history.

³John Horsch, Mennonites in Europe (Pennsylvania: Mennonite Publishing House, 1950), pp. 144-146.

⁴Although Moravia came under the control of Ferdinand in 1526, the Moravian nobles still kept relative freedom from control by their overlord because of their political tradition. Moreover, due to some economic consideration, they were also not inclined to look with favour on Ferdinand's attempts to bring them under his control on the Anabaptist issue. Thus Ferdinand was able to enforce his orders against Anabaptists in Moravia only very slowly, and for a long time without success. See John Horsch, Mennonites in Europe (Pennsylvania: Mennonite Publishing House, 1950), p. 146, 152. Also see George Huntston Williams, The Radical Reformation (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1950), p. 167.

⁵Cornelius Krahn, Dutch Anabaptism: Origin, Spread, Life, and Thought (Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1981), p. 209.

4.1 The First Mennonite Settlements in East Prussia

Prussia had its name from the Prussians, a Baltic people related to the Lithuanians and the Latvians.⁶ During its Christianization, beginning in the 13th century, it became the land of the Teutonic Knights. For the security of this new Christian country, many German peasants were solicited by the knights to colonize there and to help subdue the native Prussians. Some craftsmen and tradesmen were also later brought into the towns of that area. Finally the native Prussians were assimilated into the stream of German colonists.

However, in 1466, as a result of the Peace of Thorn, Poland got all the land west of the Vistula River with Danzig, Culm, Marienburgh, Elbing, and Thorn.⁷ This area therefore was known as Royal or West Prussia, ruled by the Polish king. In 1525, after his helpless struggle against the Polish king, Duke Albrecht secularized his territory, and made it a hereditary Duchy under the loose suzerainty of Poland.⁸ His domain therefore was called Ducal or East Prussia. Thus, at

⁶Horst Penner, "The Anabaptists and Mennonites of East Prussia," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 22, no. 4(1948): 212.

⁷Cornelius Krahn, Dutch Anabaptism: Origin, Spread, Life and Thought (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1981), p. 216. Also see The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. IV, p. 921.

⁸Horst Penner, "The Anabaptists and Mennonites of East Prussia," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 22, no. 4(1948): 214-215.

the time of the Reformation, both areas of Prussia became a part of the kingdom of Poland. However, the local authorities were largely of self determination, especially religious toleration was usually decided by the interest of the nobility, not by religious motives.⁹

Under the influence of Lutheranism, Albrecht, in the first years of his reign, promoted the Lutheran Reformation. However, he also tolerated other Protestant groups. Some Anabaptists even became his councillors, and their influence on the duke's court was so great that other groups did not venture to oppose them publicly.¹⁰ This was, to a great degree, on account of the fact that the struggle against heretics was not a first priority for the duke and other Polish magnates. At that time, they were more interested in rebuilding their devastated land than in keeping heretics out.¹¹

As a result of internal and external war, which had gone on for almost a century, the rich farmland of East Prussia reverted to swampland. With the population's decrease, many

⁹Janusz Tazbir, trans. by A.T. Jordan, A State without Stakes: Polish Religious Toleration in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (Poland: The Panstwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1973), p. 208.

¹⁰Harold S. Bender, ed., The Mennonite Encyclopedia (Kansas: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1955-1959), Vol. II, p. 123.

¹¹George Huntston Williams, The Radical Reformation (Kirksville, Missouri: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, Inc., 1992), p. 609.

villages became vacated.¹² Since Dutch farmers, who were mostly Protestants, were known for their extraordinary skill in land drainage, the duke offered favourable terms to invite them to his territory. He hoped those farmers could bring the land under cultivation again. Thus the religious toleration, the promise of economic development, and the easy accessibility by the traditional trading routes resulted in many Protestant refugees fleeing to East Prussia.¹³ In January 1527, an agreement was signed between the duke and a group of Dutch Protestants. According to the agreement, the duke assigned a total land of 5,400 hectares in the northwest corner of East Prussia, on condition of the Dutch farmers' promise to settle 100 families there.¹⁴

Although most of the first settlers in East Prussia were not exclusively Anabaptists,¹⁵ this area later became the nucleus of Mennonite settlements. This resulted from the fact that the revolution of Münster and the turmoil of Amsterdam in 1535 stirred up the bitterest persecutions of Anabaptists by

¹²Horst Penner, "The Anabaptists and Mennonites of East Prussia," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 22, no. 4(1948): 214.

¹³Ibid., p. 215.

¹⁴Horst Penner, "The Anabaptists and Mennonites of East Prussia," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 22, no. 4(1948): 216.

¹⁵According to Horst Penner, the first immigrant groups to East Prussia were Anabaptists, Bohemian Brethren, Dutch Reformed, Protestants from Poland, Huguenots, and Salzburgers. Horst Penner, "The Anabaptists and Mennonites of East Prussia," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 22, no. 4(1948): 216. Also see The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. II, p. 123.

the authorities in the Netherlands. After the fall of Münster, the Diet of Worms decreed that all Anabaptists, both Münsterites and peaceful groups, must be expelled from the empire. They were condemned in the whole of Europe, and most cities and states declared them unwelcome. Thus Anabaptists had to seek refuge in a place where the edict was not enforced. East Prussia at this time was seen as such a place because of its considerably tolerant political and religious conditions. This choice appeared to be wise when we note the fact that the duke himself was an imperial outlaw at that time.¹⁶ In his land the imperial laws against the Anabaptists became invalid. As mentioned above, the duke did not take an antagonistic position against the peaceful Anabaptists. The similar cultural tradition of Prussia gave those Anabaptist refugees another reason to seek asylum there. Further, the geographic conditions similar to those of their homeland made it particularly suitable for Anabaptists to give full expression to their farming talents. Because of all this, many Anabaptists began to flee to East Prussia. In fact, after 1534, almost every boat arriving on the coast of East Prussia, particularly in the Polish portion, brought

¹⁶Because of his secularizing the east part of Prussia, Duke Albrecht was excommunicated by the pope and outlawed by Charles V. See Horst Penner, "The Anabaptists and Mennonites of East Prussia," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 22, no. 4(1948): 215, and The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. II, p. 123.

persecuted Anabaptists from the Netherlands.¹⁷

In February 1539, the first Mennonite settlement was established in the Oberland of East Prussia, where 4,250 acres were made available for them.¹⁸ Although the first Mennonite refugees were living under Lutheran or Catholic rulers, they were usually tolerated because of the great economic contribution they made through their skills in building dikes, canals, and the cultivation of swampy land. They even obtained the freedom to establish their own churches. They were also released from compulsory state labour, and all military service.¹⁹ But these privileges came at a high price. They had to pay a high tax in exchange for all of these freedoms.

However, this settlement was not successful, because of a sudden church inspection in 1543. It resulted from the local bishop's complaint that the Mennonites were breaking down the established church order.²⁰ In his letter to the duke in 1542, bishop Speratus charged that the Mennonites paid no attention to the local Lutheran church order in respect to baptism and the Lord's Supper. They did not go to the

¹⁷Horst Penner, "The Anabaptists and Mennonites of East Prussia," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 22, no. 4(1948): 218.

¹⁸The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. IV, p. 922.

¹⁹Ibid., Vol. II, p. 124, and also see Horst Penner, "The Anabaptists and Mennonites of East Prussia," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 22, no. 4(1948): 216.

²⁰George Huntston Williams, The Radical Reformation (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1950), p. 416.

Lutheran preacher's services even though their only preacher had died. They were meeting each Sunday in the house of the preacher's widow, and she read to them out of the Bible in spite of the fact that it was forbidden. The duke therefore send his representatives to investigate the case in January, 1543. The report submitted to the duke confirmed that in the matter of the Lord's Supper and baptism the Mennonites disagreed with the local church discipline. The Mennonites therefore were ordered to leave the country unless they conformed to the local Lutheran church order.²¹ Even though the Mennonite settlers had just become established, when they were asked to choose between settled living and the maintenance of their faith, most of them remained true to their faith. Thus, the first Mennonite settlement in East Prussia was destroyed.²²

To a great degree, the failure of the first settlement was the result of the Mennonite attempt to build their own manner of life upon principles that were in sharp contrast to those of their neighbouring population. During the time of the Mennonite settling in East Prussia, the monarchical social system and state church organization were adopted as the final authority in East Prussia. The Mennonites, on the contrary, wanted to organize their life according to their religious

²¹Horst Penner, "The Anabaptists and Mennonites of East Prussia," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 22, no. 4(1948): 220.

²²George Huntston Williams, The Radical Reformation (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1950), p. 416.

belief, namely, to establish a socio-religious community. They attempted to develop their life without any interference from outside--all at a time when almost everything in East Prussia was dictated by an absolute monarch. Thus, the Mennonites had to struggle with the established social system while they were confronted with the problems of how to guard themselves against the attack from the established church. As a minority dissident group, it had great difficulties in realizing this goal under the given circumstances. Therefore, it seemed to the Mennonites that the only solution was to find another home where they could organize their life again.

4.2 The Mennonite Settlements in the Vistula Delta

Ironically, good fortune came to the Mennonites in East Prussia from an unexpected source. The breaks in the Vistula dikes in 1540 and 1545 flooded the Danzig lowlands, making them a watery waste.²³ The Polish authorities were anxious to return this land to productivity. Due to Mennonite agricultural achievements in East Prussia, the local authorities and landlords wanted the Mennonites to come to drain the marshes and to restore the ruined area. Their technique to use the windmill for pumping water made them

²³Johann Driedger, "Farming among the Mennonites in West and East Prussia, 1534-1949," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 31, no. 1(1957): 16.

especially welcome, in spite of their religious heresy.²⁴ Under a series of religiously and politically favourable terms, the delta area around Danzig and Elbing became the Mennonites' new destination. In the following years many Dutch Mennonites from East Prussia settled in that region.²⁵

In that area of West Prussia there were three semiautonomous municipal cities, each with a partly or largely German citizenry. They were Danzig, Elbing, and Thorn. Although the Mennonites had been persecuted from the very beginning, by the time the Mennonites in East Prussia were forced to leave their settlements in Oberland, Danzig and the area around the city had become somewhat secure for them.²⁶ So, the Mennonites began to establish their new home in that area, and that area became the first permanent asylum for the Mennonites in a hostile Europe. Nearly half of the Mennonites in the world today originally came from that land directly, or through Russia.²⁷

As early as 1535, some Anabaptists, expelled from Moravia, came to the region of Thorn. They constituted the embryonic form of the Mennonite congregations in the lowlands

²⁴Peter J. Klassen, "Faith and Culture in Conflict: Mennonites in the Vistula Delta," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 57, no. 3(1983): 197.

²⁵The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. 4, p. 922.

²⁶George Huntston Williams, The Radical Reformation (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), p. 406.

²⁷The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. IV, p. 920.

of the Vistula Valley. However, at that time the city of Danzig was not tolerant toward the Mennonites and other protestants, who had been put to death since 1526.²⁸ The city council of Danzig even sent letters to Amsterdam, Antwerp, Enkhuizen, and Emden to request that those cities prevent the Mennonites from boarding ships destined for Danzig.²⁹ Meanwhile, other port cities along the North Sea and Black Sea declared their determination to prohibit the Mennonites from settling in any part of their cities. They even adopted a more severe measure that cut off all relations to any city that would "hold to the error and heretical teaching of the Anabaptists."³⁰ In some cities, every boat that arrived in the harbour was required to send its captain and crew to the city hall for an examination as to whether they believed the Mennonite teachings. If they did not, they could land.³¹ Under these circumstances, some Mennonites fled into the Danzig suburbs of Schottland and Hoppenbruch where they were tolerated. The reason they were tolerated was that the local authorities needed people to rebuild their destroyed economy. In those towns the Mennonites were

²⁸Cornelius Krahn, Dutch Anabaptism: Origin, Spread, Life, and Thought (Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1981), p. 217.

²⁹Ibid., p. 217.

³⁰Peter J. Klassen, "Faith and Culture in Conflict: Mennonites in the Vistula Delta," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 57, no. 3(1983): 196.

³¹Horst Penner, "The Anabaptists and Mennonites of East Prussia," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 22, no. 4(1958): 215.

permitted to engage in trade, lace-making, and other manufacturing.³² In the following years, it was just because of the authorities' need to drain the Vistula Delta that more and more Mennonite farmers were attracted into the area around Danzig.

However, in Elbing the Mennonites received even more preferential treatment. They were permitted to settle in both the city and the surrounding area, and to follow a wide range of occupations.³³ Sometimes they received the authorities' protection from the attempts of the established churches to expel them. The city council even invited the Mennonites to expand their farming areas because of their economic success.³⁴

It did not take a long time before the local authorities found it very useful to have the Mennonites around. This, to a great degree, could be attributed to the diligence of the Mennonites in making waste land useful and valuable, and in developing local industries. As a result, more invitations were given to those who were still living in their homeland. Some Mennonite settlers were even asked to invite their

³²Peter J. Klassen, "Faith and Culture in Conflict: Mennonites in the Vistula Delta," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 22, no. 4(1958): 197.

³³Cornelius Krahn, Dutch Anabaptism: Origin, Spread, Life, and Thought (Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1981), p. 217.

³⁴Peter J. Klassen, "Faith and Culture in Conflict: Mennonites in the Vistula Delta," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 57, no. 3(1983): 197.

relatives or friends in the Netherlands to join them. By the middle of the century, the Mennonites densely settled in various lowlands in the Vistula Delta and the territory around Thorn.³⁵

In their first years of settling in the Vistula Delta, the Dutch Mennonites established several congregations according to the model of the church in their homeland. Of these congregations the church of Danzig was the oldest and largest one, which was established in 1550.³⁶ Since the Anabaptists were not permitted to settle in the city of Danzig at that time, the congregation had to locate its centre in Schottland that was just outside the walls of Danzig. Hugo Mattheissen and Herman van Bommel were the ministers of the congregation in Danzig.³⁷

Under the direction of Menno and Dirk,³⁸ the church of Danzig was established in a permanent form, and the influence of Münsteritism was completely rooted out. After Menno's death in 1561, Dirk assumed the leadership of the congregation

³⁵George Huntston Williams, The Radical Reformation (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), p. 409.

³⁶The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. IV, p. 923.

³⁷Ibid., p. 923.

³⁸In the summer of 1549, Menno Simons and Dirk Philips came to the Danzig area and visited some Mennonite settlements. See Cornelius Krahn, Dutch Anabaptism: Origin, Spread, Life, and Thought (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1981), pp. 218-219, also see George Huntston Williams, The Radical Reformation (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), p. 416.

in Danzig for the rest of his life. It was from that time onward that the model of the Mennonite church was developed into a definite pattern. In the course of mediating in the disputation between the Flemish and the Frisian Mennonites, both of which were the main groups of Mennonites in West Prussia, Dirk developed his idea of the disciplined church, and introduced strict discipline into Mennonite churches. The result was that the stricter Flemish party, which was more under the influence of Dirk, won the upper hand in Danzig and in the northern coastal area near Elbing. In the Kleinwerder and in the valley of the Vistula the Frisians was dominant.³⁹

4.3 Mennonite Farming in Prussia

For a long time the Vistula delta had been a rich farming area because of its good drainage, which had been built under the rule of the Teutonic Knights. However, after the disappearance of the Order, no authority was concerned to keep the system in a good condition. It came to fall into despair. Consequently, the major dikes broke at the Danzig lowlands in 1540 and 1545. This caused a number of the original farmers to leave that area. In 1547, the great drainage enterprise was initiated to drain the Vistula Delta by the Polish authorities. This delta covered an area from Drausensee to

³⁹The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. IV, p. 923.

the gates of Danzig--forty miles in width.⁴⁰ The Mennonites were welcome to replace those departed farmers. The first land in the Danzig lowlands for settlement was acquired by two Anabaptists, Philip Edzema and Herman van Bommel in 1547. Simultaneously, Edzema was sent to invite Mennonite settlers from Holland.⁴¹

Since many shallow lagoons and the whole territory became overgrown with reeds and rushes, it was a gigantic work project and a huge challenge to the Mennonites. Fortunately, the skill of the century-old Dutch drainage techniques provided the necessary help. After renting the swamp land from the Polish King, the Catholic church, the cities of Danzig and Elbing, and the Polish barons, Mennonite settlers organized leasing associations in the form of village communities and drainage companies. Every association then diked its land area against the water from the outside. They joined each other to make arrangements to dike in the channels for the discharge water. Windmills were built at the lowest places on the land areas in order to lower the water level of the polder. Some channels had to be dug out to make possible the steady flow of water to the windmill. Much of this kind of work had to be done by hand. This became a severe burden

⁴⁰Johann Driedger, "Farming among the Mennonites in West and East Prussia, 1534--1949," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 31, no. 1(1957): 16.

⁴¹Cornelius Krahn, Dutch Anabaptism: Origin, Spread, Life, and Thought (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1981), p. 217.

to the families of the settlers. Immense energy and patience were required to build windmills, dig endless numbers of ditches, construct dams, and improve the already existing dams. This most difficult drainage work took the settlers almost one hundred years.

In the process of doing it, the Mennonite settlers experienced countless disappointments and failures. Many a time, after decades of work and strenuous effort to make these lands valuable, everything was ruined over night when a flood broke the dam. The fruitful fields were covered with sand, the crops were completely ruined. Tremendous effort had to be given to rebuild these dams, dig new ditches, and even repair the ruined houses. Finally, after three or four generations of struggling with nature, the waste lands became fertile farmlands and grassy pastures, with windmills, dikes, sluices, and a net of drainage ditches. In all the gigantic efforts and great achievements in the agricultural development of these low areas, the Mennonites figured prominently. And because of their great industry and farming skills they also won the respect of the local authorities and their neighbours. People even said that it was easy to find where a lazy, drunken peasant or an industrious, sober Mennonite farmed.⁴²

Mennonite great service to the country was recognized by

⁴²Peter M. Friesen, The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910), trans. by J. B. Toews (Fresno California: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren, 1980), p. 48.

the authorities. In his decree of 1642, King Wladislaw IV highly praised the Mennonites in the matter of drainage and recovery of the waste land. He commented that all the Mennonites had done gave their descendants "an excellent example of hard work and diligence."⁴³ In the following years, his successors continued this position. They issued a series of decrees to make more land and other economic opportunities to the Mennonites.⁴⁴ Certainly, it has to be remembered that all of this was accomplished at a very high cost in settler's lives. It is reported that eighty per cent of the first settlers died of swamp fever in connection with the work of draining and clearing the land.⁴⁵

4.4 The Struggle for Religious Freedom

The economic success of the Mennonites in Prussia does not suggest that the Mennonites lived in an atmosphere of complete freedom. In the early years of their settlement, there were many who opposed their religious heterodoxy.

⁴³Harvey Plett, Georg Hansen and the Danzig Flemish Mennonite Church: A Study in Community, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, History Department, University of Manitoba, 1991, p. 114.

⁴⁴Peter J. Klassen, "Faith and Culture in Conflict: Mennonites in the Vistula Delta," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 57, no. 3(1983): 199.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 17.

Various restrictions limited their religious, political and economic rights. For example, they were prohibited to build churches and to live in the city of Danzig.⁴⁶ For a considerably long time, they were excluded from citizenship, and from various trades, even ones they had themselves introduced into the city.⁴⁷ However, the Mennonites never stopped their struggle against the religious and economic discrimination. This was particularly illustrated in their struggle for the exemption from military service.

Due to the privileges granted by the Polish king, the Mennonites did not experience any particular hardships for their refusal to bear arms in the first days of their settling in Prussia.⁴⁸ Certainly, this exemption had to be secured by means of a payment of money. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, this pattern had become a recognized method of exempting the Mennonites from military duties.⁴⁹ For example, on 3 April 1613, the city council of Danzig issued a decree and first time officially confirmed this kind

⁴⁶Peter J. Klassen, "A Homeland for Strangers and An Uneasy Legacy," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 66, no. 2(1992): 119.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 119.

⁴⁸Peter Brock, Pacifism In Europe to 1914 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 225.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 225.

of deal.⁵⁰ The decree explicitly stated that the Mennonites must pay their money monthly in exchange for the exemption from military service.⁵¹ However, this form of exemption was turned into extortion later on. According to the decree issued by the city council of Danzig in 1613, the payment was just one gulden per person for those well-to-do Mennonites, and half a gulden per person for others. Willibald von Haxberg, the royal treasurer, however raised the payment to one hundred and fifty gulden per farmstead. That meant, according to one family per farmstead, and the average family members at five and a half persons at that time, one person had to pay almost thirty times more money.⁵² The extortion became so severe that the Mennonites had to appeal to the Polish king Wladislaw IV (1632-1648) in 1642.⁵³ As a result

⁵⁰Before that, the Mennonites never received from the Polish authorities an explicit guarantee of exemption from military service. There just existed a kind of unwritten agreement in the matter between the Mennonites and the authorities. For example, this kind of privileges were usually embodied in the rental contracts that the first Mennonite settlers had received. See Peter Brock, Pacifism in Europe to 1914 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 228-229.

⁵¹Peter Brock, Pacifism in Europe to 1914 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 225. Also see The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. IV, p. 923.

⁵²Peter Brock, Pacifism in Europe to 1914, p. 225; and also see Harvey Plett's unpublished Ph.D. dissertation: Georg Hansen and the Danzig Flemish Mennonite Church: A Study in Continuity (History Department, the University of Manitoba, 1991), pp. 112-113.

⁵³John Friesen, "Theological Developments among Mennonites in Poland in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," Anabaptism Revisited (Walter Klaassen ed., Scottdale,

of it, King Wladislaw IV issued a decree of protecting the Mennonites from the extra financial levies. In his decree, the king confirmed his support of his predecessors' policy that granted the Mennonites various religious and economic privileges.⁵⁴ He particularly guaranteed that the Mennonites needed to pay only regular dues as a substitution for their exemption from military service.⁵⁵

In 1650, King Casimir (1648-1668) issued a decree that reaffirmed the position of King Wladislaw IV. He further declared that no decree against the Mennonites was effective from the date when this decree was issued.⁵⁶

Although the Mennonites received some protection from Polish kings, they often faced encroachment from subordinate officials and some Catholic or Lutheran church leaders on their religious freedom. A strong demand to curtail their liberties sometimes even threatened their survival in the society. For example, in 1678, the Mennonites in West Prussia

Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1992), p. 119.

⁵⁴Peter J. Klassen, "Faith and Culture in Conflict: Mennonites in the Vistula Delta," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 57, no. 3(1983): 198.

⁵⁵John Friesen, "Theological Developments among Mennonites in Poland in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," Anabaptism Revisited (Walter Klaassen ed., Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1992), p. 119.

⁵⁶Harvey Plett, Georg Hansen and the Danzig Flemish Mennonite Church: A Study in Continuity (A Ph.D. Dissertation, History Department, the University of Manitoba, 1991), p. 115.

were accused of doctrinal affinity with the Socinians.⁵⁷ Because of it, King John III (1674-1696) ordered Bishop Stanislas Sarnowski to carry out a theological examination of Mennonite faith. Since Socinians had been outlawed and expelled in 1658, the Mennonites would meet with the same fate if the charge was convicted. For the sake of defending themselves before the king, the Mennonites had to send their representatives to give the king and the bishop a detailed explanation about the Mennonite beliefs.⁵⁸ Georg Hansen and Heinrich von Dühren were the spokesmen of the Flemish and Frisian groups respectively at that time.⁵⁹

As a prominent Mennonite leader who arose almost a century after the death of Dirk Philips, Georg Hansen played an important role in clearing up the charges against the Mennonites. Georg Hansen was a cobbler by trade and did not have the benefit of a formal education. However, he was very widely read and also an eloquent speaker and gifted writer.⁶⁰ He became a minister of the Danzig congregation in 1655, and an elder in 1690. He served this office until his death in

⁵⁷John Friesen, "Theological Developments among Mennonites in Poland in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," Anabaptism Revisited (Walter Klaassen ed., Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1992), p. 120.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 120.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 120.

⁶⁰The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. II, p. 653.

1703.⁶¹

One of the charges against the Mennonites was that the Mennonites denied the baptism of other Christian confessions. In his answer Hansen completely refuted this accusation. He pointed out that Mennonites never despise and judge those who are not with them, and they also "do not want to mock or argue with anyone, but be gentle and meek toward all men."⁶² He further explained that, to the Mennonites, it would be against the teachings of Christ to despise other people's worship or spiritual practices.⁶³ According to Hansen, the Mennonites and other Christians were like the race runners when they sought the perfect expression in their religious beliefs. They were equally friendly one toward the other, and the final judgement was in the hand of Christ.⁶⁴ Without doubt, all the Mennonite beliefs and practices could give a positive demonstration to Hansen's defence. Finally, the king ordered to repeal all the charges of heresy against the Mennonites.⁶⁵

However, it was until 1694 that the Mennonites finally

⁶¹Ibid., p. 653.

⁶²Georg Hansen, A Foundation Book, quoted in Delbert F. Plett, The Golden Years: The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia (1812-1849) (Manitoba: D. F. P. Publications, 1985), p. 55.

⁶³Ibid., p. 56.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 56.

⁶⁵Janusz Tazbir, trans. by A.T. Jordan, A State Without Stakes: Polish Religious Toleration in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (Poland: the Panstwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1973), p. 203.

received the freedom for the full exercise of their religion from King John III.⁶⁶ In a decree issued in the same year, the king declared that the Mennonites could organize their church according their own beliefs. He also promised that this right would be valid to the Mennonites of subsequent generations.

4.5 The Isolated Community and the Mennonite Brotherhood

The Mennonites, from the very beginning, tried to conduct themselves as the "quiet people." They wanted nothing more than to live true to their faith. They attempted to separate themselves completely from all worldly activities. However, for a time, they were thought of as the biggest threat to the established order. As a result, they endured ruthless persecution. In the face of the attacks from a hostile environment the Mennonites put more emphasis on the brotherhood in their community life in order to protect themselves from the outside persecution. In other words, the suffering drew the Mennonites more closely together. And this prepared a favourable soil for the kind of common life in which a well-functioning system of mutual aid, both religious and secular, formed an essential part. Further, the enormous

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 118.

drainage work needed much cooperation in order to build the complex drainage network. It was clear that if there were not systematic arrangements made concerning the drainage, it would be impossible for the desolate swamp area to become fertile and profitable land. Thus, the necessary communal task of drainage, to a large degree, nurtured Mennonite sense of community life. This sense of community coincided exactly with their ideal to build a brotherly church fellowship. The mutual aid and common brotherly life thus came to merge into the Mennonite religious faith. At this point, the Mennonite idea of religious brotherhood found its expression in daily life, and the real life in reverse constantly developed the inner meaning of the brotherhood. Here religious faith and the needs of life were completely combined. This was particularly proved by the establishment of fire insurance organizations. In 1622, the Mennonites in the various lowland regions from Danzig to Elbing established fire insurance organizations covering all the Mennonite farmers.⁶⁷ They were thus vehicles for expressing financial support to one another in an orderly and ongoing way. Through those cooperative organizations a Mennonite farmer could get a payment of money and much help from others if he lost his house to fire. Another example of mutual aid could be seen when the Mennonites built dwellings for their community members who could not afford their own housing.

⁶⁷The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. IV, p. 923.

It was the enthusiasm of seeking a true brotherly love and the pressure of survival in the world that resulted in Prussian Mennonites' defining their life as a religious congregational style of life. In other words, Mennonite religious faith not only gathered all its believers into a religious congregation separated from the world, but also attracted all the members of the congregation into a congregational community distinguished from other social groups. The development of this distinctive community order provided Prussian Mennonites with great protection from outside attacks because of its strong exclusiveness. It also helped them make it through all kinds of crises due to religious suffering and natural afflictions.

Towards the end of the 16th century Dutch Mennonites began to settle down in West Prussia. A number of congregations were established in various places on the Vistula Valley.⁶⁸ The persecution, although now and again feebly flickering up under the pressure of local circumstances, never became general or sufficient enough to seriously threaten the existence of Mennonite settlements. By that time, almost the whole of the former Anabaptist congregations in Prussia had accepted the teachings of Menno Simons. They eliminated the extreme elements from the movement, softened the surrounding asperities, and moreover,

⁶⁸John Horsh, Mennonite in Europe (Pennsylvania: Mennonite Publishing House, 1950), p. 229.

came to differentiate and redefine quite clearly their own disparate impulses. For example, under the leadership of Menno Simons and Dirk Philips, the peaceful Mennonites cleared away the influence of fanatical Münsterites from the movement through their struggle with the Batenburgers. The Batenburgers, who were named after their leader of Jan van Batenburg, were still trying to carry on the radical tradition of Münster in spite of the collapse of the "Kingdom." They continued to adopt the practices of polygamy and community of goods that were practised at Münster. The general violent reaction against the Münsterites caused great difficulties for the peaceful Mennonite movement, since it was believed that they were supporters of the Münsterite revolution. At the same time, the Mennonites developed their evangelical tradition through their struggles with David Joris' belief in prophecy and Adam Pastor' tendency to unitarianism. The Bible therefore was steadfastly held by the Mennonites as the final authority in faith and life. With the evolvement of such theological characteristics in the movement, the Mennonites became more confident to bring their beliefs into their daily life. In the following years, Prussian Mennonites continually consolidated inwardly in diverse and largely isolated communities and fellowships that provided a strong centripetal force as well as an extremely exclusive trend. Their way of life also came to find more expression in their religious practices. This finally shaped the models of Mennonite church

and social community after Prussian Mennonites later settled in Russia.

In fact, during the time of Mennonites' settling in Prussia, the models of their church and community had begun to display their prominent features, which greatly affected later Mennonite generations in their way of life. One of these features was the sense of mutuality that existed among all of the members of the community. It was this social sense that corresponded to their idea of religious discipleship, and gave another expression of their idea of following Jesus Christ. What was different was that it put more emphasis on the matters pertaining to this life. Thus, the way in which people sought their holy life now became important. And it also necessarily affected the way in which they earned their living. This tendency was later developed in Russia, and became more defined there, although the development raised problems that brought about some difficulties to identify their religious principles.

At the same time, the Mennonites became noted for their brotherly way of life, and it distinguished them from both the military communitarianism of Münsterites and the voluntary one of Huterites. Although the Mennonites, like the other two groups, held to the principle of separation from the world, they understood it differently from both of them. They separated from the world, but did not fight with the established social order or try to change it. They attempted

to build a new social life, but not a social order. All the things were to happen peacefully in the existing social structure. Unlike Münsterites and Huterites, they never attempted to build another society that either forcibly replaced the old one, or completely discarded it. They admitted that the church has to be "in the world" while they insisted that it must be "out of the world." The Mennonites tended to draw all their members closely together and to live in compact communities, but the community was still to be an integral part of society. They just constructed an independent, religious and secular, fellowship. The central point of their emphasis, a point that runs through all their literature like a symphonic theme, is the duty of all members to live by the one law of love. For them, the brotherly relationship of love between all the members was to be above anything else, although it never became completely real in spite of the fact that they always dreamt of it happening and gave it their best effort. At this point, Mennonite experience through their whole history itself seemed to give us the best example. While the Mennonites were striving to separate themselves from the world, they never stopped separating some of their brethren from their church. Moreover, for someone, brotherhood became secondary when they found that a Mennonite principle was conflicting with their special interests, especially with their economic interests. About that, the Mennonite life in Russia will tell us more

stories.

In a word, after they settled down in Prussia, the Mennonites modified not only their church structure, but also developed their distinctive ways of life, such as autonomy believers' congregations, self-containing socio-religious communities, and simple agricultural life-style. Their church at the same time helped them to keep their life under the control of their faith. On the other hand, their way of life gave more energy to their religious practice, and to their seeking eternal life. This merger of the religious faith and daily life came to give the Mennonite community a distinctive shape in contrast to their contemporary society, which was characterized by its disciplined fellowship, mutual aid brotherhood, and complete separation from the world. However, it also should be noted that, in the following years, Mennonite beliefs and practices were still challenged by the accepted values of the established societies. The Mennonites always faced the choice of adapting traditional doctrines and ethics to a world in flux or seeing an increasing estrangement from dominant cultural forces.⁶⁹ In that process, the Mennonites were often put into a position of a dilemma: either reducing their convictions to the established faith or maintaining their convictions "as is," but facing the danger of becoming socially irrelevant. Under the latter

⁶⁹Peter J. Klassen, "Faith and Culture in Conflict: Mennonites in the Vistula Delta," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 57, no. 3(1983): 194.

circumstance, some Mennonites always sought escape from the society in which they were living through geographic isolation and social, cultural, and educational withdrawal. As a result of it, the maintenance of faith, in the history of the Mennonite movement, at times led those Mennonite position in their host society to be in jeopardy. They had to leave their established home again and again.

CHAPTER 5

THE MENNONITES IN RUSSIA, 18TH-19TH CENTURY

From the latter part of the 18th century, about 10,000 Mennonites gave up their organized home in Prussia and migrated to Russia.¹ Poverty and suffering once again accompanied them in their pioneer life in Russia. However, after only a short time, the Mennonites rebuilt their life, and experienced a period of the greatest prosperity in the history of their movement. Their experience in Russia was both legendary and tragic. To a certain extent, it reflected dramatically the way of Mennonite life.

5.1 The Material Wealth and Discriminatory Decrees

After more than two centuries of hardship, the Mennonites in Prussia not only maintained their religious identity, but they also developed into a strong economic community. They manifested that their way of life, which was derived from their religious belief, was suited to living in particularly

¹Cornelius Krahn, "Russia," in The Mennonite Encyclopedia, 1st ed.

difficult conditions. This became especially true when they developed large swamps into very fertile farmland. However, although the Mennonites in Prussia had generally been tolerated on account of their economic worth, there had never been a time when they were not in some way discriminated against. This was most clearly displayed by the fact that for over two hundred years the Mennonites had never been accorded full citizenship status, despite their enormous contributions to the economy of Prussia.² As people without citizenship, the Mennonites were unable to own property, engage in most business, build church buildings, or even defend themselves in a court of law. They were accepted as settlers just because some local nobles and landlords needed people skilled in draining marshes or in establishing new industries. During their settling in Prussia, the Mennonites were constantly threatened with either expulsion, imprisonment, or severe monetary exactions by local authorities. For them, the only protection against such discrimination was the good will of the patrons on whose land they resided.³ In fact, Prussian Mennonites many times had to directly ask for Polish royal protection. But in exchange for that, they had to give large

²David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia-- A Sketch of Its Founding and Endurance, 1789-1919," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 47, no. 4 (1973): 280.

³John Friesen, "The Relationship of Prussian Mennonites to German Nationalism," in Harry Leowen ed., Mennonite Images: Historical, Cultural, and Literary Essays Dealing With Mennonite Issues (Winnipeg, Canada: Hyperion Press Limited, 1980), p. 63.

and frequent donations to the royal treasury.

With the rise of Mennonite economic importance in the society, from the middle of 17th century, the Mennonites in Prussia began to be granted certain economic and religious privileges.⁴ After that, religious freedom and hard work finally brought to the Mennonites in Prussia considerable material prosperity.

As a natural consequence of this prosperity, the birth rate among the Mennonites became higher and higher. The land soon became insufficient in spite of redivisions of their farm property.⁵ After a long time of suffering, the Mennonites, for the first time, faced the difficulties that came from material wealth. Since land in West Prussia became more and more expensive after the middle of the eighteenth century, Mennonites began to spread out in search of opportunities for themselves and their children. Some moved deeper into Poland, following the course of the Vistula; others moved into East Prussia. Many Mennonites from farming backgrounds were forced

⁴In 1642, the Polish king Wladislaw IV granted the Mennonites in Prussia a *Privilegium*, in which he regularized a protection arrangement to the Mennonites. This especially included the exemption of the Mennonites in Prussia from capricious and rapacious monetary exactions in exchange for regular payments into royal treasury. See John Friesen, "Theological Developments among Mennonites in Poland in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in Walter Klaassen ed., Anabaptism Revisited (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1992), p. 119.

⁵Bruno Ewert, "Four Centuries of Prussian Mennonites," Mennonite Life 3, no. 2 (1948): 12.

to take up craft work at this time. A survey by the local authorities revealed that about two thirds of the 12,032 Mennonites, who lived outside Danzig in 1772, were involved in agriculture and the rest followed a wide rang of occupations, for example, the textile industry, kindred trades, craftsmen, merchants, and millers.⁶

The very fact of the changing economic fortunes alerted the Mennonites in Prussia that they were dealing with a situation very different from that which they experienced in the past two hundred years. Moreover, with the drift towards the towns, Mennonite traditional agrarian ways of life began to face the challenge of the urban way of life. In fact, the growing rift between the urban way of life and the agrarian way of life probably forced the Mennonites to rebuild their church and community structures.

However, the most serious case, which immediately affected the Mennonite life in Prussia, came from the partition of Poland in 1773. Since then, West Prussia, with about 13,500 Mennonites, was given to the Kingdom of Prussia as the province of West Prussia.⁷ This change soon made the position of the Mennonites in Prussia untenable. Initially, having feared the threat of the numerical growth and the

⁶James Urry, None But Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia 1789-1889 (Manitoba: Hyperion Press Limited, 1989), p. 47.

⁷Horst Penner, "West Prussia," in The Mennonite Encyclopedia, 1st ed.

economic importance of the Mennonites, the Prussian government issued a number of discriminatory decrees and laws to prevent the economic development of Mennonite communities. These forced the Mennonites annually to contribute additional money to the military officers' training school at Kulm, and set more strict restrictions to those who wanted to purchase more land.⁸ Facing such a difficult situation, the Mennonites had to appeal to the Prussian king, Frederick II, to recognize their privileges granted by the Polish kings. The king promised the Mennonites they would continue to be exempted from military service and could buy some additional land.⁹ However, within a short period, Mennonites faced more restricted regulations in their privileges because Frederick William succeeded to the throne in 1786. Since Frederick William II feared that the regiments supplied by men from West Prussia would be short of soldiers if Mennonites bought too much land,¹⁰ new edicts were issued in 1789, which made it

⁸John Friesen, "The Relationship of Prussian Mennonites to German Nationalism," in Harry Loewen ed., Mennonite Images: Historical, Cultural, and Literary Essays Dealing With Mennonite Issues (Manitoba: Hyperion Press Limited, 1980), p. 64.

⁹John Friesen, "The Relationship of Prussian Mennonites to German Nationalism," in Harry Loewen ed., Mennonite Images: Historical, Cultural, and Literary Essays Dealing With Mennonite Issues (Manitoba: Hyperion Press Limited, 1980), p. 64.

¹⁰According to the Prussian military system, Prussian army included a citizen's militia conscripted on a quota system based on regional cantons. Since Mennonites formed a majority of the population in some areas few recruits were available for the army. See James Urry, None But Saints: The

virtually impossible for the Mennonites to further purchase land.¹¹ According to the new edicts, a Mennonite would lose his privilege of exemption from military service, if he bought any land from a non-Mennonite. Meanwhile, the Mennonites were told that no new settlement was to be established in Prussia from the date of the edict.¹²

Without doubt, all these legal measures drastically affected the economic fortunes of the Mennonites, and further threatened their religious rights, especially the right of the exemption from military service.¹³ In other words, it would result in such a real threat to the Mennonites--as to whether or not they would be able to continue their normal existence in Prussia, especially now that there was a constant need to acquire more land to accommodate their large families. Although, initially, these measures were not directed against the practice of the Mennonite religious beliefs, it is important to note that the economic restrictions in turn created real religious pressures. In fact, all the prohibitions had a direct bearing on their Mennonite status, because the relief from those prohibitions could be obtained

Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia 1789-1889
(Manitoba: Hyperion Press Limited, 1989), p. 48.

¹¹Bruno Ewert, "Four Centuries of Prussian Mennonites," Mennonite Life 3, no. 2(1948): 12.

¹²David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia-- A Sketch of Its Funding and Endurance, 1789-1919," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 47, no. 4(1973): 304.

¹³Ibid., p. 304.

only if they agreed to give up their membership in the Mennonite church.¹⁴ It is clear that, for most Mennonites, their future in Prussia could be guaranteed only in exchange for a price that they were unwilling to pay. It became inevitable once again that they had to look for a new home. It was at this time that an invitation from Russia came as a gift from heaven, and saved them from the crisis.

5.2 Migration and Settlement

The opportunity for the Mennonites to settle in Russia came as a result of the conquest of new territories by the Russian armies. In numerous border conflicts, especially after the Russo-Turkish War (1781-1792), the Turks were driven eastward and beyond the Caucasus Mountains and the Black Sea. The vast regions of the Lower Volga and the Ukraine became sparsely settled. Having realized that Russia lacked the man power for an immediate extensive colonization of the new land at that time, Empress Catherine II of Russia turned for the solution of the problem to an extensive program of colonization from abroad. In December of 1762 and July of 1763, she issued two manifestos to invite foreign settlers to

¹⁴Ibid., p. 281, 304.

make their homes in these areas.¹⁵ Under the attraction of various favourable offers,¹⁶ some Prussian Mennonites began to turn their attention to the new land with new opportunities. They believed that Russia was not only offering cheap land where they could continue their simple, farming way of life, but also providing a place where their Mennonite faith could be maintained or even re-established in a purer form.

In 1786, two Prussian Mennonite deputies, who claimed to represent between 270 and 300 families,¹⁷ travelled to Kherson at the expense of Russian government. They inspected the Taurida region and the Crimea, in which a number of sites were recommended for them by an agent of the local authorities. They finally decided to settle on the Lower Dnieper near Berislav. After negotiations over the special

¹⁵David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Migration to New Russia (1787-1870)," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 9, no. 2 (1935): 72-74.

¹⁶They included free board and transportation from the Russian boundary to the place of settlement, the right to settle in any part of the country and to pursue any occupation, a loan for the building of houses, the acquisition of farm implements, the establishment of factories, perpetual exemption from military and civil service, exemption from the payment of taxes for a varying period of years, free religious practice, the right to build and control their own schools and churches for those agricultural colonies, the right of local self-government, and so on. See David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Migration to New Russia (1787-1870)," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 9, no. 2 (1935): 75.

¹⁷David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia-- A Sketch of Its Funding and Endurance, 1789-1919," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 47, no. 4 (1973): 281.

rights and privileges that a Mennonite settler would be granted, the deputies and the viceroy of New Russia, Potemkin, reached an agreement on many issues (such as various forms of assistance, size of family land grant, permanent exemption from military service, and the guarantee of complete freedom in the matter of religious beliefs and practices). As a result, a group exodus of the Mennonites from Danzig and West Prussia began in 1788.¹⁸

The first Mennonite colony in Russia was established in July of 1789, when 228 Mennonite families reached their destination--Chortitza, a long narrow valley on the right side of the Dnieper River in the Province of Ekaterinoslav.¹⁹ Although Chortitza was not the first choice of the Mennonite migrants because of the fact that its soil was greatly inferior to that which had been found near Berislav, they settled there anyway.²⁰ By the 1820s, a total of 462 families constituted the settlers of Chortitza, later also

¹⁸According to David G. Rempel, it is impossible to give the figure as to the number of families and the number of persons who left Prussia during the first migration to Russia in 1788. However, he pointed out that all official Russian sources stated that by the spring of 1789 there were 228 Mennonite families, who settled in eight villages on the one time Potemkin's estate. The total number of persons was estimated between 1,030 and 1,073. See David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia--A Sketch of Its Founding and Endurance, 1789-1919," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 47, no. 4 (1973): 293.

¹⁹David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Migration to New Russia (1787-1870)," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 9, no. 3 (1935): 111-112.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 110-111.

known as the Old Colony. Eighteen villages, with a land complex of 113,000 acres, were established.²¹ By the beginning of the century, about 2,000 families, with about 12,000 people, lived in 19 villages with about 405,000 acre land.

The second Mennonite colony in Russia was located about 100 miles southeast of Chortitza in the Province of Taurida. Its establishment was mainly due to the further oppression of the Mennonites in Prussia. A new Prussian decree, in 1801, placed greater restrictive pressures on Mennonite land holdings. According to the decree, the Mennonite exemption from military service was to cease with the first change of land ownership.²² At the same time, the new ruler of Russia, Alexander I (1801-1825), was personally interested in establishing a large number of Mennonite colonies in Russia.²³ The first 162 families left for Russia in November of 1803, and in the short time of three years, by the fall of 1806, 385 families had left to establish the Molotschna settlement.²⁴ In the following years, despite the fact that the flow of emigration decreased due to concessions being given by the Prussian king and the increased difficulty in

²¹Ibid., pp. 115-116.

²²David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Migration to New Russia (1787-1870)," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 9, no. 3 (1935): 118.

²³Ibid., p. 118.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 122-123.

obtaining passports, the flow of emigration to Russia became one of the largest emigrations in Mennonite history.²⁵ By 1835, 1,200 families, and an estimated population of 6,000, had established about 60 villages, with a land area of 324,000 acres, in the Molotschna settlement.²⁶

Although the Russian colonization program was curtailed in 1810 because of financial difficulties, the Mennonites were still given preferential treatment when they came to Russia because of their enormous agricultural achievements in Prussia.²⁷ In the 1850s, another additional 500 Prussian Mennonite families established two other original settlements in the Middle Volga region. They were Trakt and Alexander, which was in the Province of Samara.²⁸ By the beginning of the century, the two settlements had established 18 villages with about 2,000 people and 80,000 acres of land.²⁹

On account of the rapid increase of the population and

²⁵Ibid., p. 118.

²⁶Cornelius Krahn, "Molotschna," in The Mennonite Encyclopedia, 1st ed.

²⁷David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Migration to New Russia (1787-1870)," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 9, no. 3 (1935): 125.

²⁸Frank H. Epp, Mennonite Exodus: The Rescue and Resettlement of the Russian Mennonites Since the Communist Revolution (Altona, Manitoba: D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1962), p. 15.

²⁹Cornelius Krahn, "Russia," in The Mennonite Encyclopedia, 1st ed.

the government's limitation on the subdivisions of a farm,³⁰ the Mennonites were forced to extend their settlements to other areas from the 1830s onward. The surplus population of the old settlements received an opportunity to establish their homes either in new settlements, or the daughter settlements. At first, the settlements were established in the territories surrounding the four mother settlements, but subsequently, as far away as Siberia and Turkestan.³¹ By the beginning of the century, 50 daughter settlements had been established in the whole of Russia. They were composed of 365 villages, which owned over four million acres of land--equal amounts to that owned by the mother settlements.³² The churches established in the daughter settlements remained in close relationship with their mother churches for a long time. In fact, they moulded their life completely according to the pattern of the mother settlement from which they came, although they were a long distance from their mother settlement and the geography, climate, and other social conditions were very different.

³⁰According to The Mennonite Encyclopedia, by 1859 the population of the Mennonites has increased to 34,500, but the land area that they occupied still remained the level of the primitive settlement period. See Cornelius Krahn, "Russia," in The Mennonite Encyclopedia, 1st ed.

³¹Frank H. Epp, Mennonite Exodus (Altona, Manitoba: D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1962), p. 19.

³²Cornelius Krahn, "Russia," in The Mennonite Encyclopedia, 1st ed.

5.3 A Land of Opportunity

The total number of original Mennonite immigrants was about 10,000. They were granted about 501,400 acres of land.³³ For those first Mennonite settlers, Russia seemed to be a land of opportunity, and it promised them a prosperous future. However, fortune did not bring them an easy life in Russia. Most of them, especially those in the Chortitza colony, had a hard beginning. In addition to those usual adversities that beset any pioneer community, the condition of the Chortitza settlers was particularly desperate during the first winter on account of the serious loss of the settlers' baggage in the course of transportation. They had to live in dugouts and sod shanties until the arrival of building materials which were furnished by the government. The Russian government could not keep its promise to loan every family 500 rubles because of the protracted war with Turkey. Every family was only paid 100 rubles, when they first entered Russia. The remaining amount was paid over the next eight years in small sums.³⁴ In addition to all of these difficulties, there was also the barren soil, with its innumerable low plateaus, and the bad weather. This resulted

³³Ibid.

³⁴David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Migration to New Russia (1787--1870)," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 9, no. 3 (1935): 114.

in nearly total crop failure for a number of years.³⁵ Things became so bad that it seemed that the settlement could not survive.

The beginning of the Molotschna settlement, however, was completely different. Since a third of the Molotschna settlers were well-to-do, some even very rich,³⁶ and the remainder received immediate substantial assistance from the government, they never experienced the hardships that had for so many years plagued the Chortitza settlers. Furthermore, because the land was more fertile than that in the Chortitza settlement, and the farmers were more skilled than the Chortitza settlers, the settlement in Molotschna showed many signs of growing wealth and accumulating comfort. For a number of years, it was the object of great interest among the highest authorities, and even the Tsar Alexander I.³⁷

Despite the initial hardships, many favourable conditions

³⁵Ibid., p. 114.

³⁶According to a contemporary traveller's report, many of the Molotschna settlers had sold their property in Prussia for thirty to forty thousand guilders before they migrated to Russia. They had come with their own wagons that were drawn by five to seven horses. Sixty three of the 322 families did not accept the advance money offered by the Russian government. See Peter M. Friesen, The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910), trans. J.B. Teows (Fresno, California: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1980), p. 186.

³⁷According to a contemporary writer, the Tsar Alexander I visited the settlement twice, and once by the members of royal family. See Heinrich Heese, Sr., Brief History of Our Mennonite Brethren, in Peter M. Friesen, The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910), p. 113.

existed in Russia for a truly successful development. The large and exclusive block settlements enabled a self-supporting economy. 175 acres of land allotted to every family, which was a more generous assignment than for other colonists,³⁸ guaranteed a good beginning for their living in the settlement. Other privileges included freedom of location and occupation, loans for farm and industrial purposes, the unrestricted exercise of religion, a permanent exemption from military and civil service, and the right of local self-government.³⁹ With the fertile land resources, a long time tax exemption, and a relative administrative autonomy, the Mennonites in Russia proceeded to establish what later became known as the "Mennonite commonwealth." This was a self-contained community in which Mennonites governed themselves, established their own schools and welfare institutions, developed a self-sufficient economy with little outside interference, and practised their religion with few

³⁸According to the Russian colonization law issued by the government on March 19, 1764, every family who settled in Russia would obtain 81 acres of land. See David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Migration to New Russia (1789-1870)," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 9, no. 2 (1935): 75. However, according to the Potemkin-Höppner-Bartsch agreement of July 5, 1787, every Mennonite family could receive 175 acres of land. See David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia--A Sketch of Its Founding and Endurance (1789-1919)," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 47, no. 4 (1973): 283.

³⁹See "The Potemkin-Höppner-Bartsch Agreement" of 1787, in David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 47, no. 4 (1973): 283-286, and also see "Charter of Privileges" of 1800, in Peter M. Friesen, The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910), pp. 119-120.

restrictions. The organized village distinguished the Mennonite life from that of their native neighbours.⁴⁰ In the following years, all of these, led to a golden age for the Mennonites in Russia. In much of the area, they set an enviable record of achievements in stock and farming.⁴¹ With the great success in developing hard winter wheat, they not only made the Ukraine the breadbasket of Russia, but also supplied foreign demand for the grain.⁴² This progression can be manifested from the following statistics: The income from the sale of various grains in the Chortitza and Molotschna settlements in 1841 was 21,767 and 82,992 rubles respectively, but in 1852 it was 75,774 and 286,593 rubles.⁴³

At the same time, with the rearing of fine-fleeced sheep, the stock-raising became one of the main resources of accumulating the wealth of the settlements during the first four decades of the Mennonite settlement.⁴⁴ By scientific methods of crossing Prussian cattle with local breeds, the

⁴⁰David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia-- A Sketch of Its Founding and Endurance, 1789-1919," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 47, no. 4 (1973): 260.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 259.

⁴²David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia-- A Sketch of Its Founding and Endurance, 1789-1919," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 48, no. 1 (1974): 18.

⁴³Ibid., p. 18.

⁴⁴According to David G. Rempel, by the late 1830s each Mennonite family owned between 125 and 150 sheep, quoted in James Urry, None But Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia (1789-1889) (Manitoba: Hyperion Press Limited, 1989), p. 88.

Mennonite farmers produced a new breed, generally known as the German Red cattle. This breed eventually became one of the chief breeds amongst dairy cattle in the Ukraine and other areas of Russia.⁴⁵ Moreover, the Russian Mennonites also devoted themselves almost exclusively to a number of other activities related to agriculture, such as the production of silk, the planting of trees in large areas of the steppes, the milling of flour, and the manufacture of farm machinery and implements.⁴⁶ By the middle of 19th century, the two chief settlements, Molotschna and Chortitza, served as important centres in the distribution and the manufacturing of farm machinery and implements. They even came to be able to supply great quantities of these products to all parts of Russia.⁴⁷

The economic and social transformation of the Mennonite settlements in Russia was intimately related to the life of Johann Cornies.⁴⁸ Born at Baerwalde near Danzig in 1789, Cornies migrated to Russia with his parents in 1804. After a two-year sojourn at the Chortitza colony, the Cornies family

⁴⁵James Urry, None But Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia (1789-1889) (Manitoba: Hyperion Press Limited, 1989), p. 91.

⁴⁶Cornelius Krahn, "Russia," in The Mennonite Encyclopedia, 1st ed.

⁴⁷David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia-- A Sketch of Its Founding and Endurance, 1789-1919," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 48, no. 1 (1974): 19.

⁴⁸Peter M. Friesen, The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910), trans. J. B. Teows (Fresno, California: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1980), p. 190.

settled in the village of Ohrloff, which lay at the Molotschna colony.⁴⁹ In 1812, Cornies purchased his own farm in Ohrloff. Here he experimented with soil cultivation, forestry and gardening, cattle, sheep and horse breeding.⁵⁰ These experiments became so successful that his wealth increased sharply. By 1847, Cornies owned 500 horses, 8,000 sheep, and 200 head of cattle. He also became the largest renter of the reserve land, and cultivated about 25,000 acres of land.⁵¹

Cornies' success soon attracted the attention of government officials. In 1817, the government asked Cornies to head the Settlement Commission that arranged the distribution of land and settlement of the new Mennonite immigrants.⁵² When the Agricultural Society was founded in the Molotschna in 1830, Cornies was confirmed as its life-long chairman by the authorities.⁵³ The society was a governmental agent assigned to inspect agricultural activities

⁴⁹Walter Quiring, "Cornies, Johann," in The Mennonite Encyclopedia, 1st ed.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Walter Quiring, "Cornies, Johann," in The Mennonite Encyclopedia, 1st ed., also see James Urry, None But Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia 1789-1889 (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Hyperion Press Limited, 1989), p. 109.

⁵²James Urry, None But Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia 1789-1889 (Manitoba: Hyperion Press Limited, 1989), p. 111.

⁵³Peter M. Friesen, The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910), trans. J.B. Teows (Fresno, California: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1980), p. 191.

in the Mennonite colonies. It was directly responsible to the Guardian's Committee to whom it reported periodically and from whom it received orders and advice.⁵⁴ Under the leadership of Cornies, the Society took various vigorous actions to improve agriculture in the colonies, recommending and advising the farmers on new crops, techniques, and ways to improve livestock. All these attempts of the Society proved to be very successful in the promotion of improvements in those areas of agriculture with which it was charged. Cornies also established an experimental farm at Yushanlee. With tireless zeal and at his own expense, Cornies experimented to find the methods of farming which would be best suited to the conditions of the colonies. His energetic work proved fruitful. This particularly could be seen in the following areas: the planting of forests and gardens, the spreading of the four-field system of land cultivation with summer-fallow, the improving of the breed of cattle, the developing of the silk industry, the improving of the education system, and so on.⁵⁵

During the first settlement days, the religious life in Russia was at a comparatively low level and was marked by an appearance of sterility.⁵⁶ Certainly, this was explainable

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 193-194.

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 195-196.

⁵⁶David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia-- A Sketch of Its Founding and Endurance, 1789-1919," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 48, no. 1 (1974): 11.

in light of the fact that all energies were demanded by the task of conquering the frontier land. But more important was the fact that among the first group of 228 families to settle in the Chortitza settlement there was no minister.⁵⁷ Therefore, during the first few years of their settlement, the leadership had to be selected from those who were better in economy but untrained or even uneducated.⁵⁸ The first elder, Behrent Penner, was elected by the settlers and confirmed by a letter from the Prussian church.⁵⁹ It was not until 1794 that the congregations in Prussia sent Cornelius Warkentin, who was a minister at the time, and Elder Cornelius Regier to come to the Chortitza settlement. Under their direction, church life was organized and began to make progress.⁶⁰ However, Regier soon died in Chortitza. Before his death, Regier ordained Cornelius Warkentin. He therefore became the only elder in charge of all church affairs in the settlement for the first few years.⁶¹

⁵⁷Peter M. Friesen, The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910), trans. J.B. Teows (Fresno, California: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1980), p. 91.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 91.

⁵⁹Heinrich Heese, Sr., Brief History of Our Mennonite Brethren, in Peter M. Friesen, The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910), p. 112.

⁶⁰Peter M. Friesen, The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910), trans. J.B. Teows (Fresno, California: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1980), p. 91.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 91.

With the economic development, the cultural achievement in Russia was also remarkable. Initially there were no schools in the settlements. However, the Chortitza and Molotschna settlements gradually developed an education system that extended to the daughter settlements and subsequently exerted a strong influence on some of the Mennonites in North America. Hospitals and other institutions for public service were also established. The progression in education and other public services broke the lethargy of the early settlement days and boosted the economic development in the settlements.

In a word, after a considerably long time of hardships, the Mennonites adjusted to the natural environment of the area and had the ability from the bare but fertile black soil to create a comfortable lifestyle. It is not an exaggeration to say that no group of Mennonites anywhere has ever attained such a degree of success as those in Russia during the 19th century.⁶²

5.4 The Social-religious Commonwealth and the Pure Mennonite Church

In spite of early difficulties, the Mennonite settlers in Russia rapidly transferred and reproduced many of the

⁶²David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia-- A Sketch of Its Founding and Endurance, 1789-1919," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 47, no. 4 (1973): 260.

religious and social patterns that they had known in Prussia. However, the particular conditions in Russia brought to the Mennonite life there some new characteristics. For instance, in Prussia the Mennonites made themselves distinguishable from other settlers mainly in their religious beliefs and practices. Their social and cultural distinctiveness was neither unique nor peculiar in the regions in which they had settled.⁶³ This was in a great measure decided by the Mennonite discriminated social status in the society. As a religious heretical group and a social unit without citizenship in Prussia,⁶⁴ the Mennonites had no opportunity to organize a completely independent social community in the larger society. They therefore were rarely to be directly involved in the "civil" administration. The Mennonites lived in the same location with approximately the same families just because they belonged to the same congregation. Under the circumstances, the church in some degree replaced the social organization and performed its function.⁶⁵ Without doubt,

⁶³James Urry, None But Saints: The Transformation of Mennonites Life in Russia 1789-1889 (Manitoba: Hyperion Press Limited, 1989), p. 44.

⁶⁴John Friesen, "The Relationship of Prussian Mennonites to German Nationalism," in Harry Loewen ed., Mennonite Images: Historical, Cultural, and Literary Essays Dealing With Mennonite Issues (Manitoba: Hyperion Press Limited, 1980), pp. 62-63.

⁶⁵Peter M. Friesen, The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910), trans. J.B. Teows (Fresno, California: board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1980), p. 92.

the development of their religious congregation also provided the Mennonites with their social relationships and gave them their social identity. However, such an identity was not strong enough to separate the Mennonites completely from their contemporaries. This became especially true when we noted such a fact that Mennonite church played a more important role in their community life in Prussia than in Russia.

However, since the Mennonite settlements in Russia were established on the basis of a system of privileges, not only was the Mennonite religious life guaranteed to completely separate them from the mainstream of their contemporary society, but their secular life was largely isolated by a structure of local self-governing and was self-sufficient.⁶⁶ The Mennonites now lived in closed civil communities and jurisdictional districts in which they not only could, but also were forced to perform the many judicial tasks.⁶⁷ In other words, the whole life of the Russian Mennonites was kept

⁶⁶According to the 1763 Manifesto issued by Empress Catherine II, the Russian government promised all agricultural settler communities the rights to practise their religious beliefs without any interference, and to establish the local self-government. The Russian Mennonites were specially assured those privileges in the Potemkin-Höppner-Bartsch Agreement of 1787. Those privileges were also confirmed by the Great Charter of Privileges issued by Emperor Paul I in 1800. See David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Migration to New Russia (1787-1870)," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 9, no. 2 (1935): 75; also see Peter M. Friesen, The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910), p. 119.

⁶⁷Peter M. Friesen, The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910), trans. J.B. Teows (Fresno, California: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1980), p. 92.

by law separate from the rest of society. The isolation of exclusive settlements, the self-sufficiency of village life, and the linguistic segregation from most of their neighbours strengthened the Mennonite sense of community while the Mennonites continued to distinguish themselves from other ethnics in religious faith. Therefore, the biggest difference between Mennonites in Russia and Mennonites in Prussia was their ability to become socially distinct. In Russia, this set the stage for religious and secular homogeneity. Mennonite identity came to be based not only on religious faith, but also on membership in a settlement. This meant that religion became just one of the markers of distinctiveness. Mennonites already identified with their village, with their district and colony, as well as with their congregation.⁶⁸ The act of joining the church at the same time meant to involve oneself in the concerns of life in the world, such as the local government, the enforcement of laws, social welfare, and so on.

In Russia, Mennonite settlements usually consisted of the individual villages, and every village was divided into 15 to 50 households.⁶⁹ The families who were living in the same

⁶⁸James Urry, None But Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia 1789-1889 (Manitoba: Hyperion Press Limited, 1989), p. 57.

⁶⁹Peter M. Friesen, The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910), trans. J.B. Teows (Fresno, California: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1980), p. 122.

village came from different areas of Prussia and had belonged to different congregations.⁷⁰ Initially, the functions of the administration in the settlements were performed by an official appointed by the Russian government. He bore the title of "Director and Curator of the Mennonite Colonies."⁷¹ Since the seat of this official was at considerable distance from the Mennonite settlements, the first two directors often gave the execution of various administrative directives to some Mennonite deputies. Sometimes, these officials also called upon the services of the church ministers.

In 1801, agencies of self-government were introduced into Mennonite settlements and settlers' districts that usually covered at least four or five local communities. Under the new system, each settlement formed a separate unit of government, consisting of the community or village assembly. This assembly was composed of the adult male farm owners, and acted as an executive body consisting of a village mayor, two assistants, and a clerk. The village mayor and his assistants were elected by majority vote for a two-year term. The clerk was a hired official.⁷² The village assembly controlled all community affairs, and its authority was usually final even

⁷⁰James Urry, None But Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia 1789-1889 (Manitoba: Hyperion Press Limited, 1989), p. 62.

⁷¹David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia-- A Sketch of Its Founding and Endurance, 1789-1919," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 48, no. 1 (1974): 11.

⁷²Ibid., p. 13.

though only on local issues. It oversaw elections to village and district posts, maintained public order, distributed surplus lands set aside to settle increases in village population and supervised the use of lands, including the planting of crops. It was also the responsibilities of the village assembly that saw that the roads, bridges, and public buildings were maintained in proper order.⁷³ However, most of these tasks were usually delegated to the village mayor and his assistants.

The competence of the district assembly was much the same as that of the village assembly, but its officials had more administrative powers, and it applied to a larger area, usually consisting of a number of communities.⁷⁴ Its office consisted of an elected chairman, several assistants, and a hired clerical staff person. The chairman presided over the district office and the meetings of the district assembly. He was responsible for affairs in his district, for community funds, and for the transmission of government orders to local officials for implementation. For the maintenance of peace and order, he could exercise the police force in the district, for example, he had the right to punish wrongdoers with fines, sentences of communal labour, imprisonment, and even corporal punishment. The district chairman represented the district to higher governmental agencies. He also supervised the activity

⁷³Ibid., p. 13.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 14.

of the mayors in his district.⁷⁵ Obviously, this was a highly autonomous administration system. It provided the Mennonites not only with protection for their civil rights, but also promoted their material prosperity.

It is particularly worthy of note that under this system the Mennonite church still exerted a decisive influence in the civil affairs of the settlements. Sometimes it even came to possess a monarchical power in regard to the issues that raised controversies among the settlers. Meanwhile, the civil administration often rendered decisions regarding explicitly church concerns and implemented these decision.⁷⁶ In many instances, church elders and civil officials cooperated to apply intense pressure to advance what they thought to be the best interests of the church and the community. In certain areas, however, there was still potential for conflict, especially where interests concerning particular issues overlapped. One such issue was the responsibility for the moral conduct of the church or community members. Civil authorities were responsible for such matters, but so were the church elders. For the church, the only recognized punishment that could be inflicted on a church member was the ban, but the civil authorities could use other sanctions to enforce its authority, for example, the corporal punishment and banishment

⁷⁵Ibid., pp. 14-15.

⁷⁶Robert Kreider, "The Anabaptist Conception of the Church in the Russian Mennonite Environment--1789-1870," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 25, no. 1 (1951): 24.

from the colony. A very serious problem therefore was raised, namely, who was in charge of the life in the community, those who exercised God's authority on earth or those who had to administer the order of the community? Without doubt, both civil authorities and church leaders thought it was for the common good of all the members when they enforced their will in the community. However, it was this conflict that, from the very beginning of the Mennonite's settling in Russia, coloured Russian Mennonites' life, and caused them perhaps the greatest difficulties. This difference even decided the Russian Mennonite attitudes to the changes which happened in the Russian society, especially when some changes would influence their future in Russia. The reaction to the changes was so different among the Russian Mennonites that when some thought that they had to migrate to another country, others stayed behind. This sharp contrast was mostly expressed in the development of the conservative trend in the Russian Mennonite community.

For many traditional Mennonites, Mennonite faith should be centred on the activities of the congregational community, and this faith depended on its continuation. They did not want to see any change in their way of life. Therefore, they became more concerned about the direction that Mennonite life was taking. Klaas Reimer became such a leading figure in the first days of settlement.

Having been the minister of the Neunhuben congregation,

which was near Danzig, Klaas Reimer with about 30 members of his congregation migrated to Russia in 1804. During his short stay in the Chortitz settlement, Reimer was elected as a minister of the new congregation. In 1805, he and his group settled in the Molotschna settlement.⁷⁷

With the establishment of civil administration in the settlement, Reimer and other church leaders began to face a dilemma regarding how to differentiate a Mennonite congregation from a Mennonite civil community. Many of them hardly could accept the fact that some "brethren" ran a civil government and ruled in the ways of the world over other "brethren." The more confusing issue for them was whether the Mennonites could reconcile their disavowal of coercion and refusal to hold public office with their making and enforcing of laws necessary for the order of Mennonite community. Reimer took a hard line on the question. He insisted that the pure Mennonite church should be established just by strict discipline and the use of the ban. He took a firm stand in opposition to any form of compromise between the church authority and civil jurisdiction. He declared that it was not the business of the civil authorities to punish certain offenses of the church members.⁷⁸ He disagreed with Elder

⁷⁷Harold S. Bender, "Kleine Gemeinde," in The Mennonite Encyclopedia, 1st ed.

⁷⁸Delbert F. Plett, The Golden Years: The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia (1812-1849) (Manitoba: D.F.P. Publications, 1985), pp. 164-168; also see Peter M. Friesen, The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910), trans. J.B. Teows (Fresno,

Jacob Enns' compromising attitude towards the District Office, especially his acceptance of civil authority in some church affairs.⁷⁹ On this issue, Heinrich Balzer, who later became the main spokesman opposing the merger of the church authority and the civil administration, developed a systematic explanation of Reimer's views. In his treatise of 1833 entitled Faith and Reason, Balzer pointed out that according to the teachings of the Gospels Christians were to be a faithful people gathered together in the spirit of brotherhood. They needed no other rule and guidance than brotherly love and church discipline. As a result of it, they should "carefully avoid conformity with the world."⁸⁰ He declared that church members who served in secular affairs were simply to be "liaison officers" between the authorities and the elders. They had no authority to direct the church "according to the powers of state."⁸¹ Otherwise, Balzer claimed, it would result in the destruction of Mennonite fellowship.⁸²

Another incident, which occurred in 1807, also

California: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1980), p. 129.

⁷⁹Delbert F. Plett, The Golden Years: The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia (1812-1849) (Manitoba: D.F.P. Publications, 1985), pp. 166-167.

⁸⁰Ibid., pp. 243-244.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 244.

⁸²Ibid. p. 244.

illustrated Reimer's position in maintaining the pure Mennonite belief. In that year the Russian Mennonites were asked by the Russian government to make voluntary contributions to assist them against Napoleon's invasion. When many Mennonites, and even some ministers, with Elder Jacob Enns' tacit consent, became involved in soliciting contributions,⁸³ Reimer asked Elder Enns not to cooperate with the Russian government, but to have the church act in its own capacity to stop this war effort. He pointed out that what had happened among other Mennonites who, at the time, cooperated with the government, demonstrated that their churches were "built on sand and not firmly grounded on the Word of God."⁸⁴

The severe disagreements that resulted over this issue finally led Reimer and his followers to separate from the main congregation of the settlement in 1812.⁸⁵ They were later known as the Little Congregation (the Kleine Gemeinde). This group, under Reimer's leadership, saw themselves as the true

⁸³According to Reimer's autobiography, when the ministers discussed the issue, Enns kept silent. He also suggested Claas Wiens, the administrator of the Molotschna District, just went ahead if he was going to carry out the order of the government, but never raised the question in the ministers' meeting. See Delbert F. Plett, The Golden Years: The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia (1812-1849) (Manitoba: D.F.P. Publications, 1985), p. 165.

⁸⁴Delbert F. Plett, The Golden Years: The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia (1812-1849) (Manitoba: D.F.P. Publications, 1985), p. 165.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 172.

upholders of Mennonite tradition. They continued to stand firm against what they thought was the backsliding of the Mennonite church from the truths of the Mennonite faith, and sought to establish a pure Mennonite community upon the teachings of Bible as best they knew.

In 1821, under the persuasion of representatives of the Russia Bible Society, Bernhard Fast and other elders of the Molotschna congregation decided to form a similar organization in the Molotschna settlement as a branch of the Bible Society. This action of Molotschna elders, together with other controversial factors,⁸⁶ raised another sharp conflict among the church leaders, and finally led to the division of the Ohrloff-Petershagen congregation in the Molotschna settlement.

For many church leaders, it was unacceptable to allow a religious organization to exist in the settlement if it was beyond the control of the congregation and under the auspices of the government. Jacob Warkentin of Altona led the opposition to Fast's decision. As a result, about three quarters of the members of the congregation withdrew from the congregation in 1824.⁸⁷ This separate congregation had Elder Jacob Dyck of Chortitza ordain Warkentin as their elder, and

⁸⁶These incidents included that Fast's installation was performed by a Frisian elder, an evangelical missionary was admitted to the Lord's Supper, and a higher school was founded in the Molotschna settlement. See Peter M. Friesen, The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910), pp. 135-141.

⁸⁷ Cornelius Krahn, "Warkentin, Jacob," in The Mennonite Encyclopedia, 1st ed.

was later known as the "Large Congregation" or "Lichtenau congregation."

Warkentin and his supporters declared that they reconstituted a new "pure Flemish church," and separated themselves from both the "world" and the impure Mennonite community.⁸⁸ They criticized Fast's congregation as being bent on apostasy from the true Mennonite faith, and as failing to maintain the Mennonite tradition. However, Warkentin's view of the true Mennonite tradition was also marked by extremely conservative characteristics. This can be noted by his opposition to higher education and any improvement in the Mennonite community. He considered any innovations to the old Mennonite way of life as the loss of Mennonite identity.⁸⁹ Contrarily, Fast and his supporters were more open towards progressive ideas that would improve the life of their community.⁹⁰

In the following years, with the economic development of the Mennonite settlements, the importance of the Mennonite secular authorities in the settlement affairs increased. This led more violent resistance from those conservative Mennonites

⁸⁸Delbert F. Plett, The Golden Years: The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia (1812-1849) (Manitoba: D.F.P. Publications, 1985), p. 181.

⁸⁹Peter M. Friesen, The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910), trans. J.B. Teows (Fresno, California: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1980), p. 95.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 95.

to the rising role of the civil authorities. Since those Mennonites thought that the Agriculture Society was imposed on them by the government, from the very beginning strong opposition to it existed in the Mennonite settlements. Some farmers even deliberately disobeyed orders from the Society to show their contempt for the Mennonite civil authorities. The following example tells us how strong this opposition was, and how powerful the Society was. A village mayor of the Molotschna settlement reported to the Agriculture Society that in his village the trees, planted according to the specifications of the Society, all died. When the representatives of the Society came to the village in order to investigate the matter, they found all the trees were planted with their roots in the air and their branches in the soil.⁹¹ Without doubt, the Society could not accept such disobedience. The mayor, under the intervention of the Society, was banned and even physically punished for his contempt for the authorized Agriculture Society.⁹²

Facing the rising power of the civil authorities, especially the Agriculture Society, two church leaders, Warkentin and Heinrich Wiens attempted to prevent the development of this trend, and to restore to the church absolute authority in community affairs. They alarmed the church with these words: "the dangers threatening the soul are

⁹¹Ibid., p. 197.

⁹²Ibid., p. 197.

really beginning to come to the fore."⁹³ They insisted that the church was the only authority in the Mennonite community, and the civil administration must be subordinated to the congregation. It was intolerable that the Mennonite civil authorities interfered with what they thought were the church affairs or the community affairs.⁹⁴ However, the result was disappointing for these conservative church leaders. Johann Cornies, the chairman of the Society, forced Warkentin to resign from his office in 1842.⁹⁵ Heinrich Wiens was even expelled from Russia by the authorities in 1846.⁹⁶

The further combination of the religious and secular perspectives finally led another group to separate from the mainstream of the Russian Mennonite community. This incident also reflected, in the Russian circumstances, how closely the religious congregation tended to co-operate with the secular administration. In 1860, a group of laymen in the Molotschna settlement handed their elders a statement, in which they declared their withdrawal from their church, and organized

⁹³Heinrich Wiens, "Farewell Sermon," in Peter M. Friesen, The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910), trans. J.B. Teows (Fresno, California: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1980), p. 144.

⁹⁴James Urry, None But Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia (1789-1889) (Manitoba: Hyperion Press Limited, 1989), pp. 129-134.

⁹⁵Cornelius Krahn, "Warkentin, Jacob," in The Mennonite Encyclopedia, 1st ed.

⁹⁶Cornelius Krahn, "Wiens, Heinrich," in The Mennonite Encyclopedia, 1st ed.

themselves into an independent congregation under the name of "Mennonite Brethren."⁹⁷ They claimed that Mennonite principles had been violated by the cooperation of the religious fellowship with the nonreligious institutions. They felt that in the existing church there was no longer the Mennonite brotherhood.⁹⁸ Therefore, they decided to disassociate themselves from "these decadent churches" in order to restore the old Mennonite tradition and the true brotherly love under a new Mennonite fellowship.⁹⁹ The leaders of the official church did not hesitate to crush the new group by the arm of secular power and threatened them with economic ruin in order to force them to return to the unified community.¹⁰⁰ It was the interference of the Russian government that made this attempt at suppressing the new movement fail.¹⁰¹

Such a result of complete merger of the religious and the secular life in the Russian Mennonite communities was probably

⁹⁷Peter M. Friesen, The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910), trans. J.B. Teows (Fresno, California: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1980), p. 230.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 230.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 231.

¹⁰⁰E. K. Francis, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia--1789-1914," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 25, no. 3 (1951): 182.

¹⁰¹Robert Kreider, "The Anabaptist Conception of the Church in the Russian Mennonite Environment--1789-1870," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 25, no. 1 (1951): 29.

not foreseen by those who initially created such a system. However, it was a fact that religious convictions, which at one time were the major spiritual power permeating all people's hopes and keeping their community coherent and homogeneous, were still one aspect of everyday life, but were now considerably weakened due to the secular considerations with the Mennonite rapid economic progress and worldly success. Furthermore, with the increasing importance of the territorial community as an economic unit, the membership in a local congregation was now decided by the membership in a secular social system. The brotherhood, as one of the most fundamental principles of the Mennonite church, was also confined to a certain social and economic circle. The voluntary fellowship of true believers became an established territorial and economic community.¹⁰² This became more evident in the course of settling the land problem of Mennonite settlements in the 1860's. With the rapid increase of the population by the 1860s, the great majority of the Mennonites in Molotschna became landless.¹⁰³ These landless Mennonites wished to receive a fair apportionment of land from the undistributed reserve and surplus areas. Unfortunately, the land owners resisted all of the attempts to provide the landless with a better opportunity to secure themselves land.

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁰³C. Krahn, "Molotschna," in The Mennonite Encyclopedia, 1st ed.

The different economic interests divided the fellowship of the brotherhood in different groups. Sharing similar economic interests became more important than the sense of the common brotherhood. The love of the brotherhood was abandoned only to be used as a coercive mechanism in keeping a certain economic order. As one historian summarized the conflict: "Selfish, uninspired leadership failed to serve the common needs of their brethren, thus rending the garment of the brotherhood."¹⁰⁴

From the above mentioned incidents, we can find that the adjustment of the Russian Mennonites to their host society and their material successes in Russia were recorded at the cost of the conflicts as to how the Mennonites could keep their traditional way of life in a changing world. When the Russian Mennonites established their exclusive settlements in an isolated environment, some new developments happened in their community. Of these changes, the most important one was the Russian Mennonite attempt to identify themselves by their self-governing and self-sufficiency. This change resulted in new characteristics being added to the Mennonite identity in Russia. In other words, religious characteristics became just one of the markers of the Mennonite distinctiveness from other ethnics. Their secular community, besides their church, also distinguished them from other ethnics. All this was due in

¹⁰⁴Robert Kreider, "The Anabaptist Conception of the Church in the Russian Mennonite Environment--1789-1870," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 26, no. 1 (1951): 26.

part to the fact that many progressively minded church leaders were regularly and freely explaining their beliefs. For many Mennonites the trend to open the Mennonite community more to the outside world became understandable. They tried hard to fit themselves into the changing world without losing their Mennonite faith. However, others saw the purpose of their life to be the preserving of the Mennonite way of life. They did not think that anything in their life needed to change, since their forefathers had clearly formulated the pattern of their life according to the teachings of Christ. For those conservative Mennonite groups, such as the Kleine Gemeinde, Mennonite Brethren, and the "Large Congregation," changing meant nothing else but deviating from the fundamental Mennonite beliefs. Therefore, they repeatedly tried to retain all the Mennonite traditions, and kept a close watch on any deviation from them. Such contrary developments of these two groups raised serious theological conflicts in the Russian Mennonite church, and subsequently caused the internal fragmentation in their community. As a result, while the progressive groups became more open to their surrounding world, the conservatives began to withdraw from their brothers' community and sought their own solidarity in a more isolated condition. By such theological correction and social withdrawal, the conservatives believed that they still could maintain the traditional Mennonite way of life and keep their church pure, when most people fell into the temptation of the

world. However, these Mennonites seemed to overlook such a fact that they had to be "in the world" when they tried to separate themselves from the world. They saw that their way of life was identical with their Mennonite belief, but they did not note that their lifestyle, to a great degree, was conditioned by certain social environment. In fact, even some particular Mennonite beliefs also underwent changes through the history of their movement. These changes were especially expressed in Mennonite attitudes to the outside world. In other words, the initial emphasis on the complete separation for the society in which they were living later became the efforts to adjust their church to the changing society. Under these circumstances, when social environments changed so much that those conservative Mennonites felt that they were too weak to resist the influence of the social changes, they were put into an embarrassing position. It became impossible for them both to compromise the secular forces and to join the majority of their brothers to adjust themselves to the changed society. At this point, the only way out for them seemed to use their traditional device for survival in this alien world, namely, to emigrate to another country. The following account will tell us more about the consequences of the changes in the Russian Mennonite community through the historical event of the migration of the Russian Mennonites to North America which happened in the 1870s. From it, we also can learn why most of the Mennonites decided to stay behind even though they felt

high pressures from the outside world as well.

CHAPTER 6
THE EMIGRATION OF RUSSIAN MENNONITES TO CANADA
AND THE UNITED STATES IN THE 1870'S

At the very moment when the Mennonites in Russia were enjoying the greatest religious freedom and material prosperity they had ever experienced, their future was being significantly affected by circumstances completely beyond their control. As a result, a large wave of emigration, which began in the early of 1870's, brought about 18,000 Russian Mennonites to another side of the Atlantic.

6.1 The Great Reforms and the Uncertain Future of the
Mennonites in Russia

In 1861, after Russia had been shaken by the Crimean defeat, and felt that it was failing to maintain a voice in European and world affairs, it began the so-called Great Reforms (1861-1880).¹ The new reforms touched every part of Russian society. In every area of social life, there were

¹James Urry, "The Russian State, the Mennonite World and the Migration from Russia to North America in the 1870s," Mennonite Life 46, no. 1 (1991): 13.

increasing demands for greater egalitarianism and the abolition of special privileges for foreign settlers.² This was made evident when the following two events happened during the age of the Great Reforms: the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, and the introduction of universal compulsory military service in 1870.

As a result of the reforms, the Mennonite privileged status in Russia, which had been granted to them since 1789 when they first settled in Russia, began to receive more and more criticism by various public agencies and in the press. On July 16, 1870, Alexander II made a significant step that changed the destinies of almost 18,000 Mennonites in Russia. He announced his plan to establish a conscripted military force requiring several years of military service for all Russian males over 21.³ Without doubt, this plan implied the withdrawal of exemption for Mennonites from military and civil service. The Mennonites were again confronted with a dilemma: They were to behave like all other Russian citizens and subject themselves to a system of compulsory military service; otherwise, they would have to leave their prosperous homes. What was of more serious concern was that it appeared that there were some deeper implications for the Mennonites in the withdrawal of their privileged exemption from military

²Ibid., p. 14.

³Frank H. Epp, Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of A Separate People (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1974), p. 177, 200.

service. The ultimate aim of the Russian government was to assimilate them forcibly into Russian ways of life. This meant that they would lose their cultural heritage, including their religious beliefs. Although the Mennonites had become apprehensive about the changes in the administration of the colonies--such as ownership of land, compulsory introduction of the Russian language into their government and schools--it was not difficult for them to understand the negative meaning of this measure. Therefore, the reports regarding the possibility of being compelled to accept military service immediately caused widespread alarm among the Mennonites in Russia.⁴ Such a fear finally contributed to a great flood of emigration. This happened in the short period of five years, between 1873 and 1878. This flood brought about an exodus of approximately one third of the 50,000 Russian Mennonites. They came to Canada and the United States.⁵

In fact, for a long time, the Russian Mennonites had felt their very existence to be threatened. The cultural and social life of their communities was struck by a series of Russification policies. As mentioned in the previous chapter, right from the beginning of their settlement in the Ukraine, the Mennonites had enjoyed extensive privileges. The most

⁴Gerhard Wiebe, trans. by Helen Janzen, Causes and History of the Emigration of the Mennonites from Russia to America (Manitoba : Manitoba Mennonite Society, 1981), p. 24.

⁵E. K. Francis, In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba (Manitoba: D. W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1955), p. 28.

important of these were: religious freedom, exemption from military service, and autonomous local administration. In accordance with these far-reaching privileges, the Mennonite communities developed in a way that preserved their national and religious qualities. With the introduction of the Russian language into the administration of Mennonite settlements and schools in the middle of the 1860s,⁶ the Mennonites began to be integrated into the Russian bureaucracy and educational system. However, the heart of their distinctive life was now in danger. The reform of the administration made Mennonite settlements more subject to Russian regional government although there were hardly any changes in administrative practice except the titles of officials.⁷ The significant thing that happened was that the new administrative system broke down the political barriers that separated the exclusive

⁶After his appointment as the Minister of Education of Russia in 1866, Count Dmitrii Tolstoi introduced his school reform into the Mennonite settlements. Of his major ideas of school reform, the most important directly to affect the life of Mennonite settlements was the centralization of school administration and the teaching of Russian in Mennonite schools. See James Urry, None But Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia 1789-1889 (Manitoba: Hyperion Press Limited, 1989), p. 209.

⁷In 1871, the Russian government decided to dissolve the administration of foreign settlements under the Department of Crown Lands. Mennonite settlements were placed under the direct administration of the municipal and provincial authorities. See E. K. Francis, In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba (Manitoba: D. W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1955), p. 32.

Mennonite colonies from the rest of Russian life.⁸ Moreover, the compulsory military service violated their religious faith--the faith that constituted the corner stone of all of their life. In a word, all the settlements that were autonomous up to this time, as the Mennonites saw it, would now be placed under the control of the Russian government. This, however, did not sit well with the Mennonites. It had become very difficult for them at that time to adopt a life without freedom or "privileges" in both social life and religious faith.⁹ Some conservative Mennonites even did not want any change in any form to their present life. They believed that the old ways of life were truly "Mennonite" and somehow essential for the continuation of their faith. Under these circumstances, the idea that a better future might lie in a new place occupied their minds once again. The following words from a contemporary writer may be most clearly expressing those Mennonites' wishes at the time:

Even if we do not get the best land, as long as we can get a spot where we can feed ourselves and our children, and above all where we can follow our religion according to God's Word; and above all that we could have our own schools in order to teach the children according to God's Word and

⁸Georg Leibbrandt, "The Emigration of the German Mennonites from Russia to the United States and Canada in 1873-1880," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 6, no. 4 (1932): 207.

⁹Frank H. Epp, Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada limited, 1974), p. 178.

commandments.¹⁰

6.2 Negotiations and Final Decision of Emigration

Before the idea of emigration occupied some Mennonites' mind, the Russian Mennonites first tried their best and hoped that some favourable turn would occur that would prevent their situation from deteriorating. From 1871, they sent one delegation after another to St. Petersburg and the tsar's winter residence at Crimea, to plead with the government and the tsar himself for a renewal of their exemption from military service.¹¹ The negotiations continued for several years, but they could not get any assurance of exemption.¹² None the less, the government promised that their religious scruples would be taken into consideration, and suggested for

¹⁰Gerhard Wiebe, trans. by Helen Janzen, Causes and History of the Emigration of the Mennonites from Russia to America (Manitoba: Manitoba Mennonite Society, 1981), p. 33.

¹¹Gerhard Wiebe, Causes and History of the Emigration of the Mennonites from Russia to America, pp. 24-29.

¹²According to Wiebe's recall, the Mennonite delegates sent by a number of Mennonite settlements just obtained the promise of another fifteen years of complete exemption of military service from General Kotzebue, the representative of the tsar. However, the general implied, after that, the Mennonites had to accept some responsibility to the country. See Gerhard Wiebe, Causes and History of the Emigration of the Mennonites from Russia to America, pp. 28-29. Also see Georg Leibbrandt, "The Emigration of the German Mennonites from Russia to the United States and Canada in 1873-1880," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 6, no. 4 (1932): 208.

them the possibility of an alternative noncombatant service that would in no way violate their faith, and at the same time be fair to other Russian citizens.¹³ Unfortunately, the Mennonite delegates showed little willingness to compromise. They were completely disinterested in the suggestion of some substitute for military service, and just wanted the assurance of total exemption.¹⁴ They were afraid that one compromise might lead to another and would eventually result in giving up one of the most fundamental tenets of the Mennonite faith--nonresistance.

Meanwhile, the agitation for emigration began almost as soon as the plan of the government became known, and continued during the whole period of the protracted negotiations.¹⁵ Beginning in 1871, with the help of Cornelius Jansen, who was the Prussian Consul at Berdiansk, and also a Mennonite,

¹³In May of 1874, General von Todleben informed the Mennonite delegates of the decision of the Russian government: the Mennonites could work in the forestry camps as the substitute for military service. At another meeting with the Mennonite delegates in October of the year, the representative of the tsar suggested that the Mennonites could not ask for anything that was not within the law. See Gerhard Wiebe, Causes and History of the Emigration of the Mennonites from Russia to America, p. 38, 43. Also see Georg Leibbrandt, "The Emigration of the German Mennonites from Russia to the United States and Canada in 1873-1880," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 6, no. 4 (1932): 208.

¹⁴Gerhard Wiebe, Causes and History of the Emigration of the Mennonites from Russia to America, p. 44.

¹⁵ Georg Leibbrandt, "The Emigration of the German Mennonites from Russia to the United States and Canada in 1873-1880," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 6, no. 4 (1932): 210.

Russian Mennonites contacted the leaders of their American brethren and obtained detailed information on the question of settling in North America. This included information about the land available for their settlement, the promise that they would have religious freedom, and most important--the assurance that they would be exempt from military service. As a result of considerable correspondence between the two parties and upon receiving favourable information, some Russian Mennonites decided to take up their plan directly with the governments concerned without waiting for a final answer from the Russian government.

In January of 1872, on behalf of 32 others, Leonhard Sudermann of Berdiansk, one of the outstanding leaders of Russian Mennonites, presented a petition to the British consul at Berdiansk. In this petition, the Mennonites inquired about the possibility of their emigration to Canada.¹⁶ It included some information of the greatest importance to them, such as "entire exemption from all military service," "a grant of land," and being able to send a delegation to the government "both for special requests and also for the arrangements of regulations."¹⁷ They suggested that unless the tsar changed

¹⁶Ibid., p. 210; and also see Frank H. Epp, Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of A Separate People (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1974), p. 185.

¹⁷Georg Leibbrandt "The Emigration of the German Mennonites from Russia to the United States and Canada in 1873-1880," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 6, no. 4 (1932): 211.

his mind, they were planning to "seek and secure in the best possible way a new home."¹⁸ At the same time, they stated that Canada and the United States would be their first choice.¹⁹ Some days later, the Molotschna Mennonites sent another petition to the British consul. The petition expressed the desire for the possibility of a mass emigration to Canada if there was a favourable response to their questions.²⁰ About two weeks later, a reply came back from the Canadian government to the Russian Mennonites. The Canadian government promised that they would be exempted from military service, and that any male over 21 years of age would obtain "a free grant of 160 acres of the best land." Meanwhile, an official delegation was invited to visit Canada at the expense of the Canadian government.²¹ While this was happening, a similar inquiry was sent to the United States. However, the United States government did not send a reply directly to the Mennonites because of its policy of not having contact with whole groups of immigrants.²² This was to be done by the individual states. In each state the task of

¹⁸Ibid., p. 211.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 211.

²⁰Ibid., p. 211.

²¹Frank H. Epp, Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of A Separate People (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1974), p. 186.

²²E. K. Francis, In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba (Manitoba: D. W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1955), p. 37.

enticing immigrants was usually left to zealous railroad and land agents. Therefore, all that the Mennonites were told by the United States consul was that compulsory military service did not exist in the United States, and that lands were available, either as a free 165 acre homestead, or at a rate of about \$1.25 per acre, if they purchased it from the government or railway companies.²³

6.3 Finding the Promised Land

In the summer of 1872, after failing to receive any indication that the Russian government would grant exemption from military service, some of the Mennonites in Russia began to cross the Atlantic and made direct contact with the North American governments. They investigated the land and tried to get an idea of whether the conditions there would permit them to live their own life in accordance with their religious belief. First of all, a group of four young men from the Molotschna settlement made a trip to the United States on their own initiative and at their own expense. They travelled extensively in several states in order to choose some suitable places for settlement.²⁴ One of them, Bernhard Warkentin,

²³Frank H. Epp, Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of A Separate People, p. 186.

²⁴Ibid., p. 188.

then travelled to Canada and made an investigative tour through several districts in Manitoba. He became the first Russian Mennonite to visit the province.²⁵ This first investigation resulted in very favourable information about the New World being brought back to Russian Mennonites. It in turn stimulated a great deal of enthusiasm among the people to emigrate there. More delegations were sent to North America for a final investigation. Their goal was to locate the best place to settle, and to negotiate the most satisfactory conditions. They separated to inspect Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Texas, Indiana, North Dakota, and Manitoba--places that had been recommended as the most suitable settlements.²⁶ As the delegates were thinking through what their final decision might be, the Canadian government came to them offering a written guarantee that practically met all of their demands. This made their decision easy. Manitoba would become their new home. Seventeen townships west of the Red river became the first Mennonite settlements, while eight others, east of the Red river, were reserved for the Mennonites arriving at a later date. At the same time, the Canadian government promised the Mennonite immigrants that they could establish on the prairies of Manitoba the same type of settlements they had had in Russia. This meant that they would be granted the favourable terms of "entire exemption

²⁵Ibid., p. 188.

²⁶Ibid., p. 190.

from military service," a free grant of 160 acres of land to any male over 21 years old, and "the fullest privilege of exercising their religious principles."²⁷ This document was of great significance in laying the foundation of Mennonite settlements in Manitoba, and in drawing a legal framework upon which was based the organization of the Manitoba colonies. It was particularly remarkable that this document included the privilege of exclusive settlement, namely, that the Mennonites were permitted to live in a closed community with the right of an autonomous local administration, and with the use of their own language. Thus, not only were the very fundamental principles of their religious life affirmed as the prerequisite for the maintenance of their community integrity, but also the future of every aspect of their social, moral, and cultural life was thereby assured.

In the United States, several state governments were very active in introducing acts of legislation that would induce the immigrants to settle on their land, even though the federal government did not give the delegates any promise that would entitle the Mennonite immigrants to special privileges.²⁸ As soon as the question of military service

²⁷E. K. Francis, In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba (Manitoba: D. W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1955), pp. 44-45.

²⁸In his reply to the Mennonite petition, the secretary of state, Hamilton Fish stated that since all of the Mennonite wishes concerned the matters that fell under the jurisdiction of the various states, the President could not "exempt them from the laws of the states and the laws to which other

arose, the legislatures of Kansas, Nebraska, and Minnesota passed laws exempting the Mennonites from military service.²⁹ Another factor that promoted and induced the Mennonite emigration to the United States was the colonization campaign of the railroad companies. In order to build railroads throughout the country, the railroad companies were granted strips of prairie land along the railroad right of way. It was hoped by these companies that immigrant farmers would settle on these lands, because this would ensure, to a certain extent, that these lands would remain under the control of the railroad companies, and that they would be well maintained. Therefore, the railroad companies tried to meet the demands of the Mennonites that the state and national governments had failed to meet. The most important was that the companies guaranteed the Mennonite immigrants that they would have absolute control and ownership of the towns, villages or cities occupied by them. Also, that the Mennonites would be free from any interference by any other organization.³⁰ Favourably impressed by what they had seen, the delegates reached the general conclusion that emigration was to be

citizens are subject." See Georg Leibbrandt, "The Emigration of the German Mennonites from Russia to the United States and Canada, 1873-1880," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 7, no 1 (1933): 11.

²⁹Georg Leibbrandt, "The Emigration of the German Mennonites from Russia to the United States and Canada, 1873-1880," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 7, no. 1 (1933): 11.

³⁰Ibid., p. 13.

highly recommended. They had found enough land available to them in different states and it was available on easy terms. For them, the only problem was finding the regions that were the most desirable.

6.4 The Flux of Emigration

After the delegations returned to Russia, the emigration fever that already existed was further agitated by the reports about the abundant land, the favourable terms, and the complete religious freedom. The fever was no longer felt by just a few individuals, but became a popular group movement. Many Mennonites sold their properties for half their value or less so that they could leave for North America as soon as possible.³¹ This presented a serious situation to the Russian government. It recognized that Russia was now facing the loss of its best farmers. This would result in the economic structure of the country being seriously affected.³² Therefore, the Russian government discouraged emigration by

³¹Frank H. Epp, Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of A Separate People (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1974), p. 196, and also see Georg Leibbrandt, "The Emigration of the German Mennonites from Russia to the United States and Canada, 1873-1880," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 7, no. 1 (1933): 23.

³² Georg Leibbrandt, "The Emigration of the German Mennonites from Russia to the United States and Canada, 1873-1880," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 7, no 1 (1933): 23.

every means possible. Every hindrance that could possibly be found was placed in the way of the emigrants. The Russian government even promised a return of the privileges that the Mennonites had previously enjoyed, if they would settle in the valley of the Amur River instead of emigrating from Russia.³³ However, those who had decided to emigrate no longer believed in this offer of privileges by the Russian government. So, preparations for the departure were made with whirlwind intensity. In some settlements, the Mennonites even decided to emigrate as a body. Therefore, their whole villages, with their well established houses, were offered for sale. The fact that thousands of families tried to dispose of their property almost at the same time made the prices fall sharply on everything they had to sell.

A last attempt was made by the government. The tsar sent his special representative, General von Todleben, to discourage the Mennonite emigration. After some negotiations, he offered the Mennonites, as a substitute for the compulsory military service, the promise that they would be employed only in sanitary and hospital occupations. Since the administration of these service institutions was disconnected from the military authorities, about two thirds of the 50,000 Russian Mennonites accepted this new provision in the military law. They decided to stay in Russia. But, others stated that

³³Frank H. Epp, Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of A Separate People (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1974), p. 196.

any connection whatsoever with, or even indirect contribution to, the military service was against their religious belief. They had to leave the country instead of compromising with the government.

As early as the summer of 1873, about 150 Russian Mennonites left from Crimea and arrived in Illinois and other midwest states.³⁴ In June of 1874, the 70 families from Borozenko of Kleine Gemeinde, which made up the entire colony, resettled in Manitoba. However, it was not until August of 1874 that the big rush started, when en masse, large colonies left the country. The entire Alexanderwohl congregation from Molotschna, with a total of 216 families, settled in Kansas within a month. In the following years, about 1,000 families from Bergthal of Chortitza arrived in Manitoba. They also emigrated as entire communities.³⁵

From 1873 to 1883, about 18,000 Mennonites emigrated from Russian to North America, among whom about 10,000 settled in the United States, especially in Kansas, South Dakota, Minnesota, and Nebraska,³⁶ and the others in Manitoba.³⁷ The

³⁴Ibid., p. 200.

³⁵Ibid., p. 199.

³⁶According to Cornelius Krahn's estimation, half of 10,000 Russian Mennonites settled in Kansas, and most of the other 5,000 chose South Dakota, Minnesota, and Nebraska as their new home. See The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. III, p. 146.

³⁷Georg Leibbrandt, "The Emigration of the German Mennonites from Russia to the United States and Canada, 1873-1880," The Mennonites Quarterly Review 7, no. 1 (1933): 33.

year in which the highest number of immigrants came to the United States was 1874 when 5,225 persons came, in Canada the year was 1875 when 3,261 persons came.³⁸ Within a brief period of ten years this mass exodus brought one third of the 50,000 Russian Mennonites to North America. They came to occupy large tracks of virgin territory in the western prairies. Many of these areas had never been settled before. The land had never been cultivated by man, but was just occupied by Indians and wild animals. Having been guaranteed all the essential conditions of a successful settlement, they began to rebuild in this New World the prosperous life they had left behind.

6.5 The Opportunity and the Challenge

The unlimited resources of the New World in this fertile land, with its forests and meadows, gave the Russian Mennonite immigrants a great economic opportunity. The unrestricted privileges of religious and cultural development, and especially the huge financial assistance from their American brethren in both money and materials, provided for them a good

³⁸Frank H. Epp, Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The history of A Separate People (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1974), p. 200.

beginning.³⁹ However, for both the Canadian and United States governments, the Mennonite immigrants were only a means to an end. Their real purpose was to fill the prairies and build a population base there. The governments of both countries had no intention of forever allowing ethnic groups to create an endless series of unconnected ethnic islands.⁴⁰ Besides this, there were new conditions developing in North American society that resulted in many of the Mennonite assumptions being questioned by those both inside and outside of their communities.

First of all, the Mennonite church faced the challenge of revivalism in North America. With its particular focus on the individual, this movement played a part in breaking through the barriers of the relatively isolated life of the Mennonites.⁴¹ In many places, it opened up the traditional Mennonite way of life to change and progress. The most significant result was that it made central an immediate, personal, and subjective religious experience. The redemption of the individual became the primary task of the church, and

³⁹According to Leibbrandt, the financial assistance given by the American Mennonites was approximately 120,000 dollars, and the material support amounted to at least 150,000 dollars. See Georg Leibbrandt, "The Emigration of the German Mennonites from Russia to the United States and Canada, 1873-1880," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 7, no. 1 (1933): 32-33.

⁴⁰Frank H. Epp, Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of A Separate People (Toronto: Macmillan Company of Canadian Limited, 1974), pp. 209-210.

⁴¹Frank H. Epp, Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People, p. 235.

the individual's relation to the church secondary. As a result of this, most of the Russian Mennonite immigrants were drawn away from the traditional model of Mennonite life, and joined the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America.⁴² This new Mennonite organization was founded by three small Mennonite congregations⁴³ on 28 May 1860 at West Point, Iowa.⁴⁴ It was less conservatively oriented and socially informed, and tended to require a more intellectual examination and presentation of Christian truth.⁴⁵ It also adopted a freer attitude to other denominations and permitted much wider contacts with outside society than had been previously allowed. In fact, the General Conference of Mennonite Church of North America itself was a veritable melting pot of North America Mennonites. Its congregational members came from various ethnical groups, including Switzerland, Germany, France, Russia, Prussia, and Holland.⁴⁶

⁴²Frank H. Epp, Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of A Separate People (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1974), p. 238. Also see The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. I, p. 504.

⁴³They were the East Pennsylvania Conference of Mennonites led by John H. Oberholtzer, the Conference Council of the United Mennonite Community of Canada-West and Ohio led by Daniel Hoch and Ephraim Hunsberger, and the Iowa-Illinois group led by Daniel Krehbiel. See The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. II, pp. 465-466.

⁴⁴The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. II, p. 465.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 469.

⁴⁶Frank H. Epp, Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People, p. 239.

Thus, the General Conference of Mennonite Church of North America was deeply affected by the revivalistic approach in that it began to have Sunday schools,⁴⁷ and promoted rural, urban, and foreign missions.⁴⁸ It also called for a more organized approach to the works of charity both within and without the church.⁴⁹ Open mindedness on these issues indicated a weakening of the idea of separation from the world, or at least the need of a new interpretation of it. In other words, the Sunday School, revivalism, and a formal missionary program had a profound effect upon the old Mennonite concept of the church. The early idea of the separated community, namely, a strictly disciplined fellowship which merged the religious life and the secular life in a single unity, was to a large degree replaced by an individualistic understanding of the considerably open unity which contained a great variety within its autonomous ranks.⁵⁰ Without doubt, under these circumstances, the task

⁴⁷As early as 1847, John H. Oberholtzer, the founding father of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America, started the first Mennonite Sunday School in the United States. See Frank H. Epp, Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People, p. 140.

⁴⁸Frank H. Epp, Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People, pp. 239-240.

⁴⁹S. F. Pannabecker, "The Anabaptist Conception of the Church in the American Mennonite Environment," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, Vol. 25 (1951), No. 1, p. 43. Also see Frank H. Epp, Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of A Separate People, p. 235.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 236.

to maintain the basic Mennonite heritage of doctrinal and ethical principles would inevitably become more difficult.

Facing such a changing world, some conservative Mennonite groups, such as the Old Order Brethren and the Wislerites, vigorously resisted progressive movements in the Mennonite community due to fearing the destruction of the old Mennonite tradition.⁵¹ They did not only oppose to adopt the Sunday School, new styles of church architecture, and modern church liturgy in their church life, but also refused to accept any new change in their daily life, even minute styles of clothing.⁵² To those groups, the Sunday School meant to remove the responsibility for Christian instruction from the home, and finally weakened the role of the family in their religious life.⁵³ Meanwhile, following the fashion in church architecture and liturgy, such as the adopting of the colourful decoration and the singing of modern hymns, meant that the church would finally lose the simple and intimate life, which since frontier days had characterized the Mennonite pursuit of following Christ.⁵⁴ Therefore, while the progressive Mennonites rearranged their churches to include a pulpit and horizontally arranged Protestant pews,

⁵¹Frank H. Epp, Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People, pp. 262-263.

⁵²Frank H. Epp, Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People, p. 260.

⁵³Ibid., p. 262.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 262.

the conservative people still kept their plain meeting-house, with benches arranged in a U-pattern, and with a preaching table placed in its neck.⁵⁵ They continued to keep their rural ways of life: Farming was done without new machinery and technology; homes remained simple without curtains, pictures or wallpaper; clothes stayed plain and homemade, and were not adorned with jewellery. Their social circle was definitely limited to their own community and church.⁵⁶

The second threat to the Mennonite way of community life came from the building of a national culture, especially the introduction of the public school system.⁵⁷ Although, as early as 1834, the conception of the public school found its expression in the school law of Pennsylvania,⁵⁸ intense opposition came from Mennonite communities due to the worry of losing their distinctive cultural heritage. To the Mennonites, their heritage involved not only religious faith, but also language and morals, and the best way to accomplish this was through their own education system.⁵⁹ Therefore,

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 272.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 272.

⁵⁷Paul Toews, "Mennonites in American Society: Modernity and the Persistence of Religious Community," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 63, no. 3 (1989): 233.

⁵⁸S. F. Pannabecker, "The Anabaptist Conception of the Church in the American Mennonite Environment," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 25, no. 1 (1951): 42.

⁵⁹Harley J. Stucky, A Century of Russian Mennonite History in America: A Study of Cultural Interaction (Kansas: Mennonite Press Inc., 1973), p. 19.

they fought the public schools as much as possible. For example, when the Manitoba legislature passed the School Attendance Act on 10 March 1916, and English became the sole language of instruction in school, the government opened a number of schools staffed by English teachers in Old Colony areas. However, there was no student to enrol in such schools. Parents insisted to send their children to the Mennonite schools.⁶⁰ The same thing also happened in Saskatchewan. In 1918, when the provincial government according to the new School Attendance Act of 1917 asked the Reinlander Mennonite church to employ qualified teachers recognized by the Department of Education, to use the authorized textbooks, and to provide instruction in English, the Reinlander church sent a delegation to Ottawa. They complained to the federal government that the provincial authorities invaded their religious and educational privileges granted by the Dominion.⁶¹ Having failed to obtain support from the federal government, the church began to boycott the new public schools built by the government in the area. As a result of it, when three new public schools were opened in the fall of 1919, in one of them only six children, who were from another

⁶⁰Calvin Wall Redekop, The Old Colony Mennonites: Dilemmas of Ethnic Minority Life (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), p. 13.

⁶¹Adolf Ens, "The Public School Crisis Among Mennonites in Saskatchewan 1916-25," Harry Loewen ed., Mennonite Image: Historical, cultural, and Literary Essays Dealing with Mennonite Issues (Winnipeg: Hypersion Press, 1980), p. 77.

progressive group, attended, and the other two had no pupils.⁶² Moreover, when the Saskatchewan government turned to police action to enforce its laws, the Mennonites still refused to cooperate with the government although they had to pay a high price for their disobedience.⁶³ The consequence of this struggle was a sharp division among Mennonite congregations. When compulsory school attendance and more strict regulations punishing violators of the school regulations were introduced in Canada in the 1920s, about 7,000 Canadian Mennonites left for Mexico and Paraguay.⁶⁴

In fact, it was the public schools that drew many Mennonite youth out of a relatively isolated cultural environment. Day after day, year after year, the public schools taught these young Mennonites the same language and the same culture that it had been teaching all North American children. They were trained in the social and political ideals of this developing North America in the same way as were their contemporaries. Thus, they naturally assimilated many of the things that they learned from the public

⁶²Ibid., p. 78.

⁶³In April of 1918, fourteen Mennonites were charged against the School Attendance Act. When eleven of them refused to pay their fines, they were sent to Regina to serve ten days in jail. During the period of 1920-1921, Saskatchewan Mennonites paid over 26,000 dollars in fines and court costs levied under the School Attendance Act. See Adolf Ens, "The Public School Crisis Among Mennonites in Saskatchewan 1916-1925," p. 80.

⁶⁴David Toews, "The Mennonites of Canada," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 11, no. 1 (1937): 86.

educational institutions as a part of their own social and cultural heritage.

Thirdly, although in many ways the Russian Mennonite communities in North America sought a continuation of the Russian commonwealth, the new society appeared quite different from the old country. In particular, the plentiful, unoccupied land and the special laws of land ownership provided the possibility for and the individual entitlement of the Mennonites to quarter sections of land if the conditions for homesteading were met. The typical pattern of the Mennonite settlement in North America became that of fairly compact groups of single farmsteads. They were no longer in exclusive colonies or villages.⁶⁵ This change necessarily brought about a different way of social life. As mentioned above, the Mennonite way of community life in Russia, from the very beginning, had allowed for a great deal of self-administration. It was a tightly-knit community that was held together by common interests, and, in a great measure, self-sufficient. The village society was like a loosely connected series of islands marked by the exchange of news and goods,

⁶⁵The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. IV, p. 780. However, at the beginning of their settling in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, the Old Colony Mennonites continued to establish their village communities. In the following years, they tried hard to continue this traditional Mennonite way of life, although such an effort caused great difficulties for them to keep their community unit as one. Consequently, not only did the system of the village community disintegrate, some Old Colony Mennonites had to leave Canada and emigrate to South America. About this, the next chapter will give more details.

but nevertheless, it retained a sense of living independently. The village authorities provided everything for its members. They built streets, bridges, and even schools. Under this kind of structure, the ministers, as the authorized supervisors of the established way of life, played an important role, especially in the settling of disputes and the setting up of schools and churches. However, in the municipal system of North America, the local affairs were run by the municipal government with elected councils. The incorporation of the rural municipalities interfered directly with the traditional institutions of self-administration in Mennonite communities. The authority of the municipal government soon extended to the point where it overlapped with the authority of the Mennonite communities. This was most notably the case in questions of law and order and the dispensing of charity to the poor. Thus, the old system that maintained the coherence of the whole community became powerless. In other words, it was no longer necessary for a special social structure to exist in order to maintain the Mennonite belief system. This could be demonstrated by the following fact: at one time, there were no less than 110 Mennonite villages in Manitoba, however, by the 1940s there were only 24 to survive.⁶⁶

Internally, as a by-product of the harsh exercise of church discipline, the trend to divide never stopped. In

⁶⁶E. K. Francis, In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba, pp. 107-108.

spite of the high emphasis on the benefits of community in the Mennonite church, it continued to be riddled by divisions. Frequently, latent dissatisfactions or other unexpressed reasons contributed to the divisive tendency. This made the re-creation of an unbroken community impossible. Furthermore, already in Russia, the increase of Mennonite material prosperity had begun to nurture individualism. The principle of brotherhood came to be neglected, and lost its initial meaning. More and more, discord abounded among different interest groups on various issues. While their material prosperity developed to a new level, their communities lacked the coherence required by the traditional way of life.

Since the last years of the nineteenth century, all of these pressures accumulated and became increasingly tense so that few congregations remained inflexible to the old ways. To survive it was necessary to adjust to the new conditions. In fact, in North America the primary challenge for the Mennonites was to learn how to adjust their community life--which had previously been almost thoroughly separated from the "world"--to a new situation. Some groups delayed the adjustment as long as possible and reduced it to a minimum. Others accepted innovations and even welcomed them. However, generally speaking, with such combined political, social, and religious impact, the traditional Mennonite conception of the church was weakened. The tendency toward focusing more on inner experience in the religious life denied or undercut the

Mennonite tenet of following Christ in an isolated way of life. The development of secular interests increased points of contact with the world. It smoothed Mennonites' relation with the outside world, which they had previously considered to be evil. The practice of separation from the world, at this point, became no longer a simple matter as it once had been. For a considerably long time, the isolated community life had been not only tolerated in North America, but also fostered by general social conditions. The frontier hardships, the isolated parcels of land, the exclusive settlements, and the rural existence all contributed to the segregation desired by the church. However, all these barriers to contact with the outside world began to vanish with the development of North American society. It was now a question of finding a new way of separation with the world. For the Mennonites, this was really a difficult situation. If they continually refused the contact with the outside society, they might preserve their way of life, but they would lose the members of their younger generation or stagnate their movement. On the other hand, if they allowed outside influences into their church, they might survive in this challenging world, but they would face the danger to lose their tradition or even their religious and social identities. This conflict accompanied the whole life of the Mennonites in North America. Therefore, it may be said that the history of North American Mennonites in the twentieth century was in part

a history of their accommodation to the changing American environment.

Without doubt, many Mennonites took up the challenge of relating in a meaningful way their heritage to their environment. When they found that their religious identity was no longer linked to isolated parcels of land, they tried other means to maintain the boundaries. The most prominent symbol of this attempt was that these Mennonites began to turn their geographical isolation to rather strict standards of social nonconformity. For example, they put more emphasis on the clothing style as the first way to keep them from the temptation of the world. At the same time, it became important for them to protect the forms and rituals of their worship service, since they thought that some new exercises of service excited the sensibilities and pleased the flesh rather than moved the soul to deeper reverence of God. For others, the German language became the all-important value not to be surrendered. They thought that the language represented their Mennonite values, which were the actual and symbolic fences to keep the world out and their way of life in action. Another important change in these Mennonite churches was that they put their emphasis more on the doctrine of non-resistance and on relief and service ministries. They practised their Christian love by providing the services such as emergency food, clothing, medical aid, and agricultural development programmes to any people who needed them. This new zeal for relief

ministries gripped these Mennonite churches, and in 1920 the Mennonite Central Committee was formed to serve as the Mennonite relief agency. In their tradition of the community solidarity, these Mennonites also tried to adjust themselves to the new changes in the North American environment. They began to develop their community sense through the intergroup cooperation and spiritual unity. Organizational consolidation was no longer the prerequisite of their community existence. Some intergroup organizations were established, such as the Mennonite Central Committee, the Association of Mennonite and Affiliated Colleges, the Mennonite Research Fellowship, the Association of Mennonite Aid Societies, and the Associated Mennonite Bible Seminaries. These organizations, on the one hand, continued the Mennonite tradition of the community sense, and identified their movement as a whole. On the other hand, they also reflected the meaningful adjustment of these Mennonites to the North American democracy system. On the whole, the majority of the North American Mennonites still maintained a strong sense of self-identity and a high degree of social cohesion.⁶⁷ They strove to continue their cultural and religious traditions, when they adjusted themselves to the changing society. They still identified themselves with their religious faith and the distinctive way of life. Certainly, it also should be noted that all this was happening in the mainstream of North American society.

⁶⁷The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. IV, p. 781.

Even so, there were still other Mennonites who believed that they gained a world in which they could continue their Mennonite tradition, and on the other hand they would get along very well with the world. They thought that they had adjusted the Mennonite way of life successfully to the big society. They enjoyed the American religious freedom, and meanwhile, shared the brilliant prospects of life as did other ethnic groups. However, their reaction to the changing society somehow became a process that made themselves non-Mennonites. For example, when the Mennonite Brethren in Christ tried to adjust themselves to the North American life, they changed their church not only in the style of organization, including the ministry, church government, and the model of baptism, but also the definition of religious faith. These changes therefore were thought of as a negative example of the North American Mennonites' adjustment to their host society.⁶⁸

On the other hand, there was also another group of the Mennonites who violently fought back any worldly influence from the outside society. They preserved the Mennonite belief, the inherited values, the village community, the language, and the lifestyle. Moreover, all these were maintained intact as they learned them from their forefathers. However, they had to pay a high price for this, namely, they

⁶⁸See Frank H. Epp, Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940: A People's Struggle for Survival (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, A Division of Gage Publishing Limited, 1982), pp. 504-505.

lost the unity of their church, their peaceful life, and even their home. The next chapter will focus on these Mennonites, their attempt to preserve the traditional way of life, their struggle for the maintaining of their Mennonite faith, and their migration to South America for the rebuilding of their traditional and also ideal life in another place.

CHAPTER 7

THE OLD COLONY MENNONITE MIGRATION TO MEXICO IN THE 1920s

It seems that we can stop our story of the Mennonite trek at the point where the Russian Mennonites realized their ambition of reorganizing their life in North America. However, it should be noted that their existence in the land in which the Mennonites were building their new home never became so quiet as to be without problems. This seems paradoxical since they were known as "the quiet in the land." In the 1920s, the migration of the Old Colony Mennonites once more happened in Canadian prairie provinces. For those Mennonites, several challenges from the government--the government that had promised the Mennonites the security of their future--came to threaten their traditional way of life. They felt that they were being forced to adjust themselves to the changing demands of the state and to gave up their fundamental beliefs. The inability to resolve this situation finally led to their emigration from the Canadian prairies to the Mexican plateau. During an eight year period, between 1922 and 1930, about one half the total 12,000 Old Colony

Mennonites in the Canadian prairie provinces left the country.¹

7.1 The Mennonite Settlements in Manitoba

As mentioned in the previous chapter, when some Russian Mennonites determined to leave their country in search of the security which would enable them to lead the lifestyle to which they had been accustomed, the Canadian government offered them a wholly satisfactory arrangement.² Two "reserves" were provided for Mennonite settlers--on both sides of the Red River in southern Manitoba. This land consisted of twenty five townships or half a million acres of land. In other words, the Manitoba government assigned a whole block of land that covered about six per cent of its total territory then to the Mennonites.³

Of the Russian Mennonites who came to Manitoba in the 1870s, all but the Kleine Gemeinde were from the Chortitza settlement and its two daughter settlements--Bergthal and Fürstenland. The Bergthal group were the first settlers.

¹Calvin Wall Redekop, The Old Colony Mennonites: Dilemmas of Ethnic Minority Life (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), p. 17.

²E.K. Francis, In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba (Manitoba: D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1955), pp. 44-45.

³Ibid., p. 62.

From 1874 to 1876, their five villages in Russia, consisting of a total of about 500 families and nearly 3,000 persons, were transplanted to the East Reserve.⁴ This mass migration was also joined by some Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites from the Molotschna settlement among those who settled in Manitoba. Under the leadership of Klass Reimer, about half the members of the Kleine Gemeinde, or sixty families and 800 persons, left Russia as a group and built five villages in both the East Reserve and the West Reserve.⁵

Subsequent to the Bergthal group and the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites, some 300 families or 1,600 persons from the Chortitza and Fürstenland settlements, organized by Johann Wiebe, settled in the West Reserve in 1875.⁶ By 1877, a total of about 3,240 persons from those two settlements had built 25 villages in the West Reserve.⁷ Soon after, these Mennonites became known as the Old Colony Mennonites due to their extremely conservative way of life--even though this name was initially given to refer to the fact that they were from the first Mennonite settlement in Russia.

⁴Cornelius Krahn, "Manitoba," in The Mennonite Encyclopedia, 1st ed.

⁵Ibid., also see Harry Leonard Sawatzky, They Sought a Country: Mennonite Colonization in Mexico (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), p. 11.

⁶Cornelius Krahn, "Manitoba," in The Mennonite Encyclopedia, 1st ed.

⁷Cornelius Krahn, "Manitoba," in The Mennonite Encyclopedia, 1st ed.

With land reserved in block, the Mennonite migrants rebuilt their village communities after the pattern they had developed in Russia. By 1900, they had developed a total of 59 villages in the East Reserve and 70 in the West Reserve.⁸ Each village, like those in Russia, usually consisted of several homesteads built closely together. The buildings of the individual farm units were placed in a uniform strip of land extending from the village street back to the plowland that belonged to the village.⁹ The land behind the homesteads was divided into larger blocks and distributed to the farmers.¹⁰ In that way, the value of land in each field, as determined by distance, soil quality, moisture, etc., was uniformed, providing for every villager an equitable share in the available land. All farmers had access to the good land and were obligated to cultivate some poor lands.¹¹ At the end of a village, a quarter section or more would be reserved for a common woodland and pasture. Church buildings and streets were local village property, and it was the responsibility of all the villagers to build and to maintain

⁸Frank H. Epp, Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1974), p. 212.

⁹E.K. Francis, In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba (Manitoba: D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1955), p. 63.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 63.

¹¹Ibid., p. 63.

them.¹² The maintenance of roads and ditches, the cutting of weeds on public lands, and the upkeep of the graveyard were carried out by unpaid labour.¹³

Although in many ways the Manitoba Mennonite settlements arose as a continuation of the so-called Russian Mennonite Commonwealth, it appeared to be somewhat congenitally deficient. First of all, the Canadian laws of land ownership undermined the cornerstone of the village system. According to the Dominion Lands Act, legal title to land could not be vested in a whole village community, as had been the case in Russia. The homesteading provisions under the law anticipated an individualistic form of ownership.¹⁴ Extended negotiations with the government resulted in the requirement of homesteader residence upon the land being waived. This made it possible for the Mennonites to establish their village communities. However, it was still required that each homestead be entered by the name of an individual.¹⁵ Under the circumstances, the ownership of the land in Manitoba settlement became dual: the individual farmer "bought" the land and "held" the title to it, but the ultimate control of

¹²Ibid., p. 65, also see Calvin Wall Redekop, The Old Colony Mennonites: Dilemmas of Ethnic Minority Life (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), p. 80.

¹³E.K. Francis, In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba (Manitoba: D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1955), p. 98.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 64.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 65.

the land resided with an official (*Vorsteher*) who represented the church. In other words, the church owned all the land in a village, even those that were set aside for common use, such as pastures, streets, and the land for schools and churches.¹⁶ It was clear that such a village organization could be thought of as a land association of farmstead owners who agreed to pool their land. However, from the government's point of view, it had no legal status.

Without doubt, the Mennonite sense of community was strong enough to negotiate collective ownership. Besides, the hardships of pioneer time made Mennonite settlers realize that their survival on the Manitoba steppe depended entirely on the strength of their cooperation and mutual aid. Therefore, initially most of the Mennonite settlers favoured to the communal arrangements which established a compact village. However, it was also clear that everyone was entitled by law to withdraw his land from the village for any reason and at any time. It was this legal imperfection of the village system that in some degree contributed to the subsequent breakdown of the system.

Around 1880, about half the Bergthal people resettled in the West Reserve because of the poor soil in the East

¹⁶Calvin Redekop, "The Old Colony: An Analysis of Group Survival," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 40, no. 3 (1966): 193.

Reserve.¹⁷ This movement soon exerted a significant influence over the life of the entire West Reserve because these newcomers wanted to depart from the traditional Mennonite village settlement pattern. However, this was not done on purpose. The motivation of the resettlement was mainly economic and the movement was basically the result of individual actions. Initially, the individuals resettling in the West Reserve wanted to maintain the traditional Mennonite village. But because it was only individual families that resettled, it was impossible for those Bergthal people to transplant their village organization completely to the new settlement. Because of it, there emerged several mixed villages.¹⁸ Living in mixed villages resulted in some necessary reorganization in the new village communities. They had to leave their church administration in their old settlement. This situation made it difficult for the church to supervise all its members due to the inconvenience of the communication, and it subsequently led to the weakening of church discipline. Thus the solidarity of the Bergthal group in the West Reserve became much less pronounced than that of any other Mennonite group in Manitoba. Generally speaking, the Mennonite village system could never work adequately unless religion was the controlling influence of the personal

¹⁷Cornelius Krahn, "Manitoba," in The Mennonite Encyclopedia, 1st ed.

¹⁸E.K. Francis, In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba (Manitoba: D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1955), p. 69.

and village life. The inner consistency of the whole system, in a great measure, was based on constituent group norms perceived in a context of the Mennonite faith. Whenever the religious control became weak, a general softening of the village organization soon happened. That was how things stood in the West Reserve. With the weakening of the church control amongst those Mennonites who recently resettled in the West Reserve, the contact with the outside society became easier. This resulted in those Bergthal people being in favour of the individual farm pattern--the pattern prevalent amongst non-Mennonite farmers throughout Manitoba.

For the Old Colony Mennonites, the very presence of the Bergthal group in this region soon became a threat to their fundamental faith, because the village pattern, in their eyes, was the only permissible way of life. They believed that the whole purpose of their life was to maintain the religious and cultural identities of their community in the world. This concern especially centred around the preservation of their way of life, which included language, clothing, education, furniture, self-government, mutual aid, village community. They viewed all customs as integral parts of their view of the church. They therefore began to make the willingness to live in closed villages a test of membership. Excommunication was applied to the dissenting members. Their houses and farms were bought and resold to those who would obey the church, and

thus, were kept within the community.¹⁹ On 5 October 1880, Elder Johann Wiebe of the West Reserve called a general meeting of his church members to discuss how to deal with the challenges with which they were confronted, especially those of the Bergthal group. As a result, it was decided that those who wanted to continue their traditional practices of their church should renew their membership. This resulted in those who were inclined toward the position of those resettling Bergthal people being expelled from the church.²⁰

The plan was not very successful. The abolition of the village pattern was becoming a social epidemic. Even some of conservative Mennonites broke away from their villages. For the greatest individual economic advantages, an increasing number of legal proprietors of the quarter section, on which the village site happened to be located, demanded unrestricted use of their lands and expelled those who had built their houses on it. In this way, many original villages disappeared completely.

Meanwhile, another external threat to the Mennonites in Manitoba appeared on the horizon in form of municipal government. From the very beginning of the Mennonite settlement in Manitoba, the reserve and village systems allowed for a good deal of self-government. In particular,

¹⁹Ibid., 103.

²⁰Cornelius Krahn, "Manitoba," in The Mennonite Encyclopedia, 1st ed.

the church had more powers than in Russia. For example, the officers of the civil administration on the district level were nominated by the church leaders and elected by acclamation in the church assembly; while in Russia they were usually appointed by the Russian authorities.²¹ In a village, all cases of insubordination and all misdemeanours were handed over to the church council. The church had the authority to confront the transgressor with the account of his misdeed and to demand penance. As it turned out, the authority of the church leaders proved so effective that the civil officials of the Mennonite settlement came to rely entirely on them whenever the need arose of forcing a recalcitrant member of the community to abide by the rules. If penance did not help, as a last resort the council could excommunicate the culprit and ultimately ban him from the community.²²

In 1880, however, the provincial legislature passed the municipal act. Its intent was to replace the Mennonite self-government by municipal government, with elected councils to be in charge of essential services.²³ In the East Reserve,

²¹Ibid., p. 85.

²²Calvin Wall Redekop, The Old Colony Mennonites: Dilemmas of Ethnic Minority Life (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), p. 9, and also see Frank H. Epp, Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1974), p. 223.

²³Cornelius Krahn, "Manitoba," in The Mennonite Encyclopedia, 1st ed.

the transition was made painlessly because the arrangement meant merely a change in the name of civil administration.²⁴ In the West Reserve, however, while the Bergthal group was quite prepared to accept the change, the Old Colony Mennonites resisted. The opposition became especially strong when they discovered that the whole reserve would be divided into two parts in a way destructive to their village system.²⁵

As was already observed, the Mennonites who settled in Manitoba belonged to three different groups, namely, Bergthal and Kleine Gemeinde people who occupied the East Reserve, and the Old Colony Mennonites who shared the West Reserve with some Bergthal people. Each of these three groups had arrived with their religious leaders and institutions. However, only the Bergthal and Old Colony people transfer their civil administration to Manitoba. Thus, in Manitoba, the Kleine Gemeinde people were put under the administration of the Bergthal civil office. At the same time, the Old Colony Mennonites took control in the West Reserve.²⁶ However, difficulties and frictions soon arose. Since the Old Colony Mennonites occupied the most of the West Reserve, their civil

²⁴E.K. Francis, In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba (Manitoba: D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1955), p. 91. See also Frank H. Epp, Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1974), p. 223.

²⁵E.K. Francis, In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba (Manitoba: D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1955), p. 94.

²⁶Ibid., p. 87.

administration was organized as the supreme authority in that region. At first, the somewhat few Bergthal people residing there were quickly absorbed into the local village communities. Following the unplanned movement of large members of the Bergthal people from the East Reserve to the West Reserve, the Bergthal people organized their community. With the development of progressive spirit in the Bergthal group, they began to give their professed allegiance to Elder Gerhard Wiebe who resided in the East Reserve. This was the first step of their whole strategy to cast off the yoke of the Old Colony Mennonites.²⁷ The new municipal system gave them more hope to free themselves both from the control of the Old Colony majority and from a pattern of social organization that they considered an obstruction to individual economic advancement. They decided to take advantage of this opportunity not only to legalize their progressive way of life, but also to provide a moral justification of their modernistic attitudes in regard to other secular affairs. In January 1884, the Bergthal group in the West Reserve, joined by some Old Colony dissenters, elected own their reeve, Jakob Giesbrecht, a former village mayor of the Old Colony.²⁸ Meanwhile, the provincial government divided the West Reserve into two parts. The Bergthal settlement now became an

²⁷Ibid., p. 89.

²⁸Ibid., p. 93.

independent Municipality.²⁹

The Old Colony Mennonites, however, refused to cooperate with the government arrangement. They withdrew completely from this system and established a most rigorous church regime in their half of the West Reserve. They kept their own internal administration and punished every infraction of their economic and social institutions with the ban.³⁰ Sanctions were also invoked by them against those Bergthal people who cooperated with the government's arrangement.³¹ This division amongst the Old Colony Mennonites and the Bergthal people in the West Reserve resulted in the Old Colony Mennonites being outnumbered by the Bergthal people and non-Mennonites. As a result, the first reeve elected in the settlement was non-Mennonite.³² This situation continued unchanged until their exodus in the 1920s. This meant that the original municipality of the Old Colony did not function very effectively. What was to be more important for the Mennonites in Manitoba, however, was that the difference between all the groups were accentuated by this innovation of

²⁹Ibid., p. 94.

³⁰Frank H. Epp, Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1974), p. 224.

³¹E.K. Francis, In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba (Manitoba: D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1955), p. 90.

³²Frank H. Epp, Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1974), p. 224.

civil administration. In 1890, more division amongst the Mennonites in Manitoba occurred. This resulted in people regrouping, not based on their genealogies, but according to their present beliefs. Bergthal members in the West Reserve who opposed to the progressive trends in the settlement became known as the Sommerfeld Church, after their elder who lived in the village of Sommerfeld. Bergthal members in the East Reserve who shared the same fear of progress became known of as the Chortitza Mennonite Church, after their elder who lived in the village of Chortitza. The progressives in both reserves retained the name of Bergthal Mennonite Church, while the largest and also the most conservative group was still called as the Old Colony Mennonites.

Following this regrouping, the Old Colony Mennonites became especially radical. They insisted that to give up their self-government mean nothing than forfeiting a practical and cherished tradition and permitting the practices and directives beyond the jurisdiction of their elders and the discipline of the congregation infiltrate into their community. Therefore, they completely deprived themselves of the challenges and influences that came through contact with outside world. Moreover, contact with other groups was kept at a minimum. The name of the Old Colony Mennonites also began to be used to distinguish the more conservative from

the more progressive Mennonites.³³ With the lapse of time, the stand of the Old Colony Mennonites against the new administration system proved to be just the first episode in a series of struggles with the secular authorities. Their attempt to maintain their traditional way of life ultimately led to their emigration to Mexico.

7.2 The Struggle for the Right to Control Education

As we have seen, the Old Colony Mennonites, after they settled in Manitoba, were almost immediately involved in the struggle to maintain the integrity of their community and their traditional way of life. The clash of values reached its greatest intensity in the school struggle between the Old Colony Mennonites and the authorities in Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

When the Mennonites were invited into the country, according to the agreement reached by their delegates with the Canadian government, they were granted to the right to set up their schools "without any kind of molestation or restriction whatever."³⁴ For many years, the Mennonites enjoyed complete

³³Cornelius Krahn, "Old Colony Mennonites," in The Mennonite Encyclopedia, 1st ed.

³⁴Georg Leibbrandt, "The Emigration of the German Mennonites from Russia to the United States and Canada, 1873-1880," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 7, no. 1 (1933): 8.

school autonomy. They had church-run schools with instruction by their teachers. Religious and moral education was especially emphasized in their curriculum. All teaching occurred in German. In fact, the church laid down general rules, appointed teachers and exercised a strict supervision over all matters concerning the content of education. For instance, in the general school regulations of the Chortitza Church, it was clearly stated that the Mennonite children should be instructed "according to the principles of our creed." Even more, the school was described as a "nursery of Christianity" in which a knowledge of the Bible could be acquired.³⁵ At the same time, the maintenance of school buildings was delegated to the village community. It collected the school tax that was prescribed by the church according to the number of children of school age in a family. The tax money was used to take care of the school building and to provide the teacher with a house, fuel, grain, and other contributions that represented one part of his income. The teacher's salary and current school expense were covered by tuition fee. Teachers were appointed once a year by the executive council of the church. Particular emphasis was laid upon the moral quantification.³⁶

Although the independent school education, in the eyes of

³⁵E.K. Francis, "The Mennonite School Problem in Manitoba, 1874-1919," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 27, no. 3 (1953): 209.

³⁶Ibid., p. 219.

the Mennonites, was the most important means of maintaining the solidarity of their community and of continuing their cultural tradition, the pressure for change emanated from the Mennonite community itself. On account of a limited number of trained teachers, the Mennonite schools usually offered a limited curriculum and did not employ advanced teaching methods.³⁷ Since the late 1870s, the provincial government repeatedly tried to introduce public school system into Mennonite settlements in order to promote higher educational standards amongst the Mennonites. At first, the efforts of the government received a favourable response from most Mennonite communities, especially from some of the Kleine Gemeinde and the Bergthal Mennonites. They began to advocate the creation of public schools and the teaching of English. In fact, several public schools were established.³⁸ However, the Old Colony Mennonites insisted that the public school system, even though it brought to the Mennonite schools more financial benefits, directly violated the Mennonite principle that the school must be put under the control of the church. Further, the teaching of English in Mennonite schools was also unacceptable because any diminution of the teaching of the

³⁷Ibid., p. 210, 212.

³⁸According to a government's census of public schools in Manitoba, which was taken in 1878, only about one third of all the Mennonite schools were not registered with the status of the public school. See E.K. Francis, "The Mennonite School Problem in Manitoba, 1874-1919," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 27, no. 3 (1953): 211.

German language would seriously threaten the continued functioning of the church, since it was the only means of communication in their community.³⁹ So, they took advantage of the loopholes in the Manitoba Schools Act,⁴⁰ and simply continued, or reverted to the private school system. Their action exerted a tremendous influence in other Mennonite groups. By 1891, although the Mennonites ran at least one hundred schools in their settlements, only eight of them were registered as public schools, compared to the 36 there had been in 1879.⁴¹

When the Manitoba government discovered the shortcomings of the law (which was certainly against the lawmakers' initial desire) and how the Mennonites were making use of the

³⁹E.K. Francis, "The Mennonite School Problem in Manitoba, 1874-1919," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 27, no. 3 (1953): 214.

⁴⁰The act, passed by the Manitoba legislature in 1890, introduced a system of public schools into the province. From then on, public schools became nonsectarian, state-controlled, secular, and supported by the government. At the same time, English was adopted as the official language of instruction. In 1897, some amendments to the act were passed. The amendments permitted not only the teaching of religion in public schools, but made it possible a bilingual system of instruction. However, both of them did not stipulate compulsory attendance. See Frank H. Epp, Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1974), p. 340. See also E.K. Francis, "The Mennonite School Problem in Manitoba, 1874-1919," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 27, no. 3 (1953): 215 and In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba (Manitoba: D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1955), p. 170.

⁴¹Frank H. Epp, Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1974), p. 340.

loopholes, they responded by drafting the new School Attendance Act, which was passed on 10 March 1916. The Public Schools Act of 1890 was repealed. English became the only language of instruction in public schools. In addition, all children between the ages of seven and fourteen were compelled to attend public schools unless they were receiving satisfactory private education.⁴² However, if a private school was found to be inadequate in meeting the standards set by the provincial authorities, the government would appoint school trustees who were responsible for the establishment of a public school with compulsory attendance, and which replaced the unqualified one.⁴³ Thus, for the Mennonites, it seemed that the only way to escape the obligation of sending their children to public schools was to operate their schools as qualified private schools. Some church leaders even organized a union to work for a return of all their public schools to private schools.⁴⁴ However, things went contrary to their wishes. The immediate consequence of this action was a further deterioration of education quality in Mennonite schools. In 1918, when the provincial government took a census in Mennonite schools, all Mennonite private schools

⁴²E.K. Francis, "The Mennonite School Problem in Manitoba, 1874-1919," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 27, no. 3 (1953): 230.

⁴³Ibid., p. 232.

⁴⁴Frank H. Epp, Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1974), p. 357.

were condemned as inadequate.⁴⁵ Mennonite parents were ordered to send their children to public schools. Those who failed to do it, as well as the church leaders who influenced the Mennonite parents to rebel against the order of the authorities, were haled before the magistrates, fined, and even jailed.⁴⁶ On 27 September 1918, for example, having spent three days in jail, thirteen parents in the Wakeham school district were fined five dollars each for their refusal to send their children to a public school. In the same year, an elder in Schanzenfeld was fined twenty dollars for having advised parents against sending their children to the public school at Winkler. On 18 July 1919, eleven persons were fined at Morden for the same offense. In March 1920, six farmers of Hamberg were fined twenty-five dollars each for failing to send their children to the district school.⁴⁷

Facing such a situation, those Old Colony Mennonites decided to continue resisting the public system even if it meant suffering the prescribed penalty. Further, they and other Mennonite groups sent their delegates to provincial and Dominion governments and argued their "responsibility of educating their children." Many petitions were written to the proper authorities. They called the attention of the

⁴⁵E.K. Francis, "The Mennonite School Problem in Manitoba, 1874-1919," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 27, no. 3 (1953): 232.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 232.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 232.

government to the fact that the right of having their own schools had been granted to them when they first migrated to Manitoba, and the new school law meant "the promise of Ottawa being entirely set aside."⁴⁸ They also emphasized that Mennonite congregations would cease to exist if they gave up the responsibility of teaching their children in their own schools.⁴⁹ In the petition of 14 October 1921, the Mennonites even talked about the possibility of emigration: "If the restrictions and the pressure under which the Mennonites at present suffer, continue, we shall be compelled to seek another home, where we and our children may live according to our faith."⁵⁰ However, all Mennonite efforts to save their parochial schools proved to be unsuccessful. Nothing could change the government's determination to establish the public school system in the whole province because the government had never felt the system was just for the purpose of promoting the level of education. What they considered more important in the establishment of the public school system was the national policy aimed at the assimilation of all ethnic groups in order to safeguard national unity and cultural uniformity.⁵¹ Needless to say, to the leaders of the Old Colony Mennonite church, this was a

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 236.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 236.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 236.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 233.

very difficult situation, because they had to make the choice between maintaining their traditional way of life and adjusting themselves to the society in which they were living. Once again, those Mennonites found that the only way to extricate themselves from the predicament was of emigration.

7.3 The Decision of Emigration to Mexico

Due to the negative response of the provincial and federal governments, the Old Colony Mennonites realized that the introduction of the public school system could not be prevented, and that their social and religious positions in the Canadian prairie provinces were no longer safe. They began to consider leaving Canada for a new land of greater freedom. In July, 1918, at the conferences held in both Manitoba and Saskatchewan, the Old Colony Mennonites first arrived at the decision to send delegates to seek a suitable tract of land in a country that would guarantee them freedom with respect to language, religion, and schooling.⁵² Many locations were considered, such as the United States, South America, and even North Africa and Australia.⁵³ The

⁵²Cornelius Krahn, "Old Colony Mennonites," in The Mennonite Encyclopedia, 1st ed.

⁵³Calvin Wall Redekop, The Old Colony Mennonites: Dilemmas of Ethnic Minority Life (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), p. 13, and Cornelius J. Dyck, An Introduction to Mennonite History (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania:

Mennonite correspondence with various governments clearly revealed the points on which they desired more definite guarantees for their religious privileges, especially pertaining their schools. For instance, the Old Colony Mennonites in Manitoba asked Premier L.A. Taschereau of Quebec for the privileges of entire exemption from military service, the fullest right in exercising their religious principles, and the privilege to educate their children using to their customary German language.⁵⁴ Negotiations were first taken with the governments of Brazil, Uruguay, and Argentina.⁵⁵ Although the Mennonites received a very warm welcome everywhere, they found that once they put their requirements in black and white, those governments became disinterested. In Argentine, which was the first country the Mennonites visited, the Mennonite delegates found that lots of European emigrants were streaming into that country without asking any special privileges. Under the circumstances, they realized that their prerequisites for emigration to the country would necessarily make the government uncomfortable. Therefore, it was very unlikely that their desired privileges to be granted. The Mennonites then turned their attention into the United States. A number of delegations were sent to Alabama and

Herald Press, 1967), p. 242.

⁵⁴E.K. Francis, In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba (Manitoba: D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1955), p. 191.

⁵⁵Cornelius Krahn, "Old Colony Mennonites," in The Mennonite Encyclopedia, 1st ed.

Mississippi during April and May of 1920.⁵⁶ When the delegates returned from Mississippi, they declared that some concessions, such as the right to establish their own schools and the authority to administer their own community, had been promised by the authorities.⁵⁷ However, a few days later the governor of Mississippi denied that he had promised the Mennonites any special concessions to induce them to settle in the state, because it was contravened either federal or state laws.⁵⁸ As a result, when another Mennonite delegation was going to make the down payment for the land offered by a land agent, they were denied admission into the United States.⁵⁹

It was at this time that good news from Mexico brought the Mennonites new hope. In 24 January 1921, a delegation consisting of representatives from the Old Colony settlements in both Manitoba and Saskatchewan, left for Mexico.⁶⁰ In El Paso the delegates received a letter of welcome from the

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷"Plans for Exodus Are Complete," The Winnipeg Evening Tribune, April 30, 1920, p. 2.

⁵⁸"Promised Land Only Illusion for Mennonites," The Winnipeg Evening Tribune, May 7, 1920, pp. 1-2.

⁵⁹According to Sawatzky, the immediate reason that the delegate was refused entry was that the four delegates did not have their immigration papers in order. See Harry Leonard Sawatzky, They Sought a Country: Mennonite Colonization in Mexico (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), p. 34.

⁶⁰Cornelius Krahn, "Old Colony Mennonites," in The Mennonite Encyclopedia, 1st ed.

Mexican president and the minister of agriculture.⁶¹ They then investigated many parcels of land which had been offered to them. However, none of this land appealed to the Mennonites. They did not see this land as suitable for the pursuit of the same agricultural practices to which they had been accustomed. They were not impressed with the hard and dry soil, and the cactus and thorn scrub-covered landscape. It made them believe that the planting would not be successful in that country.⁶²

On february 17, the delegates arrived in Mexico city where they met the president of Mexico, Alvaro Obregón. During the meeting, the Mennonites presented their request for privileges, and explained in great detail their religious practices and their way of life.⁶³ President Alvaro expressed enthusiasm at the possibility of attracting so large a group of skilled farmers to his country. A document of the Privilegium was soon worked out, just mine days after the meeting. However, the president did not initially grant the Mennonites the rights of establishing their schools and using German in their schools. But when he realized that he would lose these potential enterprising settlers, the president promised the Mennonites that they would obtain all they

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Harry Leonard Sawatzky, They Sought a Country: Mennonite Colonization in Mexico (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), p. 38.

⁶³Ibid., p. 39.

wanted.⁶⁴ This promise gave the delegates full confidence that Mexico was the place for which they were looking. They now became anxious to get on with the search for suitable land. While they were searching for a suitable piece of land for settlement, the privilegium, signed by President Alvaro Obregón and Minister of Agriculture A.I. Villareal, was sent to the delegates. In this document, the Mennonites were granted to all the privileges they required, such as exemption from military service, the right to exercise their religious principles and the rules of their church without any restriction, and to found their schools using their own teachers.⁶⁵ When this statement was taken to Manitoba and Saskatchewan, an increasing urgency to emigration developed among the Old Colony Mennonites. People eagerly looked to sell their property so that there would be no obstacle to the migration once a satisfactory destination was found.

The Mennonite delegates finally found a land in Mexico which met their requirements. It was a part of the estate of Carlos Zuloaga, some sixty miles west of the city of Chihuahua. On 6 September 1921, the Manitoba Old Colony Mennonites bought 230,000 acres from this estate. Their Saskatchewan brethren bought 35,000 acres of land near the

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 39.

⁶⁵Ibid., p.40.

village of Patos in the province of Durango.⁶⁶ The delegates then returned home.

By late February of 1922, some groups had indicated their readiness for immediate departure. The leaders of the church also worked hard to promote an early emigration. Between March 1 and March 11, four trains from Manitoba and two from Saskatchewan left for Mexico.⁶⁷ The migration continued sporadically through the next few years. However, after 1925, only a few scattered Old Colony Mennonite families came to Mexico.

As mentioned above, not all the Old Colony Mennonites followed their church leaders in the emigration to Mexico. And of those who emigrated, some later returned to Canada. This was the only exception in the history of Mennonite migration. All this set the whole movement of emigrating to Mexico in a questionable light. The reason some of the Old Colony Mennonites had not cooperated with the church from the very beginning was that they were more inclined to adjust themselves to the surrounding society. This was especially true for those Old Colony Mennonites in Saskatchewan, because the resistance to adjust to new environment was usually weaker in daughter settlements. When public schools were established, they sent their children there without being

⁶⁶Cornelius Krahn, "Old Colony Mennonites," in The Mennonite Encyclopedia, 1st ed.

⁶⁷Ibid.

forced to do so. Although they all were excommunicated due to disobedience to the church, they continued their progressive way, and even left their church and joined other more progressive churches. One of their leaders, Jacob J. Friesen, later became the first Mennonite organizer of district schools in Manitoba.⁶⁸

Another key reason why many Old Colony Mennonites stayed behind was due to the difficulty in selling their land. So much land suddenly offered for sale could only make the price of the land lower. For example, in 1922 when the Old Colony Mennonites began to leave Canada, the land prices in Manitoba settlement were as low as \$12.50 per acre, including buildings. In Saskatchewan settlement, land prices dropped to as low as \$5.00 per acre. A year prior to this, the average price asked per acre was \$75.00.⁶⁹ Many of the first emigrants had not sold their land when they left for Mexico. For poorer families, their land might be their only financial resources for emigration. As E.K. Francis pointed out: those who did not leave for Mexico were usually forced to stay behind due to their poverty.⁷⁰

⁶⁸Frank H. Epp, Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1974), p. 352.

⁶⁹Hary Leonard Sawatzky, They Sought A Country: Mennonite Colonization in Mexico (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), p. 47, 49.

⁷⁰E.K. Francis, In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba (Manitoba: D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1955), p. 191.

However, this was only one aspect of the situation. The more serious problem was the failure to sell the land as a unit. This began to undermine the cohesiveness of the Old Colony Mennonite community, and even began to break down their well-functioning organizational and mutual aid system. Some of the church members became disgusted with the land sale tactics of their leaders. They either were no longer willing to sell their land or would rather sell their land individually.⁷¹ Others lost their interest in the cause of emigration and began to obey the education laws. This situation made it more difficult to maintain the order and unity in the community. The elders and ministers had to use church discipline to excommunicate those who did not cooperate with the desire of the congregation.⁷² The disunion within the church was thus accentuated. As a result, these people eventually remained behind in Manitoba. Some of them joined other Mennonite churches. Others tried to found a new and somewhat more liberal church. Some never joined any church.

⁷¹Cornelius Krahn, "Old Colony Mennonites," in The Mennonite Encyclopedia, 1st ed.

⁷²Ibid.

7.4 Motives of the Old Colony Mennonites for Emigrating

With the first train of emigrants to Mexico departed on 1 March 1922, the result was that the most conservative groups of Mennonites in Manitoba and Saskatchewan became "the trail blazers of Mennonite settlement in a wholly new cultural environment."⁷³ They finally had a piece of land in which there would be little temptation to adjust themselves. It was evident that the disturbing influences upon the traditional Mennonite way of life by the Canadian society was the primary motivation behind the emigration. However, it should also be noted that the conservative leadership was so strong in the Old Colony Mennonite church that the church leaders exerted a tremendous influence on the people in the decision to emigration. This was especially true for those who belonged to the churches in the West Reserve where about three fourths of the group followed their church leaders to Mexico.⁷⁴

From the previous description of the Mennonite village government, we have found that the church was the ultimate power; and this formed the ecclesiastical base for the Old Colony Mennonite settlement. The Old Colony Mennonite community, in fact, became somewhat of a theocracy with the

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Cornelius Krahn, "Old Colony Mennonites," in The Mennonite Encyclopedia, 1st ed.

bishop in the position of the greatest authority. Church discipline was used as the most effective weapon to enforce compliance to their unique way of life. For example, during their struggle with the public school system, any member of their church who sent his children to a public school was automatically banned from the church.⁷⁵ This factor made resistance to the public school system among the Old Colony Mennonites almost universal and very consistent. Moreover, in the Old Colony Mennonite settlement the meetings called to discuss plans of emigration were all under the guidance of the church leaders. The delegates sent to negotiate with the government and to search for the proper land were also chosen by the church leaders. When due to the failure of selling the land in block which resulted in more and more church members losing their interest in emigrating, the purging of the church was initiated and carried out under the supervision of the church leaders. This happened during January and February of 1922, just prior to the departure of the first emigrants. Suffice it to say here that the church leaders almost controlled the entire process of emigrating from Canada. In other words, without such strong conservative leadership the migration would have petered out very early; or at least not so many people would have participated in the mass emigration

⁷⁵Frank H. Epp, Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1974), p. 352.

from the West Reserve.⁷⁶

The religious and cultural conservatism of the Old Colony Mennonites played another very important part in inducing the church leaders to decide to emigrate. As one of the most conservative groups among the Russian Mennonites in the first migration in Manitoba, the Old Colony Mennonites manifested a simple and steadfast faith: God had called on them to be his faithful people.⁷⁷ They believed that they were the only true and orthodox Christians and followers of Menno Simons, and that other Mennonite groups had been forsaken by God due to their indulging in worldly things.⁷⁸ The satisfaction of every aspect of life, in the eyes of those Mennonites, lay in obeying the will of God, and in remaining separate from the world. Any impure and immoral behaviour would be punished by God.⁷⁹ The Old Colony Mennonites saw their church as the only holy place in the world, and it had the ultimate authority over the daily lives of the individuals, school administration, building styles, household innovations,

⁷⁶It seems to become more clear when we note the following facts: Some of the Old Colony Mennonite emigrants from the West Reserve soon decided to return to Canada after they settled in Mexico; in Saskatchewan, only about one fourth of the Old Colony Mennonites joined their church to emigrate to Mexico. See Cornelius Krahn, "Old Colony Mennonites," in The Mennonite Encyclopedia, 1st ed.

⁷⁷Calvin Wall Redekop, The Old colony Mennonites: Dilemmas of Ethnic Minority Life (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), p. 29.

⁷⁸Ibid., pp. 31-32.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 30.

vehicles, clothing, and language. The separation from the world therefore was preserved by the use of the most extreme forms. Any compromise of this fundamental principle was thought of as the form of violence to their faith. This conservative spirit was probably the most important factor in keeping the Old Colony Mennonites so bound to their traditions and so obstinate in their beliefs. Every attempt to introduce something new into their community was punished severely by church discipline. Old ideas and ways were thus tenaciously adhered to by the members of the church even if they sometimes did not know why. Moreover, the tradition of suffering for their religious faith, especially the belief that they were the special people of God, gave them a sense of righteousness although, sometimes, what they were fighting for was just secular things, such as the preservation of the German language, the maintenance of their farming lifestyle, and the control of their own schools. Many incidents could be mentioned to show the influence that the conservative tradition of the Old Colony Mennonites exercised over their responses to the challenges from the outside world. For example, throughout the public school struggle, the Old Colony Mennonites firmly believed themselves to be in the right. They insisted that they had a legal right to control their schools under the agreement of 1873 with the Dominion

government,⁸⁰ even though they had already been told, according to the British North America Act, that the agreement of 1873 was legally in error, and that it had been corrected.⁸¹

Another example was the Old Colony Mennonite attitudes towards the legislation already enacted. Unlike other Mennonite groups, the Old Colony Mennonites were not willing to budge an inch from their former stand. They even delivered such a message to the government. Thus, there was no point in the government looking for help from the church leaders in settling the resistance toward the public school system among the Old Colony Mennonites. In their petition to the

⁸⁰It was the privilege of educating their children in the schools "without any kind of molestation or restriction whatever." See E.K. Francis, In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba (Manitoba: D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1955), p. 45.

⁸¹On 16 July 1919, the Old Colony Mennonites brought a test case before the Manitoba Court of Appeal so that their right to control their own schools could be legally reconfirmed in the basis of the agreement of 1873. However, the case was decided against the Mennonites, because it was judged that the province of Manitoba had the power to pass the school legislation in question, and the Dominion government had no right to usurp powers delegated to the provincial governments. The Mennonites appealed again before the Supreme Court of Canada. From the Supreme Court of Canada it went to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London. The final word was still unfavourable to the Mennonites because the Committee refused to grant leave to appeal the judgment of the Manitoba Court of Appeal. See "Mennonite Test Case Evidence Is submitted," in The Winnipeg Evening Tribune, 17 July 1919, p. 2; "Mennonite Appeal Cases To Be Argued Before Full Court," in The Winnipeg Evening Tribune, 29 July 1919, p. 3. See also E.K. Francis, "The Mennonite School Problem in Manitoba, 1874-1919," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 27, no. 3 (1953): 232.

provincial legislature, in February 1919, they stated that it was their tradition to educate their children in their own schools and in their own way. All their children were educated to be able to read, write, and know enough arithmetic "in such a manner as to meet the requirements of the agricultural way of life to which we have belonged."⁸² They emphasized that their church was coherent, not merely "on a religious basis," but also "in secular things."⁸³ Therefore, they had the responsibility to teach their children "both the religious and secular truth as one whole."⁸⁴ At the same time, they saw no need to improve their standard of education, because they believed that they had well trained teachers in their schools, and that their children were educated in all aspects of life. The Old Colony Mennonites therefore requested the government not to evaluate their schools on the basis of a subjective and partial study.⁸⁵ Here there was no indication given that the Old Colony Mennonites would be willing to compromise at all. However, other Mennonite groups, for example, the Chortitza Mennonite Church, spoke in a completely different tone. Although they wanted to maintain

⁸²Calvin Wall Redekop, The Old Colony Mennonites: Dilemmas of Ethnic Minority Life (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), pp. 245-246.

⁸³Calvin Wall Redekop, The Old Colony Mennonites: Dilemmas of Ethnic Minority Life (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), p. 247.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 247.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 249.

their private school, they were willing to meet all the demands of the authorities. In their petition of 13 January 1920, they declared that they never desired to oppose the school law. They would give "complete and wholehearted cooperation" to the government in the process of establishing public schools in their settlements.⁸⁶ While they hoped for permission to keep their schools, they promised that they would promote the quality of their teachers and bring into effect higher standards of education and more efficient instruction in English.⁸⁷

The above mentioned facts brought one thing to the fore: for those extremely conservative Old Colony Mennonites, the heart of their concern was not simply the divergence of the structure of the administration and of the educational system. It was the challenge to the authority of the Mennonite church and the cohesiveness of their community. More importantly, with the influence from the outside world, the progressive trends in their community directly undermined the cornerstones of their beliefs. The progressive option to collaborate with the world, in the eyes of those Old Colony Mennonites, would destroy all they believed and all they had fought for. In other words, schools, the German language, and the village

⁸⁶Abraham Friesen, Emigration in Mennonite History with Special Reference to the Conservative Mennonite Emigration from Canada to Mexico and South America after World War One (Unpublished M.A. thesis, the Department of Graduate Studies and Research, the University of Manitoba, August 1960), p. 65.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 65.

community had become so much a part of their life that it was, to a great degree, as impossible to take them away from this life as to separate those Mennonites from their farming life. As a minority ethnic group, the only response available to these conservative Mennonites was to seek the escape from unwelcome impositions and impingements through the traditional device of emigration to a new place in which the old order might again be rebuilt and maintained forever or until the coming of the next crisis.

CONCLUSION

The story of Mennonite migrations since the sixteenth century is largely the history of some religious people who tried to find the perfect expression of their faith in this world. Initially because of religious persecution, migration to other countries, for those Mennonites, was often a means of survival. After religious persecution ceased, Mennonite belief continued to be a key factor in Mennonite migrations. To a great degree, their migrations resulted from their strong inclination to separate from the world. When some Mennonite groups literally understood the principle of separation, which was taught by the masters of Mennonite theology, such as Menno and Dirk, they thought that their religion was absolutely holy. From this starting point, they insisted that their religious existence and their way of life should be completely different from that of the world. In their eyes, theirs was a sacred tradition, a holy life, a pure belief, that must be conveyed in its purity to the next generations and thus be preserved for the end-time when all things will be consummated.¹ This radical distinction between their

¹As we have discussed in chapter seven, the Old Colony Mennonites exhibited this separatist characteristic in its most radical form.

religious communities and the outside society resulted in the Mennonites' intense relationship with their host society. When some changes happened in the society, these Mennonites appeared not to be able to, or not to be willing to, adjust themselves to the changing society. As a result, repeated migrations, for these Mennonites, became the only acceptable device for both escaping the challenges of the changing society and maintaining their religious faith. This can be seen more clearly in the Mennonite migrations that happened in the twentieth century, which had a greater emphasis on the maintaining of their Mennonite way of life.

In fact, ever since its inception Christianity has experienced reality on two levels: the human and the divine; the physical and the spiritual; the this-worldly and the other-worldly. Jesus' statement that his followers lived "in the world" but not "of this world" expressed this Hellenistic-Christian duality most adequately. It is the Mennonites who derived their view of the world primarily from their understanding of this biblical epigram. They believed that the true church was called out of the world, namely, that it was a selected community, composed of voluntarily dedicated believers, and that it was independent of secular authorities. For them, only those who had showed a real desire to strive for the life of walking in Christ and given indication that they were making progress were qualified into the fellowship of the church. In other words, the Mennonite church was

thought of as a brotherhood of love in which the fullness of the Christian life was to be expressed. On the other hand, the world was seen as basically outside their church. They would had nothing to do with compromising with a worldly order that remained sinful.

When this understanding of the church and the world was adopted by some Mennonite groups, it contributed to a considerably negative view of the world to those Mennonites. They consistently maintained the teachings of Menno: the world is anti-Christian, dark, and evil.² Christians cannot be part of the secular world around them, but must depart from the evil in society and follow Jesus away from the world. All of this caused these Mennonites to experience the tension between involvement with the outside world and withdrawal from it, and this tension significantly affected their existence in this world. Once they found that they could not express their religious belief in their own way, or that the expression would be limited due to the changes of the society, they had to seek new freedom and security in order to practise their religion and their way of life. This device often became realistic by emigration. Certainly, migration, for those Mennonites, might not be the only choice, but it was really an easier way to balance the dilemma they were facing: the struggle for their best interests both in the spiritual realm

²J. C. Wenger ed., The Complete Writings of Menno Simons (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Mennonite Publishing House, 1984), pp. 554-556.

and in the real world. At this point, it was especially true when migration to a new place suggested more economic opportunities as well.

However, in the early years of the movement, the theological emphasis did not play an important role in the Mennonites' migrations. Rather, the key factor contributing to their migrations was the hostility that the Mennonites experienced at the hands of the secular authorities and mainline Reformers.

Originally, the movement was part of the Reformation ferment, attempting to reform the religious and social institutions of the time. Since the Mennonites attempted to change the whole of ecclesiastical and secular systems, they were rejected by mainline Reformers and persecuted by the power structures of their time. Instead of trying to resist the decrees of the authorities against them, the Mennonites retreated to the villages and countryside, appealing to rulers and landowners for refuge and religious freedom. Some local rulers recognized their peaceful intentions, sobriety, and agricultural expertise, and consequently tolerated them on the condition that they separated from the Catholic and Reformed populace. In the following years, the once radical and active Anabaptists settled down and became the proverbial "quiet ones in the land." They remained faithful to the teachings of their spiritual leaders with regard to the nature of the world and a Christian's relationship to it. At the same time, for

the sake of their peace and security, they refrained from actions that would anger their hosts. Largely unaffected by the surrounding world, they became separated from the dominant cultures by language, distinctive cultural characteristics, ethnicity, and religious commitments. It was also in this relative isolation that the believers' church, composed of those who met the exacting standards of religious experience and virtue, significantly shaped the contours of the Mennonites' life.

As early as the 1530s, Mennonites found a way to escape the death hunting. They fled from the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Germany to East Prussia in search of a peaceful life and religious freedom. In the following years, they moved along the Vistula River to West Prussia, and settled down in the Vistula Delta, the triangle area between Danzig, Elbing, and Thorn. The traditional independent spirit of the magnates and nobles made it difficult for both the mainline Protestant church and the Catholic church to enforce any kind of religious uniformity. The economic motivation further made the nobles extend more religious toleration to the Mennonites. Prussia therefore became the asylum for the Mennonites comparable to Moravia for the Hutterian Brethren in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For the first time, the Mennonites enjoyed a considerably peaceful life, although it required paying a high price. During that time, they also established their congregations, and began to build their

distinctive way of life. Under the leadership of Menno Simons and Dirk Philips, the characteristics of Mennonite faith which would distinguish the Mennonites from other Christian groups took shape. Their community way of life also appeared this initial model.

The growth of population in Prussian Mennonite communities made it more difficult for the Mennonites to make a living. When their desire to obtain more land was blocked by the religious laws that discriminated against them, Mennonite existence in Prussia became difficult, and for some, impossible. When the Russian empress, Catherine II, issued her Manifesto in 1763 inviting farmers from Western countries to settle in her recently acquired lands in the Ukraine, many Mennonites in Prussia were attracted. In exchange for religious, political, and economic privileges and advantages, about 10,000 of them left their organized homes in Prussia to build their new life in Russia. The religious and economic impulses thus inextricably combined together to push Prussian Mennonites on to the road to Russia. The economic development on the one hand required the Mennonites to have more room in order to expand. On the other hand, the worldly order in which they had to live made it impossible to expand unless they gave up their faith. When the Mennonites were caught in such a dilemma, the favourable offer from the Russian empress gave them a new hope. Migration became the only way to satisfy both sides: the development in secular life and the

continuance in religious faith.

Since the Mennonites were granted the privileges to develop their religious, economic, and educational institutions, they in fact established, in time, a Mennonite state within the tsarist empire. The traditional separation of church and state, a principle that they had advocated, suffered, and died for, gave way to a Mennonite Commonwealth on Russian soil. In this church-state, the Mennonites built their industries, controlled trade and commerce, established their own law and order, and maintained their German language as the primary vehicle of communication. The world in the form of Caesar had become less hostile towards the Mennonites in Russia. The secular institutions, at least those within this Mennonite world, also no longer seemed as evil as previously, for they had been christianized in part by Mennonite involvement in them.

Although Empress Catherine II promised Mennonites religious freedom "for all time," that time apparently came to an end at the end of the nineteenth century. The Mennonites of Russia saw their privileges and autonomy threatened due to the Great Reforms in Russia, which happened in 1861. The numerous and arduous journeys to St. Petersburg, the often futile attempts to renegotiate their former privileges, the russification that swept the country of their Russian neighbours--all this convinced many Mennonites that the time had come to leave this country. When they studied the map to

find a place where they could find complete exemption from military service, North America became the new Promised Land in their eyes. From 1873 to 1884, about 18,000 Mennonites from Russia emigrated to the United States and Canada.

After their immigration to North America, the Mennonites again attempted to maintain their isolated community life. They consistently withdrew from the culture and society of their host countries and either lived in communal brotherhoods or in closed ethnic communities. However, this geographical and cultural separateness did not successfully set up a protective barrier for their isolated community in North America, in which continuity with the past could be nourished. The development of North American society pulled the Mennonites into integrated and national societies, and dramatically altered the shape of their subculture in North America. For many centuries, the Mennonite migrants had learned to carve out an ethos on the margins of social systems where the patterns of social interaction with the dominant society could more easily be regulated. They moralized concerning life-styles, dress, and involvement in civil affairs according their religious beliefs. Now they had to fashion a way of living after being pulled into the political, cultural, economic and ideological system of American society. The majority of the Mennonites became participants in the dominant culture. They entered virtually all areas of life, with the exception of the military force. They were actively

involved in education, medicine, business and commerce, the performing arts, and of course, farming. However, for some conservatives, such as the Old Colony Mennonites and the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites,³ the new environment was disturbing the order of their life. They saw the assimilating force of North America as a threat to their traditional way of life, especially to the authority of their church and the cohesiveness of their community. After a tenacious struggle against the disturbing influence of the society, those Mennonites once again sent out their delegates to find a new land in which they could continue to foster and retain their traditional way of life. As a result of it, the migration of the Old Colony Mennonites from Canada to Mexico happened in the 1920s.

On the basis of the data presented in the previous chapters, we find that both religious and social economic dynamics made some Mennonite groups migrate repeatedly. However, it is particularly worth noting that Mennonite theology, which received its substantial contents from Menno Simons and Dirk Philips, laid the foundation for their separated way of life after religious persecution stopped. For the purpose of establishing a true Christian fellowship and maintaining their faith pure, these Mennonites

³James C. Juhnke, "Mennonite History and Self Understanding: North American Mennonitism as a Bipolar Mosaic," in Calvin Wall Redekop ed., Mennonite Identity: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives (Lanham: University Press of America Inc., 1988), p. 85.

consistently sought the Promised Land, even though sometimes, in order to gain it they had to give up their organized home, cultivated land, and even wealthy life. For centuries, they have never stopped dreaming of establishing their own world, namely, a brotherly believers' community patterned after the apostolic church. However, it seemed to them that there was no place in which they would be able to live quietly in order to make their faithful ideal come true. They might find a temporary home in a country that was eager to have these hardy settlers develop the virgin soil, but as soon as that country had passed the initial stages of development it began to assimilate the Mennonites into its way of life. When this happened these Mennonites would either have to give up their distinctive way of life or leave for another country. On the other hand, the new beginning on virgin land did not always result in a kingdom of God as pure and true as the Mennonite migrants had expected because the social, economic and political systems were left completely up to them. During that process, the Mennonite settlers chose several different directions for themselves as they sought the perfect expression of their religious beliefs, especially in their handling of their relationship with the world. While those conservative groups saw the self-contained and unrelated community as the true Mennonite way of life, they completely withdrew from society. However, after they settled in a new place, most Mennonite migrants saw the need for accommodation

and involvement so that the church did not lose its position in the confrontation with both state and society. This latter position also pointed to different options. For some, it meant total integration with society to the point of secularization; others just made the necessary adjustments, to enable them to have minimum contact with outsiders. For some, adjustment meant mixing together a little bit of all the options in varying proportions. As a result, every time they migrated they left some groups behind, but it is also a fact that every time they migrated they attracted some other groups.

In summary, the Mennonite understanding of the true essence of the Christian faith gave the Mennonites great energy to seek a true Christian life in this world. Indeed, their beliefs, such as an intimate and disciplined fellowship of voluntarily committed believers, a true Christian life of following Christ in daily life, and the separation of the church from the world, gave a perfect expression of a new type of Christian society. Moreover, the Mennonite ideal, namely, the establishment of a world in which every Christian has his share in shaping church life according to his understanding of the Bible, has been difficult to realize in the modern world, especially in North America. However, although the Mennonites attempted to establish such a genuine and true Christian church in the most biblical way, the outcome did not always seem to be satisfactory. When they tried hard to realize the

true brotherhood in their church, there were always some brothers who wanted to depart from the church. Although the Mennonites never wanted to be a part of the world, and even tried to build their community out of the world, their relations with the outside society were always strained. When they strove to build their community in a way of completely separating from the world, the social forces never stopped to pull them back into the world. Such results of their religious practices turned out contrary to the Mennonite initial expectations, and they raised many difficulties for the Mennonite movement. The Mennonites might establish a new brotherhood in a new church, when the old one was broken. In this way, they could keep their church purer and purer, but with what results in the end? And is the last one the purest one? They also could keep on the move, when they found that their relationship to the outside society had threatened their existence in their host society. Without doubt, they might find a new place in which they could establish a more isolated Mennonite world. However, geographical isolation and cultural exclusiveness never guaranteed their separation from the world forever. Instead of it, the more isolated their community life was, the more short-lived it became. From Prussia to North America, the Mennonite history of migration proved this point. Yet the really fatal difficulty was the land available to the Mennonites: there was less and less available due to the development of the whole world. At this point, it seemed

that the only way out of the embarrassing situation was to adjust themselves to the environment of the society in which they were living. However, if a religious separatist group achieves the environmental freedom by compromising its religious beliefs, numerous questions become increasingly significant. For example, in what sense does the sacred-secular dichotomy have any meaning? Is it the tendency of the church to reflect the national core of society rather than to impact the society? If this is the natural tendency, then how does one explain the fact that some religious groups here and there have resisted identifying with the core society and with the state? These questions await further analysis.

APPENDIX

THE MENNONITE MISSIONS IN CHINA

From the very beginning, one of the prominent qualities of the Anabaptist movement was its active concern with evangelism.¹ As early as August, 1527, when other Reformation groups were fighting for territorial rights for their religion, the foremost Anabaptist leaders at the time met in Augusburg, Germany to design a strategy for the evangelization of Central Europe.² They appointed missionaries to Basel and Zurich, the Palatinate, Upper Austria, Franconia, Salzburg and Bavaria to teach, comfort and strength their follow believers, or to build new brotherhoods.³ This evangelical enthusiasm gave a rapid spread to early Anabaptist movement. However, persecution in various ways and to varying degrees followed wherever the Anabaptists went. Most of the missionaries sent by the Augsburg Synod soon died a martyr's death.⁴ In the following years, wanderings and exile, for individuals and

¹G. W. Peters, Foundations of Mennonite Brethren Missions (Hillsboro, Kansas: Kindred Press, 1984), p. 12.

²The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. III, p. 529.

³F. H. Littel, The Origin of Sectarian Protestantism (New York: The Macmillan Company, Second edition, 1968), p. 110.

⁴The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. III, p. 529.

whole families, filled the annals of the movement. Missionary zeal was thereby lost and replaced by an inner aspiration for quiet faithfulness to a more traditional type of religious life. The typical Mennonites became "the quiet in the land," emphasizing the virtues of simplicity and honesty. They were even thought of as neither "in the world" nor "of the world" in spite of their incessant efforts to build a true church "in the world."⁵

The recovery of evangelical-missionary zeal found its stimulus and origin in the 18th-century Pietist movement and the evangelical awakening that followed it. The stimulating contacts with these movements returned evangelism and missions to the Mennonites by the end of the 19th century. The Mennonite church re-opened its door to missions, both in its native countries and in foreign countries.⁶

The first missionary effort in China, in which the Mennonites became involved, was made at the beginning of the century when missionaries were sent out from the United States. However, those missionaries served under non-Mennonite boards. It was after 1905 that mission work under Mennonite boards began.⁷ In the following years, The General Conference Mennonites, The Mennonite Brethren Church, and The

⁵S.F. Pannabecker, "Foreign Mennonite Missions," The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. III, p. 713.

⁶Ibid., p. 713.

⁷The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. I, p. 560.

Krimmer Mennonite Brethren sent missionaries to China. Those missionaries opened mission work across eight different provinces of China from the east to the west. More than 5,000 Chinese were converted to the Mennonite church before the missionaries had to leave the country in the early 1950's.⁸

1. H. C. Bartel and the China Mennonite Mission Society

As the first Mennonite missionary who entered into China, Henry Cornelius Bartel (1873-1965) was a member of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren. He was born in Gombin, Poland, and immigrated with his family to Hillsboro, Kansas at the age of three years. When he was eighteen he joined the Gnadenau Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church. In 1901, Bartel and his wife, Nellie Bartel, went to China as missionaries of the South Chili Mission. After four years of service with the Mission, Mr. and Mrs. Bartel started their own independent mission work at Ts'ao-hsien, Shantung Province. They founded the first Mennonite mission in China, later known as the China Mennonite Mission Society. In the following years, the Society developed into the largest Mennonite mission in

⁸The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. I, pp. 560-562.

China.⁹

When Bartel arrived in China, it was just about a year after the Boxer Insurrection (during which a number of missionaries and Chinese Christians were killed) was subdued. He was standing on the land where the martyrs' bloodstains were still wet, and hatred towards foreigners was very evident throughout the whole country. The preaching of the gospel of God, to anybody, almost meant to plant the seed of adversity for oneself. However, Protestant mission work was already well established in China. This, without doubt, was a great encouragement to the new missionaries.

Bartel's first year in China was given to the study of the Chinese language. After that, Bartel and his wife, accompanied with two lady missionaries were sent to Tai Ming Fu, the centre of the South Chili field, to open a mission station.¹⁰ The beginning of the work was rather hard because of both hatred towards foreign missionaries among the Chinese people and some language difficulties. However, with the assistance of the native evangelists, and his growing understanding the language and the ways of the people, he got more opportunities to make contact with the people. Many of the people became interested in his preaching and some were

⁹J. H. Lohrenz, The Mennonite Brethren Church (Hillsboro, Kansas: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1950), p. 250.

¹⁰H. C. Bartel, A Short Review of the First Mennonite Mission in China (Ts'ao Hsien, Shantung Province, no publisher, 1913), p. 6.

converted.¹¹ Two years later, he was sent to open another new station at Ts'ao Chou Fu, in which he continued to labour as a missionary in connection with the South Chili Mission for two more years.¹²

During his labour in Ts'ao Chou Fu, Bartel began to consider the possibility of opening a mission field that was totally under the auspices of the Mennonites. At first, he just made a proposition to the South Chili Mission that they might grant unto him and his co-labourers the privilege of having the Ts'ao Chou Fu field as the branch of this mission for the Mennonites. Since the proposal was not considered practical, Bartel decided that there was no other way at present but to go along with the way things were, although it was very hard both for himself and his friends.¹³ The final break came when Bartel, his wife, and another missionary woman, Margaret Warkentin, ventured out to locate a new mission field in August, 1905. After three days journey in Chinese carts they arrived in Ts'ao Hsien, Shangtung Province, which later became the headquarters of the China Mennonite Mission Society.¹⁴

According to Bartel's records, the beginning of the independent mission work in Ts'ao Hsien was quite encouraging.

¹¹Ibid., p. 6.

¹²Ibid., p. 6.

¹³Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 7.

An abandoned house in the east suburb of Ts'ao Hsien, which was thought to be haunted, was offered to Bartel for a low price.¹⁵ It was in this haunted house that the independent Mennonite mission work in China began, and it gradually developed into the largest Mennonite mission institution. Soon a number of inquirers came to the small chapel on the station to listen the preaching of the gospel of God. At the beginning, those people always had some hope for material help, but as Bartel and his co-workers kept on pointing them to Jesus, some of them accepted Him as their Saviour and joined the church.¹⁶

The small chapel that was built soon proved to be too small for the crowds, and a building with a larger seating capacity had to be provided for the fast growing congregation. A woman in the United States offered five hundred U.S. dollars to build a new chapel. A church building with a seating capacity of one thousand persons, costing one thousand dollars, was erected to meet the needs.¹⁷

Bartel's mission work was not limited only to the station, but expanded to the surrounding areas. Just one year later, in 1906, he began working in a new mission field in Shan Hsien, which is about thirty miles east of Ts'ao Hsien. At first, his work in Shan Hsien was itinerant. But in the

¹⁵Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 53.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 53.

fall of 1907, a new mission station was built, and some missionaries took up the work there.¹⁸ In Ts'ao Chow Fu, the third mission station was built in 1909. It lay 33 miles north of Ts'ao Hsien. At this place, the South Chili Mission had opened a station a few years earlier. They were going to discontinue operations there because of lack of workers. Their property was offered to Bartel to build a new mission station. However, the achievement in this field proved discouraging. In spite of the faithful work, there was only one Chinese person converted up until 1913.¹⁹ From these three original mission centres, Bartel and other missionaries in the Society extended their work across the boundary line of Shantung Province, and went into Honan Province. By 1913, they had built two permanent mission station in K'ao-ch'eng Hsien and Yü-ch'eng Hsien respectively.²⁰ Besides these main stations, several out-stations and chapels were also built.

However, everything did not go as Bartel had wished. In particular, the financial pressures grew heavier day by bay on his mission work. He was even not able to pay what was owing on the property.²¹ In the summer of 1906, he had to return to America seeking support for his work. As a member of the

¹⁸H. C. Bartel, A Short Review of the First Mennonite Mission in China, pp. 53-54.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 54.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 54-55.

²¹H. C. Bartel, A Short Review of the First Mennonite Mission in China, p. 9.

Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church, Bartel was invited to many Mennonite Brethren churches. He was able to successfully stimulate the interest of many of his brethren in mission work in China. As a result of it, he returned to the field with strong moral and financial support from individual church members, and seven Mennonite Brethren workers left to serve with his mission.²² Despite this, he was not able to persuade the leadership of the church to officially accept or approve the work. The conference, as a body, was not willing to take a part in the newly created field, and remained somewhat reserved in its attitude.²³ It was not until 1909 that a report came from the conference's annual conference that the first discussion came about the possibility of a mission in China. However, the result was not good. They did not favour the move. An indefinite resolution of the conference, which was drawn by the Board of Foreign Mission, left the issue to individual local churches. The local churches soon returned the initiative to the Board. A definite decision was still not made. This made it impossible to take any practical steps towards promoting the mission.²⁴ Under the circumstances, Bartel felt that it became necessary to organize an independent missionary board for united and

²² Ibid., pp. 7-8.

²³G. W. Peters, Foundations of Mennonite Brethren Missions (Hillsboro, Kansas: Kindred Press, 1984), p. 134.

²⁴Ibid., p. 135.

systematic work in China. On December 30, 1912, a meeting concerning the corporate mission work in China was held. As a result of it, a board was incorporated as the China Mennonite Mission Society.²⁵

The China Mennonite Mission Society was not a conference of churches in North America, but an organization with a board made up of various Mennonite individuals and groups. It drew both its missionaries and its support from members of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren, Mennonite Brethren, Evangelical Mennonite Brethren, and Missionary Church Association.²⁶ Its purpose was to make Christ known to the Chinese, to relieve the suffering by the medium of relief work, to find a home for orphans, and to assist in raising the social standards of the masses.²⁷

The time up until 1927 was a time of continuous growth and expansion in the China Mennonite Mission Society. The boundaries of the field were extended, and new churches were established. This development expanded the original working area of the Society, which was about one thousand eight hundred square miles, covering two counties, to five thousand square miles, and including seven more counties. In addition to the nine walled cities, there were twelve thousand villages

²⁵H. C. Bartel, A Short Review of the First Mennonite Mission in China, p. 11.

²⁶The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. V, p. 58.

²⁷The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. I, p. 560.

with total population of approximately three million people.²⁸ At the peak of mission work, there were thirty missionaries working in the society. They came from various Mennonite denominations.²⁹ According to Bartel's report, in 1913, the Ts'ao Hsien church had a membership of over one hundred.³⁰ This number increased to three hundred and thirty in 1923.³¹ Some mission schools and an orphanage with agricultural and industrial training, from which many pastors and evangelists came, were opened. A Bible school was also operated on the Shantung field, which, in 1940 had about 70 students enrolled. A home for the homeless and the suffering was built. The total number of communicants was estimated at about 2,500 in 1927.³²

Much of the early mission work of the Society was performed to attract Chinese people into the church. To reach this goal, methods were usually used in which the effect could be immediately felt, like relieving the suffering and

²⁸A. K. Wiens, "The Work of the Mennonite Mission in China." Unpublished thesis, University of Southern California, 1951, p. 25.

²⁹The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. I, p. 560.

³⁰H. C. Bartel, A Short Review of the First Mennonite Mission in China, p. 53.

³¹Abraham K. Wiens, "The work of the Mennonite Missions in China." Unpublished thesis of the University of Southern California, 1951, p. 27.

³²The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. I, p. 560. Also see J. A. Toews, A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church (Fresno, California: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1975), p. 406.

providing an education opportunity for poor children. Therefore, the poor, the downtrodden, and those suffering from various ailments and diseases were the first fruits of the mission work. Few well-to-do farmers and merchants were affiliated with the church. After a number of years, the missionaries became more and more convinced that if China were to be reached with the Gospel, the influential and the educated must be won, and they in turn must reach the masses.

When the pioneer workers of the China Mennonite Mission Society felt that preaching the Gospel should have the preeminence, they likewise saw the great needs of educating the youth of China. They thought that if these children were raised up in the way of life of Christianity that they would become useful instruments to preach the Gospel to their people and to establish the church of God in China. The orphanage was usually seen as the best way to reach Chinese children. Therefore, this work was begun as soon as the mission field was occupied in Ts'ao Hsien.³³ Although the rumour, that missionaries were going to take out the orphans' hearts and eyes to make medicine, made the start very difficult, it did not take long until a half starved orphan boy was brought. After people saw that nothing bad was done to the boy they soon began to bring so many children to the orphanage that

³³H. C. Bartel, A Short Review of the First Mennonite Mission in China, p. 57.

missionaries had to turn many away.³⁴ In 1909, when a terrible famine struck many of the districts near Bartel's working field, more than one hundred orphans were received into the orphanage. More accommodations were built in order to house the whole "family," which consisted of a total of about 200 girls and boys. A thirty acre piece of farm land was used to plant crops. The goal was to provide suitable training for the boys and to establish a source of income for the mission. The girls were instructed in school, house and needle work.³⁵ As apart of education work, in 1912, a boarding school was opened at Ts'ao Hsien. This school was an inducement to those who were not able to attend government boarding schools. The first class, which was composed of sixteen girls and twenty boys, was taught reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, music and Bible.³⁶ In an executive report of April 8, 1924, fifteen mission schools were listed-- eleven schools for boys and four for girls. These schools were mostly located in and around Ts'ao Hsien. Most of them were at least in part self-supporting.³⁷ With the increase in the enrolment of the schools, so increased the amount of money needed each month to operate them. To alleviate the

³⁴Ibid., p. 58.

³⁵Ibid., p. 59.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 33-34.

³⁷Abraham K. Wiens, "The Work of the Mennonite Missions in China," unpublished thesis of the University of Southern California, 1951, p. 36.

financial burden of the school and to place the institution on a self-supporting basis, different projects were introduced whereby the students could earn part of their board and tuition. Therefore, about a half of the school time was devoted to industrial work.

The criticism by the Chinese people of mission schools became prominent in 1924. At the fifth annual conference of the Young China Association in July, 1924, the following resolution was made: "That we strongly oppose Christian education which destroys the national spirit of our people and carries on a cultural program in order to undermine Chinese civilization."³⁸ In August of the same year, the National Conference of Student Union denounced educational enterprises started by foreigners for the propagation of the Christian religion. At Kaifeng in October, 1924, the Provincial Educational Associations, in a joint session, proposed the separation of education from religion. It was further recommended that all foreign control be removed from the schools.³⁹ The tense situation was further aggravated by student demonstrations in Shanghai on May 30, 1925. The result was that the government passed laws and regulations for the recognition of educational institutions established by foreigners. The government insisted that the schools must not

³⁸China Mission Year Book, 1925 (Shanghai: Christian Literature Society, 1925), p. 56.

³⁹Ibid., p. 57.

serve as institutions for the propagation of the Christian faith. At the same time, the left wing element of the ruling party, the Kuomintang, was bitterly opposed to the Christian church. Missionaries were looked upon as "imperialists" and "capitalists." The movement against the foreigners resulted in looting and the destroying of property. In Nanking, some missionaries were even killed when the national troops took over the city in 1927. A large proportion of the missionaries in 1927 withdrew from the interior, and three schools and hospitals were either closed or left to the Chinese staffs. The mission schools of the China Mennonite Society were also closed in 1927, and were not reopened.

The training for both the clergy and the laity was considered essential to guard the church against the attacks of superstition from within and educated sceptics from without. They felt the primary task of missions was to spread the Christian faith over the entire nation as rapidly as possible, and the most efficient way to reach the goal was to train Chinese Christians in short term Bible courses and then send them out to win others for Christ. In order to establish a healthy indigenous church, a Bible school was opened at Ts'ao Chow Fu in 1922.⁴⁰ In 1940, about seventy students

⁴⁰Abraham K. Wiens, "The Work of the Mennonite Missions in China." Unpublished thesis of the University of Southern California, 1951, p. 40.

were enrolled in the school.⁴¹ One of the most important feature of the school was that of the practical work. The older students assisted with preaching in the street chapels and on the street corners. In 1922, the China Mennonite Mission Society opened the Truth Publishing House. It published 400,000 copies of Sunday School literature and 260,000 copies of other printed materials in 1923.⁴²

During World War II, the mission field of the China Mennonite Mission Society was occupied by the Japanese. Bartel escaped the Japanese occupation because he was visiting his son in Sichuan Province at the time. It was impossible for him to return to the Ts'ao Hsien station because of the war between Japan and the United States which had been taking place since 1941. All communication with the workers on the field ceased at once. Under the circumstances, Bartel decided to open a new mission field in southwest China. He and his wife made a tour along the Sichuan-Gansu-Shaanxi border to find a place in which they could build their new mission station. The pressing inner urge to go further north caused Bartel to journey into the province of Gansu. Because of the poor conditions in transportation and Mrs. Bartel's health, they had to return to Sichuan province. Then, they tried to

⁴¹J. A. Toews, A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church (Fresno, California: Board of Christian Literature, 1975), p. 406.

⁴²Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of Christian Missions in China (New York: Ruseell & Russell, 1967), p. 648.

Shaanxi Province again, and finally found an ideal place for the new mission headquarters in Shuang Shih Pu, a small town on the Sichuan-Shaanxi border. This later became the West China field of the Society.⁴³ His work received financial support from the Society Board. It sent him some funds through the United States Charing Board in New York.⁴⁴

After World War II, because of communist threats, the ministry in western China was short lived. Communists soon conquered all of China. Bartel continued to work in China until 1952. After his return to the United States, he died in Hillsboro, Kansas.⁴⁵ However, his son, Loyal Bartel, remained in the Shantung-Honan field until his death in the late 1960s.⁴⁶

Although, initially, Bartel wanted to establish an inter-Mennonite mission in China, this goal succeeded only as far as workers were concerned. No genuine inter-Mennonite organization ever took responsibility for the work, even though missionaries came from different conferences, and the Society gathered some funds for its work from different Mennonite denominations. Due to difficulties in

⁴³The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. V, p. 58.

⁴⁴Abraham K. Wiens, "The Work of the Mennonite Missions in China," p. 57.

⁴⁵The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. V, p. 58.

⁴⁶G. W. Peters, Foundations of Mennonite Brethren Missions, p. 138.

administration, Bartel, on different occasion, expressed the desire that the conferences, from which missionaries came to work under the China Mennonite Mission Society, should established a united board, so that it could become more efficient at carrying on the work. However, for a considerably long time, although vitally interested in the welfare of the China Mennonite Mission Society, no Mennonite body was willing to accept responsibility for the mission field in China.⁴⁷ The constitution of the Mennonite Brethren Conference also did not permit the Board of Foreign Missions to affiliate with another board or boards. Yet not until 1945, at the General conference in Dinuba, California was the Board authorized to negotiate with the China Mennonite Mission Society for the transfer of the mission to the Mennonite Brethren Church. No workable agreement was reached because of the objection of a group of missionaries from non-Mennonite background at the time.⁴⁸ At another meeting on May 7, 1946, various proposals were considered once again. As a final agreement, the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren took the responsibility for the original mission field of the China Mennonite Mission Society in North China, while the Mennonite Brethren and the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren accepted the new Gansu field in West China. This agreement finally resulted in

⁴⁷G. W. Peters, Foundations of Mennonite Brethren Missions (Hillsboro, Kansas: Kindred Press, 1984), p. 137.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 137.

the China Mennonite Mission Society being dissolved.⁴⁹

2. The Mission of the General Conference Mennonites

The mission work of the General Conference Mennonites in China was begun as an individual venture in 1909.⁵⁰ Henry Jacob Brown (1879-1959) and his wife became the first missionaries of the General Conference in China. However, China was not the initial destination that he chose to start his missionary career. He recalled, in his recollections about his mission experiences in China, that he was hardly willing to consider going there as a missionary, when he first heard the suggestion.⁵¹

Having graduated from the Rochester Theological School at New York, Brown returned to Mountain Lake, Minnesota, the place of his birth, to conduct evangelistic meetings. Not long after that, foreign missions became of interest to him. He applied to the Mission Board as a missionary to India which the Conference had opened as a mission field some years earlier. According to Brown's recollections, the Mission Board did not consider it wise to send out a man of his

⁴⁹The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. I, p. 560.

⁵⁰The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. I, p. 560.

⁵¹H. J. Brown, Chips of Experiences (No publish place and publisher), p. 35.

disposition as a missionary to go to such an uncultivated field. Instead of it, the Board suggested that he to go to the American Indians. However, foreign missions had occupied all of his thinking. He then tried to go to the Sudan, but again he was refused.⁵² By this time, the idea of an independent venture to a foreign country came to Brown's mind. It seems reasonable to believe that Mr. Schrag, who was a cousin of Mrs. Brown and also a Mennonite missionary working in China, had some influence on Brown to shift his interest to China.⁵³

After fully deciding to enter China as missionaries, Brown and his wife left Seattle on November 4, 1909. When he boarded the ship to China, Brown was very worried about his future. "We surely had our full lot of uncertainties to contend with. . . . No one but God knew where the funds for our maintenance and for the preparation of a mission plant were to come from."⁵⁴ On December 4, Brown and his wife arrived in Shanghai. After spending some time there, Mr. Schrag took them into the interior. In Ts'ao Hsien, they met Bartel, and stayed there for about one year to learn the Chinese language and get acquainted with the customs of the

⁵²Ibid., pp. 33-35.

⁵³According to Brown's recall, his first information about China missions came from Mr. Schrag, and he was suggested to work there as a missionary. See H. J. Brown, Chips of Experiences (No place of publication and publisher), p. 35.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 41.

land. At the same time, they began working under the China Mennonite Mission Society. It was the hope of making his new work become a General Conference project that influenced Brown to move to a new field. In 1911, under Bartel's assistance, Brown went to K'ai Chow, Hopei Province, which was adjacent to that of the China Mennonite Mission Society, to open a new mission field.⁵⁵ Within just a few months, Brown, with the help of a Chinese carpenter, built a small three-room house in the east suburbs of the city as his new home and the mission station. Meanwhile, he gathered a little group of people who were earnestly seeking for the truth.⁵⁶

Since there was no river port or rail road connection in the K'ai Chow area, the possibility of extending working boundaries was considered. By 1914, two other stations had been opened in Tamingfu and Chang Yuan. Thus, the General Conference field had three main mission stations within its confines. K'ai Chow, the oldest station with a population of about 20,000 people, was situated in the heart of the field. The majority of the staff workers were engaged there. Tamingfu, the largest city, with approximately 60,000 inhabitants, was located in the extreme north, while Chang Yuan, the third station with a population of 13,000 people, was situated in the southwestern part of the field. The total number of baptized Christians was about sixty five at the

⁵⁵The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. V. p. 58.

⁵⁶H. B. Brown, Chips of Experiences, p. 48.

time. The working force of the mission was composed of Brown and three native evangelists.⁵⁷

In 1914, the General Conference decided to take over the work in China. As a result, some new missionaries were sent out in the following years, and the work was gradually enlarged. By 1920, there were 14 missionaries on the field. The field expanded to an area 100 miles long and 40 miles wide with a population of 2.5 million, in which there were seven centre stations built. Besides the evangelical work, the school work and medical work were started.⁵⁸ Educational work included full primary schools at the seven centres and lower primary schools at a number of other places. Boarding schools for boys and girls were opened at K'ai Chow which developed eventually into full senior high schools.⁵⁹ Because two doctors were sent from the United States, Medical work began with a dispensary at K'ai Chow. In the following years, it grew to become an eighty-bed institution with outstation clinic work and a well-developed school of nursing.⁶⁰

Since the General Conference accepted the responsibility of the work in China, and as new workers were being added

⁵⁷Abraham K. Wiens, "The Work of the Mennonite Missions in China," p. 73.

⁵⁸The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. V, p. 560.

⁵⁹H. J. Brown, Chips of Experiences, p. 51.

⁶⁰The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. V, p. 561.

every year, it became apparent that some sort of organization would have to be effected. The initial step was made by the Foreign Missions Board of the General Conference in appointing a senior missionary on the field as the chairman of the new organization--the Field Conference, which, with a General Committee, was responsible for the administration on the mission field in China. In 1922, a constitution was framed by the Committee. It provided for the office of secretary to be elected by the workers on the field. An executive committee was established. It was composed of the chairman, a secretary, and a third member who was elected by the missionaries. This constitution was in operation until the Chinese-Japanese war broke out. Since the war forced the missionary families to return to the United States, the mission work of the General Conference in China disintegrated rapidly. In March, 1940, a special conference was held in K'ai Chow to discuss reorganizing the mission work under the circumstances of the war. At the conference, twelve missionaries and twenty five Chinese church leaders worked together to frame a new constitution. They elected a new general committee, which would have charge of the evangelistic, educational, and medical work in the mission field. At the same time, the Committee also had the responsibility of supervising the mission work in general. All the work, excepting the missionaries' residences, primary schools, and the foreign workers' salaries were placed under

the jurisdiction of the newly organized council of nine members. There were, at that time, 2,273 communicants in 24 organized churches and 40 preaching places to be reported.⁶¹ Besides that, S. F. Pannabecker gave more detailed statistics and drew a more clear picture of the mission work of the General Conference at that time: 18 Sunday schools and 23 Daily Vacation Bible Schools were conducted. 925 students attended 8 primary schools conducted throughout the field. 103 students attended the Bible School at K'ai Chow. 128 trained workers, 50 evangelists, 26 Bible women, 41 school teachers operated all of the mission institutions.⁶²

After the Chinese-Japanese war, although the contact with the mission field was renewed through missionaries who served on the Mennonite Central Committee as relief staff in China, the mission work in the old field was soon interrupted due to the ensuing civil war. Missionaries were forced to move their work to Kaifeng of Honan Province, Paoki of Shaanxi Province, and Chengtu of Sichuan Province. However, as later Communist control was established in these areas, it became impossible to continue the work. Missionaries found it advisable to leave the country. By 1950, there were only four missionaries remaining in China. They went to the new west China field in which the Board of Foreign Missions opened as an independent

⁶¹The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. V, p. 561.

⁶²Quoted in Abraham K. Wiens, "The Work of the Mennonite Missions in China," p. 90.

mission work a few years earlier. However, only one year later, in May, 1951, the last missionary of the General Conference had to return to the United States because of the Communist hostile policy to foreign missionaries.⁶³ In 1950, Brown reported the following figures about the Hopei and Honan mission field: 8 stations with churches, 28 county churches, 2,700 church members.⁶⁴

3. The Missions of the Mennonite Brethren Church and the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Conference

As mentioned above, although about a dozen Mennonite Brethren missionaries had served on the field of the China Mennonite Mission Society since 1906, the first conference discussion regarding a possible mission in China came from the 1909 annual conference at Henderson, Nabraska. At the conference, Frank J. Wiens and his wife requested the Board of Foreign Missions to send them to China as Mennonite Brethren Church missionaries.⁶⁵ Since the conference was not acquainted with China, the question was soon raised whether

⁶³The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. V. p. 561.

⁶⁴Abraham K. Wiens, "The Work of the Mennonite Missions in China," p. 91.

⁶⁵G. W. Peters, Foundations of Mennonite Brethren Missions (Hillsboro, Kansas: Kindred Press, 1984), p. 135.

the conference was prepared to open a new mission field in China. Moreover, the new field necessarily meant more requests for workers and finances, so fear was expressed that the action might negatively influence the work in India. Under the circumstances, the Board decided to wait for definite action by the general conference. But this was not scheduled until October, 1912.⁶⁶ The Wienses found themselves in a peculiar situation: they must either wait three years or go out as independent missionaries. They chose the latter because Mr. Wiens had a new mission field in South China in mind. Since they did not have the necessary funds to go to China, instead of going there directly, they went via Russia. In Russia, they visited Mennonite Brethren churches, preached in the Mennonite communities, and raised extensive sums of money. In the early fall of 1911, they finally travelled by way of Siberia and Japan to China. In early 1912, they found their place of work around the city of Shonghong, a mountain region in Fukien Province.⁶⁷ The city, at that time, had a population of between 30,000 and 50,000 inhabitants. It later served as the main station, and from there other towns and villages were served.

The first days of the Wienses at Shonghong were spent quietly because they did not have enough knowledge of the

⁶⁶Frank J. Wiens, Fifteen Years Among the Hakkas of South China (n.p., n.d.), pp. 21, 27.

⁶⁷G. W. Peters, Foundations of Mennonite Brethren Missions (Hillsboro, Kansas: Kindred Press, 1984), p.136.

Chinese language to conduct meetings. As they became more proficient in the Chinese language, the Wienses realized that a place of worship was needed. A ten-room house with a little garden was purchased, and the independent mission work was begun. However, the action of the Wienses did not solve the problem of mission work in China. The Mennonite Brethren Church was still not willing to accept the Wiens' work as a conference project, although it gave some financial support to them. It was feared that the China mission would divide the conference's limited resources of people and money to such an extent that no foreign mission field could be run efficiently.⁶⁸ After four years of carrying on the mission work independently, Wiens sent a detailed report to the general conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church in 1915. In his report, once again, Wiens petitioned the conference to accept them as conference missionaries and the whole field in South China as a conference mission field. Although Wiens' work in China had won many sympathizers and the full confidence of the conference, due to the heavy financial burden to foreign mission fields, delegates to the conference differed widely in opinion. As a result, a compromise resolution was adopted: An annual support of \$500 was to be sent to Wiens until the next general conference session. At the same time, the conference decided that the Board of

⁶⁸G. W. Peters, Foundations of Mennonite Brethren Missions (Hillsboro, Kansas: Kindred Press, 1984), p. 136.

foreign Missions would begin to take preparatory steps to accept the South China field at the next conference. In 1919, the general conference gave special attention to the "China-Wiens problem." Since the Board of Foreign Missions was prepared for action, it instructed J.H. Pankrantz, a senior missionary to India, to visit the South China mission station, study the situation, and make recommendations. When Pankrantz gave the conference a favourable report about Wiens' work, the delegates approved the resolution to accept Wiens' mission field as a conference work, with the Wienses as its missionaries.⁶⁹ The matter was finally settled after almost ten years of discussion.

The conference immediately took steps to strengthen the staff on the field. In the following six years, eight new missionaries were sent out.⁷⁰ Evangelical work, schools for boys and girls, and a Bible school for training evangelists were conducted. In 1921, Wiens reported that, on his working field, there were an indigenous church of 450 members, eleven outstations supervised by Chinese evangelists, and seventeen schools in which thirty teachers were employed.⁷¹ In the following years, the constant growth of the South China field was indicated in the reports of the missionaries, especially

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 136.

⁷⁰J. A. Toews, A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church (Fresno, California: Board of Christian Literature, 1975), p. 406.

⁷¹The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. V, p. 561.

in attendance at station and village schools, and a remarkable expansion of the medical work. However, this period of progress only lasted for about eight years. The field experienced serious disruptions because of political unrest. Between 1927 and 1929, all stations and residences were destroyed. The missionaries dispersed--some sought safety in the coast cities, others went to the Bartel field in North China, and some returned to the United States.⁷² In 1929, an attempt to return to the field was made. However, just six months later, it proved to be a futile effort due to the continuing war between the Communists and the government troops in South China. In 1935, Wiens returned once more to Shonghong to try to resume the work. He found the buildings of the mission stations demolished, the members of the church scattered and the schools closed. Wiens did not rebuild the stations, but spent several years in itinerant evangelism. In 1947, Ronald Wiens, the son of F.J. Wiens, and his wife returned for a third attempt. In spite of lack of communications and the civil war, the couple remained until 1951, when they left the field for Hong Kong and were transferred to mission work in Japan.

Besides the South China field, in 1946, the Board of Missions of the Mennonite Brethren Church, took over the West China field, on which H.C. Bartel started his pioneer work in

⁷²Frank J. Wiens, Fifteen Years Among the Hakkas of South China (n.p., n.d.), p. 168.

the early forties. This new field lay in the area surrounded by the borders of Sichuan, Shaanxi, and Gansu Provinces. Schuang Shih Pu of Shaanxi Province was its headquarters. After World War II, in order to see the work operate more efficiently, Bartel appealed to the Mennonite Brethren Church to accept responsibility for the field. The proposal was of vital interest to the Mennonite Brethren Church. At the general conference of 1945, the action of taking over the work in the West China field was considered, and some preparatory steps were taken. In 1946, the Mennonite Brethren Church sent its first missionaries to the field, and then transferred all of its missionaries working on the North China field there. However, after just a short period of active work, all of them had to return to the United States because of the civil strife.

Although Bartel went to China as an independent missionary, he was largely supported by the members of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Conference. When the China Mennonite Mission Society organized in 1905, some members of the body began to work under the Society. By 1922, as many as 13 missionaries had been serving on the field of the Society.⁷³ At the same time, regular support was given through individual contributors, although the conference never officially recognized the organization. In 1922, Frank V. Wiebe was sent to China as the missionary of the Conference.

⁷³The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. V. p. 562.

Meanwhile, the Board of Foreign Missions of the K.M.B. Conference encouraged him to locate a new field, which had not been occupied by other Christian missions, as the independent mission field of the Conference. After a year of language study, Wiebe, accompanied with Bartel, made a exploratory tour into Inner Mongolia. An area, about 150 miles long and 50 miles wide with a population of 60,000,⁷⁴ was recommended to the home Board as the mission field of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Conference. The Board approved Wiebe's plan, and Inner Mongolia was chosen as the first mission field of the Conference. A small village town, Cho-tze-shan, with approximately 4,000 inhabitants, was selected as the centre of operations. A four and half acre compound, with homes, church, elementary school, and clinic, was built as the main mission station at Cho-tze-shan.

The work on the field continued without serious interruption until 1941, when the missionaries were strongly advised to leave the country because of the invasion of the Japanese troops. During the relatively peaceful period of almost twenty years, Wiebe had developed his work in all the mission field. A total of 16 missionaries served on the field.⁷⁵ The major emphasis in the work was evangelism, which included preaching, women's work, outstation meetings, and instruction classes. Churches were organized at four

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 562.

⁷⁵The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. V. p. 562.

centres and encouraged to become indigenous and self-supporting. Under the leadership of Wiebe, as soon as there were a group of about ten in a community who were converted to the church, they were encouraged to organized a small church with the assistance of the evangelist and the missionary. If the group were able financially to support an evangelist, they would call a leader, who was generally an ordained elder. Usually, these congregations elected a "Tung Shih Hui," or council from their own members, which would look after the material and spiritual welfare of the members. During the infancy of the church, the evangelist's salary was paid by the Board of Foreign Missions. After that, some of the outstations which grew rapidly were seen as ready to become self-supporting, but others which were located in poorer districts found it difficult to support their own evangelists.

In 1947, four missionaries went back to the field, and the various churches on the K.M.B. Conference field organized a Chinese Christian Church Conference, which met annually or whenever necessary to discuss and decide important matters of mutual interest. However, after only a short time, the Communist occupation of North China caused the missionaries to leave their fields. This also closed the door of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren mission field in Inner Mongolia.

4. The Indigenous Chinese Mennonite Churches

Without doubt, the purpose of the Mennonite missions in China was not only to acquaint Chinese with the teachings of Christ and lead them into a vital Christian experience, but also to assist them in becoming a self-supporting and self-propagating Christian church. The following quote from the recollections of Henry J. Brown, the pioneer of the General Conference Mennonite Church mission in China, may reflect many other missionaries' opinions on the issue:

The task of giving the Gospel to Chinese is so great and the difficulties of language and customs so numerous, that we cannot think of depending upon the foreign missionaries in caring it out. In my mind there is no doubt that the Chinese brethren must shoulder the responsibility of doing it. The task is great and the whole work may require time; but it must and can be done.⁷⁶

However, for the missionaries, it was not always easy to figure out what was the best way to reach the goal. There were those who believed that the indigenous church in China was to be strictly modeled in form after that of the New Testament, while others argued that the Chinese church should be given the privilege to choose its own form of church polity. The matter of financial support of the Chinese church also created many serious problems. There were those who believed that the Chinese church should not be supported by foreign funds, but self-supporting from the very beginning.

⁷⁶H. J. Brown, Chips of Experiences (n.p., n.d.), pp. 168-169.

It was also true that a few of the missions put this principle into practice with very satisfying results. However, any financially embarrassing situation in the Chinese church was known to the home churches through the missionary reports. Such reports often were met with immediate sympathetic responses, and the mission coffers were well supplied for the Chinese church, schools, and relief work. These well-meant, but ill-advised practices were thought of as a necessary way to maintain the Chinese church by some missionaries, even though it actually postponed the day of independence for the church in China.

As independent ventures, from the very beginning, the Mennonite missions in China faced financial embarrassment. Since they were not accepted as conference projects, it resulted in only limited financial resources coming from individual contributors. No denominational organization supported them with funds. So they had to shift the financial burden unto the Chinese church. Yet, this situation brought about a number of independent Chinese churches, while those missions with enough funds found it rather difficult to establish independent, self-supporting churches on their fields. The Ts'ao Hsien congregation was an example of an independent, self-supporting church. According to the executive report of March, 1923, the church was responsible for ten out-stations. An out-station was a small church usually with a Chinese evangelist or layman in charge. The

missionary visited the out-station as often as his assistance was required. At the same time, the Chinese workers were properly trained to assume the responsibilities of preaching the Gospel to their own people. Since it was physically impossible for the missionaries to reach all the people in different villages due to the fact that travel facilities were poor in most parts of China, the Christians found it difficult to attend church services at the main mission stations. Thus, self-supporting out-stations became the main places of worship and local church organizations on the field. Just as Bartel had done, Brown, from the very beginning of his mission in China, put a special emphasis on the establishing of a self-supporting Chinese church. When a local congregation had to be organized, as much as was possible, the Chinese workers were always put in charge. The Chinese Christians were encouraged, if possible, to support their evangelists. However, in case they were not able to do it, the mission would assist with the support of workers and money until the church was able to assume that responsibility. Thus, under the Chinese evangelists' charge, many local churches supported themselves for many years.⁷⁷

The National Christian Conference, which was held in Shanghai in 1922, gave an impetus to the already fast growing indigenous Chinese church. At that conference, the Chinese

⁷⁷Abraham K. Wiens, "The work of the Mennonite Missions in China," p. 85.

church leaders expressed the hope that they would be given a greater voice in the church administration. Brown gave a favourable response to the requirement. He drew up a plan for closer cooperation with the Chinese church leaders. The most important move was to permit the Chinese workers to assume greater responsibilities in church government. However, the first attempt at self-government was practically a total failure because of the civil war between 1924 and 1927. During World War II, the issue was put on the agenda once again. As a result of it, a nine-member committee, which was composed of foreign missionaries and Chinese workers, took charge of the mission work on the General Conference Mennonites field.

In a word, from the very beginning of Mennonite missions in China, the indigenous methods were emphasized. In particular, the rise of nationalism in the 1920s greatly accelerated the indigenous movement. Mission education was another contributing factor to the development of the indigenous church. With the development of mission education, resulting in a multiplicity of various mission schools throughout the country, more and more educated Chinese became church workers. Some of them rose to take over the administration of the Christian missions. The Chinese church began to develop under the Chinese leadership. The change in missionary personnel also made a vital contribution to the development of the indigenous Chinese church. As the older

missionaries retired from active service, Chinese leaders stepped into responsible positions in the church. When the young mission recruits arrived on the field, they subordinated themselves to the superior and more efficient Chinese church leadership. All of this resulted in the whole emphasis of the mission work gradually changing to focus on the development of the local church, instead of expanding the occupied territories.

For more than half a century, the Mennonites have made great efforts to share their faith with Chinese people. Many negative factors, like the shortage of mission funds and continuing civil disturbance in China from the 1910s to 1940s, made the Mennonites' mission efforts produce little fruit. However, they did a great job at bringing the Gospel to those Chinese people who lived in the areas which were very poor. At the same time, they made a good effort at establishing an indigenous Chinese Mennonite church.

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