

THE ANABAPTISTS: neither Catholics nor Protestants

by William R. McGrath

INTRODUCTION

The text of the following booklet was originally written by Bro. McGrath as a series of two articles for the SWORD AND TRUMPET in 1955 and 1956. Because of many requests for their reprinting, the publishers of THE FELLOWSHIP MESSENGER have arranged for the two articles to be reprinted now as one booklet, with some changes and corrections by Bro. McGrath. Included also is a list of twenty questions for use as a study, review, and discussion guide for those who may desire to use the booklet for church history and doctrinal studies in their local congregations, mid-week meetings, home study, Bible schools and correspondence courses. Additional copies of this booklet may be ordered from THE FELLOWSHIP MESSENGER, Box 36, Hartville, Ohio. The price is 50¢ each or ten booklets for \$4.50, or 100 booklets for \$40.00.

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Brother William McGrath came to conversion through reading the Word of God and to his first acquaintance with the Mennonite Church through reading church history. His incisive article beginning on this page locates true Anabaptism in relation to some of the larger currents of church history. He shows that it is "more than protestantism." This article appears in two installments. You will not want to miss the second installment in the forthcoming issue, for there Brother McGrath draws his significant conclusions.

Part 1

The title of this article will seem somewhat strange to a reader who may have the rather popular but erroneous idea that there are only two kinds of professing Christians: Protestants and Catholics. Originally the term "protestant" was applied to a group of German princes of the early sixteenth century who wanted to manage the religious affairs of their own territories as they saw fit, without any interference from Rome, or any other "higher power" – when an emperor denied them this right, they *protested*, and insisted on making the Church in their territories a department of the government, as the post office is in America. Because most of these princes professed "reformed doctrine" (that is, they favored the teachings of Luther and Calvin, as opposed to the teachings of the old Catholic church), the name

applied to them came to be the name applied generally to the party and program of the famous reformers. But many evangelical churches reject this name protestant and claim to want no connection with it. As a matter of fact, the early Anabaptists (forefathers of the present-day Mennonites) not only rejected the name, but also repudiated the famous reformers themselves! We might ask, Why did they refuse to be identified with the Protestant movement? Why did they claim to have a Christianity which was more than Protestantism? Can we make the same claim today? We can find the answer to these questions in a survey of Church History — which we should always be eager to study since the Apostle Paul admonishes us not to be ignorant of what happened in Church History, lest we repeat the same mistakes that others before us made. (1 Corinthians 10:1-14)

To understand why the Anabaptist refused to be identified with Protestantism, we must understand the problems which were in back of the whole Reformation movement of the sixteenth century. The Catholic Church was in a very decadent condition, with many unscriptural abuses tolerated and even dogmatically defended by her priests and popes. As we examine the scene of that time closely, we find eight flagrant violations of Scripture, crying out for correction or reform:

1. *The system of indulgences*, in which the Catholic Church claimed to have the right to excuse people from the penalty of their sins, and even release their loved ones from the fiery punishments of "purgatory," if they would make a certain "sacrifice" (usually the payment of some money for a certificate of indulgence from the church). This practice became so rank that it even included a prior license to sin, for a monetary consideration.
2. *The system of Penance, confession, and meritorious good works*, in which Catholics were taught that the church could forgive sins if the people would confess them to the priest and then work out a penalty which he would assign them, such as fasting for a certain length of time, or giving money to the poor.
3. *The worship of saints, of Mary, and of images and relics*, in which the common people were taught that they could secure intercessors with God, by prayer and petition to Mary and the saints, as well as that God was pleased by the veneration of images, relics (souvenirs of dead saints), and prayers for the dead.
4. *Sacramental magic*, in which the church taught that the waters of baptism properly administered

made infants to be born again (and that an infant dying without such a treatment could never see God), and that the bread and wine of the communion were actually the real body and blood of Christ, rather than merely symbols to remind us of His sacrifice.

5. *Monasticism, celibacy, and asceticism*, — practices in which the church upheld a double standard of Christian living: one very strict standard for the monks, priests, and nuns, and a much lower standard for the laity, because of the theory that only a few were called to be disciples and they could by their holy life atone for the sins of the common members. This system developed many immoral abuses.
6. *The sacerdotal system* of the authority of priests, bishops, and popes interpreting and overruling the authority of the Scriptures: the growth of an "infallible" hierarchy, an ecclesiastical machine which made its own laws and defined as "heretical" all dissent, with the priest becoming the intercessor between God and man, displacing Christ, or making Him available only through the service of the priest.
7. *The use of physical violence in religious matters*, in which the Catholic Church employed force in torturing, imprisoning, persecuting, and causing the State to kill or banish those whose conscience and faith were not in conformity with Rome.
8. *A mass-church*, in which everyone baptized as an infant was automatically a member, regardless of whether he was born again and living the Christian life or not — membership coterminous with the entire population of the State.

These eight flagrant violations of Scripture constituted the problem facing any reformation — any reformer must meet each of these eight issues and restore the church to Biblical truth in each corrupt area. Last, but not to be overlooked was the social and economic position of the church in medieval society: the church owned more than one-third of all the real estate in Europe, collected a compulsory annual tithe from every person, high or low, and channeled enormous sums of money out of every country into Rome. Political homage and taxes were exacted of unwilling kings and princes, under threat of excommunication and revolution, and the church maintained well-armed military orders and even hired armies to enforce her decisions. "Crusades" were declared against disobedient rulers, "heretics," and pagan countries that looked ripe for conquest and plunder. The church was a super-State which held

both the great and petty rulers of Europe in her power. As nationalism began to grow, rulers and nobles grumbled more and more at the super-national, international power and imperialistic interference of the church, and began to desire to keep the taxes that poured out of their lands to Rome, began to desire to appoint their own clergy (who would obey their kings and princes directly, instead of Rome), began to desire to confiscate and plunder the rich properties of the church (to "nationalize" them in the way in which foreign business is often "nationalized" today in Latin America and the Near and Far East). A true reformation would have to be one which would not only correct religious abuses but even more so one which would have to break the power of Rome (or any church) to interfere in the internal politics of a nation. The situation was tailor-made for revolution and change, all that was lacking was religious leadership to provide the "theology" for "nationalization," and to capture the popular enthusiasm. Such were soon found.

Martin Luther began his career in reformation little realizing the tremendous consequences of his action. Four rather distinct periods can be traced in his life and work:

1. The young, liberal Luther, who went all out for freedom, who captured the popular imagination by his courageous stand for freedom of conscience against Papal slavery and coercion.
2. The later Luther, disillusioned by the outbreak of social and economic revolution, and the rise of radical religious fanaticism — the Luther who halted between two opinions, whether to found a church composed of born-again believers and the disciples only, or whether to simply try to hold together the crumbling fabric of medieval society with another mass-church, controlled by the prince rather than by the Pope.
3. The adaptable Luther, dismayed at the spread of fanaticism and economic revolution, who accommodated his church necessities to political exigencies, sacrificing conscience to expediency, wooing the princes and noblemen, and speaking harshly against the rebelling peasants.
4. The socially arch-conservative Luther, who "invested the godly prince and the civil power with that authority which formerly the church of Rome had claimed."¹

All of our sympathy goes out to the young Luther who burned the Papal Bull of excommunication, and the book of canon law, thus repudiating the entire Papal system with all of its

man-made authority, the young Luther who said: "Here I stand. I can do nothing else, for it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. So help me God." He fully expected to die a martyr's death; instead he was to live, and change, and eventually advise that other men should be put to death for their conscience's sake. Luther's life and work is in many ways typical of a number of the great reformers, who began well by the cry, "Back to the Bible," but who soon saw that more than religious opinion was at stake in a radical reformation. One after another they found themselves gradually compromising, gradually leaning more and more upon the rising nationalistic self-interest of kings and princes and city councils who wished to throw off the political and economic yoke of Papal interference. Let us examine each of the eight flagrant Catholic violations of Scripture and see how the Protestant reformers dealt with each of them.

1. Indulgences

One and all, the famous reformers overthrew the Papal system of indulgences thus meeting the first great abuse fairly and squarely. They emphasized the Bible teaching that no church has the power to give an "indulgence" to lessen or remit the penalty of sin, or in any way to help those already dead and damned. Sad to say, however, the Protestant reformers' emphasis on *sola fide* (salvation through faith *alone*, "only believe"), no matter how well-meant by them was generally understood and practiced as a kind of "*Protestant indulgence*" to sin. The result was that one system of indulgences was overthrown only to be replaced by another. A modern Lutheran theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, writes of this sad result in the following words, calling this "Protestant indulgence" to sin by the name of *cheap grace*:

"Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner. Grace alone does everything, they say, and so everything can remain, as it was before. 'All for sin could not atone.' The world goes on in the same old way, and we are all still sinners 'even in the best life,' as Luther said. Well, then, let the Christian live like the rest of the world, let him model himself on the world's standards in every sphere of life, and not presumptuously aspire to live a different life under grace from his old life under sin. That was the heresy of the enthusiasts, the Anabaptists and their kind.... Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without Church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without contrition. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the Cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate (in the believer)... We Lutherans have gathered like eagles round the

carcass of cheap grace, and there we have drunk of the poison which has killed the life of following Christ. It is true, of course, that we have paid the doctrine of pure grace divine honors unparalleled in Christendom, in fact we have exalted that doctrine to the position of God Himself. Everywhere Luther's formula ("sin boldly") was repeated, but its truth perverted into self-deception. So long as our Church holds the correct doctrine of justification, there is no doubt whatever that she is a justified Church! So they said, thinking that we must vindicate our Lutheran heritage by making this grace available on the cheapest and easiest terms. To be 'Lutheran' must mean that we leave the following of Christ to Nomians, Calvinists and Anabaptists — and all this for the sake of grace. We justified the world, and condemned as heretics those who tried to follow Christ. The result was that a nation became Christian and Lutheran, but at the cost of true discipleship. The price it was called upon to pay was all too cheap. Cheap grace had won the day."²

These shocking words come not from an opponent of Luther, but are the sincere confession of a modern Lutheran theologian seeing the collapse of such empty Protestantism (with its "Protestant indulgence" to sin because of cheap grace) in Nazi Germany, where the great majority of church members fell away to follow a modern anti-Christian dictator, showing that German Christianity was only skin-deep. But it did not take four hundred years for someone to see through this kind of superficial Christianity. The Anabaptists, contemporary with Luther, immediately saw the fallacy of this "only believe" doctrine. We read hundreds of expressions from them like this of Menno Simons:

"The people they (the *reformers*) console with the teaching that Christ has paid for our sins, faith alone should have our thought, we are poor sinners and can not keep God's commandments, and similar ease-loving consolations, so that every one selfishly seeks the liberty of the flesh through the new doctrine. They remain in the old corrupt way of sin, in an unchanged life, without any fear of God, just as if they never in their lives heard one syllable of the word of the Lord and as if God would not punish wickedness and unrighteousness."³

Scholars generally agree that one of the fruits of the Reformation was an undeniable decline in morality throughout all of Europe, wherever the doctrine of "only believe" spread among the common people. Menno Simons observed this general moral deterioration with sadness and indignation:

"Notwithstanding, through the preaching of their compromising gospel, such a wild and reckless liberty is in evidence in all Germany that you cannot rebuke them for their open unchastity, intemperance, cursing and swearing, lasciviousness and foul words without being compelled to hear that you are a separatist (a sectarian), vagabond, fanatic, heaven-stormer (a person who believes he can be saved by his own good works), Anabaptist and other terms of reproach and insult."⁴

2. Penance, Confession & Meritorious Good Works

Looking at the second glaring abuse of Catholicism, we again rejoice at first to see the famous reformers utterly rejecting the unscriptural system of penance, confession, and meritorious works as an atonement for sin. However, it is also soon apparent, as we study their writings and the practice of their followers, that though they abolished good works as meritorious or capable of atoning for sin, they did not always make clear the truth of good works as a necessary result of salvation and abiding in Christ. Luther substituted for penance an almost morbidly pessimistic concept of continual sinning and continual repentance. The Anabaptists also rejected this as an immoral doctrine, and although clearly teaching the continued need of repentance (much more so than we see it emphasized today), and humility before the grace of God, they did not hesitate to assume that it was possible to live the Christian life and possible for the born-again believer to obey God's commandments and be pleasing in God's eyes through child-like obedience (see 1 John 3:22). One of their favorite verses was 1 Peter 3:21, which speaks of baptism as "the answer of a good conscience toward God." One of their most beautiful tracts, TWO KINDS OF OBEDIENCE, emphasized that there is indeed a legalistic obedience, which is slavish, but that there is also the filial obedience of a truly born-again child of God, for whom the keeping of God's commandments is not grievous but rather a joy-bringing expression of love to the Father (1 John 5:3; John 15:10-11). In place of the Protestant concept of continual sinning and continual repentance, the Anabaptists emphasized the keeping power of God, the necessity of the born-again disciple's being yielded to God (*Gelassenheit*, surrenderedness), and being ready always to confess and forsake sin whenever he might fall (*Buszfertigkeit*, a readiness to repent, an openness of heart to heed conviction of sin and rebuke). We are reminded again as we see these things in church history that it is not enough to destroy or overthrow a false doctrine, we must also be certain to restore the true Scriptural doctrine. Avoiding both legalistic works — righteousness and radical, proud

perfectionism — the Anabaptists insisted on child-like obedience in the lives of born-again disciples, and did not take the morbidly pessimistic view held by many of the reformers.

If one word could sum up the piety and practice of the early Anabaptists, we should choose *Nachfolge* (discipleship), which might be further broken down into four parts: *Gehorsamkeit* (the loving obedience of the child-like regenerate soul), *Leiden* (the cross-bearing suffering which love must experience in an unlovely, Christ-rejecting world), *Buszfertigkeit* (a child-like teachableness, lovingly ready to be chastened, instructed, rebuked, and corrected when in error, voluntarily willing to be disciplined), and *Gelassenheit*. This fourth concept, *Gelassenheit*, yieldedness, is a calm and joyful resignation of the soul to God, in perfect rest and quietness of heart, even though the world might be shouting abuse and reviling and persecuting and threatening. It is completely different from that bitter resignation of despair, issuing in a reckless abandonment to the "only believe" doctrine, boldly heedless of sin, which characterized much of Protestant piety and practice. *Gelassenheit* is that quiet, deep joy of the soul which rests in Christ, lovingly yielded and at peace as in a deep sea of calmness when all around and above is trouble, suffering, rejection, and slander. It is that of which our Lord spoke in John 16:22 and 33 — "your joy no man taketh from you," and "that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." It is the precious experience of abiding in Christ, and Christ abiding in the believer, a bond of love imperturbable by mere external circumstances.

3. Worship of Saints, of Mary, of Images and Relics

Considering next the third area of Catholic abuses, the system of worship of saints, images, and Mary, we are happy to see the famous reformers rejecting all such abuses, even destroying images, stained glass windows, paintings, altars and statues, with ferocious zeal. Zwingli, Knox, and Calvin were especially zealous in this kind of iconoclasm, throwing all "aesthetic" "aids to worship" out of the churches, demolishing musical instruments and choirs and ornaments. Luther, however, did not go so far, but retained much of the ceremony of the mass, candles, organs and many other items of the Catholic worship service. A fairly clean sweep of reform was made in this area, although John Wesley later challenged the unfinished reformation in England, accusing the worldliness and nationalism of the "protestants" as follows:

"Are you clear of idolatry any more than the papists are? It may be, indeed, yours is in a

different way. But how little does that signify! They set up their idols in their churches; you set up yours in your heart. Their idols are only covered with gold or silver, but yours are solid gold. They worship the picture of the Queen of Heaven; you the picture of the Queen or King of England. In another way they idolize a dead man or woman; whereas your idol is still alive. O, how little is the difference before God! How small pre-eminence has the money-worshipper at London over the image-worshipper at Rome; or the idolizer of a living sinner over him that prays to a dead saint." ⁵

While Luther and many of the Protestants followed the principle of rejecting only those things that were specifically contrary to Scripture, the Anabaptists generally followed the principle of rejecting everything that was not specifically commanded to be observed in the Scriptures. H. S. Bender quotes and comments on this Anabaptist principle in the writings of Conrad Grebel to one would-be "reformer":

"We understood and have observed that you have translated the Mass into German and that you have ordained a new German liturgy. This cannot be good, for we find in the N. T. no teaching about (such) singing (and liturgy).' This sentence announces Grebel's method; everything must be tested by the New Testament, and what is not found therein as a teaching of Christ and the apostles or as an apostolic practice must be abandoned. To this first principle a second standard is added; everything must edify, must produce a true faith leading to right living, and dare not lead to an 'external hypocritical faith.'" ⁶

This principle does not mean that the Church has no right to make Scriptural applications but only that it has no right to introduce foreign and unnecessary practices which have no Scriptural foundation.

It is particularly sad to see how easily the nominally Protestant masses turned from saint-worship to hero-worship, glorifying kings and princes and other nationalistic heroes. This is just as much idolatry, as Wesley points out in the above quotation. We cannot underestimate the massive influence of carnal nationalism in shaping the Protestant "reformation" in country after country. In a country like England, where the "reformer" was the vile and immoral Henry the Eighth, adulterer, drunkard, and tyrant, the "reformation" took on the dimensions of a mere nationalistic plundering of the Catholic wealth and properties.

4. Sacramental Magic

Turning next to the fourth great Catholic error, that of sacramental magic, the teaching that God gave His regenerating grace only in the baptismal waters administered by the priest (usually to infants), and that Christ was really present physically in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper, we are disappointed to find that none of the famous reformers repudiated infant baptism, or baptismal regeneration. Almost all of them at one time in their career questioned the practice, but one after another decided it would be "necessary" to retain this unscriptural doctrine and practice. The reason for this was that if infant baptism were rejected, and only believers were admitted to baptism, on their voluntary confession of faith, this would make only a very small church — if the membership were purely voluntary, not many people would join, there would only be a few Christians, and society would fall apart, or at least so the reformers must have reasoned. They decided for a mass-church, in which everyone who was born in the country was baptized and automatically became a "Christian." Since an infant cannot have faith, this was a very poor decision according to Scripture, but it was a decision made for political and social expediency. Similarly in the communion emblems only a minority of the reformers decided against Christ's being physically present, and Luther strongly insisted that the emblems were indeed Christ. Thus the Church became all those who were baptized as infants, who agreed with the theology of the reformers ("only believe"), and who ate and drank 'Christ' in the communion service. The Anabaptists utterly rejected any baptism except baptism upon faith, and also refused to regard the communion emblems as anything more than signs. Thus the Anabaptists repudiated ceremonial magic, while the Protestants were confused and divided on the issue, many believing that God actually gave grace only through the sacraments themselves and the correct preaching of the "only believe" doctrine.

5. Monasticism, Celibacy and Asceticism

Fifth, we must consider whether or not the "reformers" reformed the Roman Catholic institutions of monasticism, celibacy, and asceticism. Although "high church" factions of the Protestant camp today have revived monasticism and celibacy as special vocations for the select few, in general, the reformers simply dropped this double emphasis on a strict standard for the few along side a lax standard for the many, and replaced it by a generally lax standard for all, leading to the general moral deterioration we have already noted in the above quoted words of Menno Simons.

Truly it did not help the cause of Christ to

demolish the double standard but then replace it by nothing better than general antinomianism. The Anabaptists rejected both the double standard of Catholicism and the antinomian worldliness of Protestantism, and restored all Scriptural standard of discipleship for all of God's born again children. Where men have relaxed the high and holy standards of the New Testament as binding upon all church members, discipline is inevitably lost, and when discipline is lost, discipleship is lost, sonship is lost, and finally salvation itself is lost.

6. Sacerdotal System

Considering next the sixth great Catholic abuse, that of clericalism, and the authority of Popes, bishops, and councils, we are refreshed by the reformers' cries of "back to the Bible." However, as we examine the facts, their real piety and practice, we are disappointed to find again a betrayal of the cause of true reformation. Though a watchword of the reformers was the priesthood of all believers, the fact is that they definitely forbade anyone to preach and testify who was not ordained by the official political and ecclesiastical machine. Again and again, Luther stormed against the "unauthorized" preachers of the Anabaptists, whom he contemptuously called "hedge-preachers." The reformers are often said to have introduced religious liberty, but the facts show that this was far from the truth: they persecuted those who did not agree with them; Luther even reviled the other reformers who would not agree with him. The Protestant historian, Hallam, reflects the judgment of all impartial scholars when he writes of Luther:

"An unbounded dogmatism, resting on an absolute confidence in the infallibility, practically speaking, of his own judgment, pervades his writings; no indulgence is shown, no pause allowed to the hesitating; whatever stands in the way of his decisions, the fathers of the Church, the school men and philosophers, the canons and councils, are swept away in a current of impetuous declamations; and as everything contained in the Scripture, according to Luther, is easy to be understood, and can only be understood in his sense, every deviation from his doctrine incurs the anathema of perdition. That the Zwinglians, as well as the whole Church of Rome, and the Anabaptists, were shut by their tenets from salvation is more than insinuated in numerous passages of Luther's writings."⁷

Another scholar, John L. Stoddard, is forced to the same conclusion by the disturbing facts of Luther's life and writings:

"It is commonly said that Luther inaugurated the right of free investigation. Nothing is less true.

He *talked* of it, as a reason for abandoning the traditions of the Church, but he did his utmost to bring about complete subjection to an unassailable Bible *as he interpreted it!* He instituted thus a Pope of printed paper, instead of a Pope of flesh and blood. Moreover, *since he constituted himself the authoritative interpreter of the Bible, he practically claimed for himself infallibility.* One of Luther's contemporaries, Sebastian Frank, wrote despondently: 'Even under the Papacy one had more freedom than now.'⁸

Nor was this tyrannical intolerance confined to Luther alone, all of the famous reformers displayed it, from John Calvin having Servetus (his theological opponent) burned at the stake, to Ulrich Zwingli forcing his former friend Hubmaier to give up his doctrine and conscience under torture and threat of death. Far from restoring the priesthood of all believers, and instituting a new religious freedom, the famous reformers all tried to impose their own interpretations by force, and intimidate their opponents into silence by threats. This unhappy situation resulted in great waves of persecution and terrible civil wars. Finally, after much confusion and bloodshed, an effort was made to work out a kind of peace through compromise. The principle, *cujus regio, ejus religio* (each ruler may establish his own religion), was adopted according to which the religion of the ruler was to become the official religion of his territory. "Freedom of conscience," says the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Vol. 23, p. 15), "was thus established for princes alone, and their power became supreme in religion as well as secular matters." This was an unhappy principle which simply gave rising nationalism its charter of supremacy, and laid the foundations for that kind of absolute, totalitarian Statism which even today is bearing pernicious fruit. Under the Catholics, rulers at least trembled before the possibility of the church's criticism and interference, but the reformation made the rulers heads of the churches in their own lands, and every critic was silenced. But the Anabaptists not only believed in the priesthood of all believers, they also practiced it fearlessly, and every member was expected to testify to Christ's love and Lordship, and against sin; consequently they were charged with treason, subversive activity, and heresy, and nearly wiped out in bloody persecutions by rulers who patronized a tame State-church, but would not tolerate a fearless church of prophets of God. They met with the same fate as did John the Baptist before them and for the same reason.

7. Physical Violence in Religious Matters

The seventh great Catholic error had been the system of the use of power, violence and bloody

coercion against those who had disagreed religiously with Rome. The famous reformers made no attempt to undo this terrible anti-Christian principle. On the contrary they exploited it to the full. A contemporary Baptist historian has succinctly put the facts:

"All of the leading Reformers, who so heroically freed the church from the Roman Catholic church and the Pope, fastened a State Church upon the people wherever they went, and the true New Testament sovereign local church that stood for absolute religious liberty was persecuted by these State Churches of the Reformers. This was true of Luther, who fastened a State Church upon Germany; Zwingli . . . in Switzerland; John Knox . . . in Scotland; Henry VIII . . . in England; (and John Calvin in Geneva, whose consistory was nothing more than a bold-faced inquisition). They all became persecutors like Rome before them!"⁹

That this is a historical fact cannot be denied, but many sentimental hero-worshippers have tried to excuse the state-church reformers in some way or another from the blood-guilt of these persecutions. One of the most common excuses a generation ago was that it was a brutal, rough time, and everybody did that sort of thing anyway. Five years ago, a book entitled CHRISTIANITY AND FEAR was published in Switzerland, in which the author, Oscar Pfister, at great length analyzes the crimes of the reformers. Concerning Calvin, he writes in the following words an evaluation which applies to all of them:

"Acquaintance with the period (of the Reformation) shows that many scholars of the time, men with followers who in some instances numbered many thousands, zealously opposed the persecutions of the 'heretics,' and in the name of the Gospel, called for merciful treatment. Prominent among them were . . . the Anabaptists. Most of these men and their love-inspired eloquence were known to Calvin; but their opposition to the persecution of heretics made no impression whatever on him. An end should therefore be made of propagating the ancient falsehood that Calvin's cruelties are adequately explained by the spirit of the times." "And we marvel at the great logician's (Calvin's) lack of logic, whose wrath was roused against the persecution of Protestants in Catholic countries and who yet showed himself so merciless towards alleged heretics."¹⁰

The Anabaptists protested against this anti-Christian activity on the part of the famous reformers, but it availed nothing. Menno Simons writes of this bloody cruelty in which thousands of Anabaptists were put to death by the Protestant

State-churches:

"Observe, dear brethren, how far the whole wide world has departed from God and His word... how bitterly do they persecute, defame, and destroy the eternal saving truth, the pure, unadulterated Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, the pious, godly life of the saints. And this is done not only by Papists and the Turks but to a great extent also by those who boast of the Holy Word, although in their first writings they had much to say concerning faith, that it is the gift of God and can be created in the hearts of men alone through the Word, for it is an assent of heart and will. But this principle has for some years been again discarded by the theologians and, it appears to me, has been effaced from their books. *For since lords and princes, cities and countries have identified themselves with their carnal doctrine*, they have widely published the contrary opinion, as is fully evident from their own writings. And through their inciting publications and sermons they deliver into the hands of the henchman (executioner) many God-fearing pious hearts *who contradict, reprove and admonish them with the clear Word of God, and point out to them the true fundamentals of the holy Word*, namely the powerful faith working through love, the penitent new life, the obedience to God and Christ and the true evangelical ordinances of baptism, the Lord's Supper, and discipline, as Jesus Christ Himself instituted and commanded and His holy apostles taught and practiced. Yes, all who out of pure love insist on this, must be these accursed Anabaptists, disturbers, seducers and heretics; all the pious may expect this at their hands. Nevertheless, one and all of them, be they lords, princes, preachers, theologians or common people, be they Papists, Lutherans or Zwinglians wish to be called the Christian congregation, the holy Church."¹¹

We might particularly notice two things in the above-quoted passage: First, Menno states that the Anabaptists rebuked and prophesied against the sins of their persecutors. I remember reading of the court trial of an Anabaptist who was standing accused before his judges and a number of State-Church preachers, one of whom cried out: "*Dieser Hermann hat sich gegeben zu einer verdammten Sekte, die uns verdammt!*" (— This fellow Herman has given himself over to a damned sect that condemns us.) Undoubtedly the consciences of the reformers smarted guiltily under the fearless testimony of the Anabaptists. Secondly, we should notice that Menno observes a change in the reformers themselves — if at first they had been courageous in their convictions

that faith must be voluntary, they soon changed when they saw that they needed the support of the rulers, if their 'reformation' were to be a "success." This observation of Menno's is not just his own — a recent scholar of Reformation history, Harold J. Grimm, of Indiana University, writing in 1954, says the following:

"Luther's courageous act at Worms has rightly been regarded as an important step in the history of the development of religious liberty. He steadfastly maintained that the authorities of both the church and the Empire were bound to convince him, an individual, of his errors before condemning him. On the other hand, this was still a far step from complete religious individualism and the denial of authority. This position, supported by the subsequent history of the reformer, shows that he firmly believed that by his personal religious experience and study *he had arrived at the absolute religious truth, which did not permit any individual interpretation.* It was his duty to show the authorities this truth, *and it was their obligation to defend it. If the papacy would not do so, he would turn to the government. If the emperor refused to do so, he would turn to the territorial lords.*"¹²

If any man should come to this conclusion in modern times, he would probably be sent to a mental institution, but Luther was "successful" in his plans — *perhaps not least because the territorial lords were looking for some way of escaping the interference of the Roman Church* and welcomed this opportunity to espouse the cause of "liberty" by supporting the reformer. But when the peasants of Germany tried to apply this "liberty" to themselves by overthrowing the tyrannical territorial lords and gaining their independence, Luther raged against them:

"For if a man is an open rebel, every man is his judge and executioner, just as when a fire starts, the first to put it out is best man. . . . Therefore let everyone who can, smite, slay, and stab, secretly or openly, remembering that nothing can be more poisonous, hurtful, or devilish than a rebel. It is just as when one must kill a mad dog; if you do not strike him, he will strike you, and a whole land with you. . . . Stab, smite, slay, whoever can. If you die in doing it, well for you! *A more blessed death can never be yours, for you die in obeying the divine Word and commandment in Romans XIII, and in loving service of your neighbor, whom you are rescuing from the bonds of hell and the devil.*" "A rebel is not worth answering with arguments, for he does not accept them. The answer for

such mouths is a fist that brings sweat from the nose. The peasants would not listen; they would not let anyone tell them anything: their ears must be unbuttoned with bullets, till their heads jump off their shoulders.... On the obstinate, hardened, blinded peasants, let no one have mercy, but let everyone, as he is able, hew, stab, slay, lay about him as though among mad dogs, . . . so that peace and safety may be maintained. . . . And beyond all doubt, these are precious works of mercy, love, and kindness, since there is nothing on earth that is worse than disturbance, insecurity, oppression, violence, and injustice, etc., etc." ¹³

Luther's writing on the peasant wars is full of such expressions as the above. When he was in later years reproached for such violent language, and for inciting territorial lords to merciless slaughter (they killed over 100,000 peasants), he answered defiantly:

"It was I, Martin Luther, who slew all the peasants in the insurrection, for I commanded them to be slaughtered. All their blood is upon my shoulders. But I cast it on our Lord God who commanded me to speak in this way." ¹⁴

Sadder yet, Luther reacted with equal violence to the Anabaptists who tried to apply the principle of "liberty" to themselves. Though he knew there were both nonresistant, harmless Anabaptists as well as a radical fringe of social revolutionaries, he condemned all together — favoring a policy of extermination. We might also, had we space, quote some of his violent sayings against the Jew. Luther, assuredly riding the high tide of German nationalism with the territorial lords, wrote several horrible anti-semitic tracts advocating the plundering and slaughter or banishment of the Jews, a project never realized until Hitler. It was essentially the support of the power of the princes and rulers which ensured the "success" of Luther's movement, as is frankly acknowledged by the *Encyclopedia Britannica* which says:

"Had the German princes not found it to their interests to enforce his principles, he might never have been more than the leader of an obscure mystic sect. He was, moreover, no statesman. He was recklessly impetuous in his temperament, coarse and grossly superstitious according to modern standards." (Vol. 23, p. 11). ¹⁵

The German princes had a considerable selfish interest in a "reformation" which would enable them to throw off church interference, to stop paying tithes and taxes to Rome, and to confiscate and plunder the rich Catholic ecclesiastical properties, farms, and monasteries.

In all of these examples from Luther's life and writings, we can see a pattern which was repeated in the career of each of the reformers. Not all, to be sure, were so crude and outspoken as Luther, but all followed a policy in which the Roman Catholic unholy union of Church and State was repeated, not repudiated. A modern-day Methodist bishop and scholar, R. F. Weaver, well sums up our alarmed conclusions about the relation between Church and State, Church and nationalism as a result of the "reformation":

"The Protestant Mind is the precursor of the nationalistic mind and is to a large degree the creator of the dominant thought-pattern of the era that follows, namely, the divine right of Kings. Luther gave to the secular power an authority and dignity almost, if not completely, divine: 'The hand that wields the sword is not a human hand but the hand of God. It is God, not man, who hangs and breaks upon the wheel. It is God who wages war.' *It is not too much to say that, powerful as the influence of Luther was in the realm of religion, his doctrine of the State was mightier in Protestant lands than his doctrines of grace, and created a new phase of the age-long problem of the relation of organized government to organized religion.*"¹⁶

Prior to the time of the Reformation, kings and princes were subject to the check of the Church, but the reformers introduced new reasoning about the political arm of society — a few words from Luther's writings again will suffice to show the new attitude which soon made the State the great centralizing power (and made the church but another arm of government, so that soon every petty German principality had its state-church, just as it had its office of the mails, its state-opera, etc.):

"As a Christian, man has to suffer everything and not resist anybody. As a member of the State, the same man has to rob, murder, and fight with joy, as long as he lives. . . . A prince may indeed be a Christian, but he must not rule as a Christian. . . . No one must think that the world is governed without blood. The worldly sword must be red and blood-rusty. . . . Wherever the princes take their power from, it does not regard us. It is the will of God, irrespective whether they have stolen their power or assumed it by robbery. . . . If anybody has the might, he obtained it from God. Therefore he also has the right. . . . Even if the authorities act unjustly, God wills that they should be obeyed without deceit ... for to suffer unjustly harms no man's soul; indeed it is profitable to it. . . . Even if the authorities are wicked and unjust, nobody is entitled to oppose them, or to riot against them."¹⁷

That a Christian must obey and suffer even under an unjust ruler is Biblical truth, *but he must never take part in the administration of either justice or injustice*, and it was just this which Luther never saw; to the end he believed that a Christian was a dual personality, what he did as a Christian, he did in his *private life* (yes, he must even be nonresistant there!), but when the State called upon him to do something, he must obey unquestioningly, as a *citizen, a public man*. To disobey even the unjust State was to disobey God. In such a system, in case of conflicting loyalties, the Christian's duty must always yield to the citizen's duty! Luther made it also clear that he would, if he were a Christian minister living in a Mohammedan State, obey the Sultan and go to war to kill Christians! But the Bible nowhere teaches such an extravagant dualism — every man has only one soul, and we are responsible to God for the deeds done in the body. It makes no difference whether we sin at the State's command or not. It is still sin. The apostles said: "We must obey God rather than man." The apostles were accused (Acts 17:7) of treasonable, subversive activity, because they taught that there was a Higher Power to Whom we are responsible, a Power higher than the State, — "and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus!" Amen!

The Protestant 'reformation' failed to reform the Roman Catholic abuse of the relation between Church and State, and failing in this, it failed in one of the most crucial problems confronting it.

To be continued

¹ Liberty magazine, vol. 50, No. 2; p. 28 (a review by J. M. Dawson).

² Bonhoeffer, Dietrich: *The Cost of Discipleship*, pp. 37-38; 47.

³ *Complete Works of Menno Simon*, p. 283/II, 8b

⁴ *Ibid*, 251b/II, 29a.

⁵ *Great Voices of the Reformation*, Wesley, "A Word to a Protestant," p. 533.

⁶ Bender, H. S.: *Conrad Grebel*, p. 175.

⁷ Hallam, *Literature of Europe*, vol. I, p. 372.

⁸ Stoddard, J. L.: *Rebuilding a Lost Faith*, pp. 97, 98.

⁹ Tulga, C. E., "The New Testament Doctrine of the Church," from the Introduction.

¹⁰ Pfister, Oscar: *Christianity and Fear*, pp. 418-419, 427-428.

¹¹ Menno Simons, *ibid*; 147a/I, 196a.

¹² Grimm, Harold J.: *The Reformation Era*, p. 139.

¹³ Martin Luther, *Werke*, Erlangen edition, vol. 24, p. 294; vol. 15, p. 276; *passim*.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, vol. 59, p. 284.

¹⁵ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. 23, p. 11.

¹⁶ Weaver, Rufus W.: *The Revolt Against God*, p. 155.

¹⁷ Luther, *Werke*, Weimar edition: vol. 30, p. 1, *passim*.

Part 2

8. A Mass-Church

Turning last to the eighth Roman Catholic abuse which faced any potential reformer, we must ask, did the Protestant reformation recover the New Testament teaching on the Church? Did they abolish the Roman Catholic concept of a mass-church composed of members by virtue of the accident of nationality and geography, by "infant-baptism," rather than saving faith? The answer again must be no. They did not restore their church to the New Testament standard of a church composed of believers only, of born-again, blood-washed disciples of Christ. One and all, the reformers retained and defended the unscriptural church founded upon infant baptism and including all the inhabitants of a "Christian" county. In this singular failure, this further betrayal of the goals of a true reformation, as in all the others, the famous reformers cannot be justified by the lame excuse that "they did the best they knew how, anyway." The tragedy of it is that they all considered, *and rejected*, coolly and deliberately, the Bible standard of a believers' church. They knew of others who chose to follow the Bible standard, and they not only rejected their conviction, but they tried to wipe them out by fire and sword. Those others that stood true to their Lord and His standard for the Church were the Anabaptists.

Numerous unprejudiced scholars of the history of Reformation times have come to the same conclusion: the Anabaptists fulfilled the real task facing the Reformation, and the Protestants failed. Roland H. Bainton attempts to assign one reason for this:

"The ideal of restitution or restoration was common in the age of Reformation, and all parties desired to restore something. The difference was only as to what, and how far back to go. *Luther wished to restore the church of the early Middle Ages*; for him the great corruption was the rise of the temporal power of the papacy in the eighth century. The Anabaptists went back further than any of the other groups, and turned exclusively to the New Testament. Even within the New Testament they tended to neglect Paul and to push back to Jesus. That is why (their) ideal of Restoration tends to coincide with the ideal of the imitation of Christ." ¹⁸

This is not to say that they rejected Paul, but rather simply looked to the indwelling Christ as Lord, rather than to take Paul's doctrine of justification out

of it's New Testament context, and invent (like the Protestants) an unscriptural "only-believe" (*sola fide*) cheap-grace salvation. Paul himself says, "Christ *in* you, the hope of glory," (Col. 1:27) not only Christ reckoned as your righteousness, but His righteousness also fulfilled *in you*, (Romans 8:4, 13:10) and: "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." (1 Corinthians 11:1) Another great scholar, Hoffmann, says:

"The roots of the Reformers lay chiefly in St. Paul, while the Baptists (Anabaptists) preferred the teaching of Jesus, with its ethical imperatives and its eschatological hopes. . . . In this respect the Baptists (Anabaptists) were certainly nearer to Biblical Christianity than the Reformers, though the Reformers too made Biblical Christianity their objective."¹⁹

Hall, in comparing Anabaptism and Protestantism, in his HISTORY OF ETHICS WITHIN ORGANIZED CHRISTIANITY, has the following penetrating commentary:

"Nor was it (Anabaptism) in any degree a truly Protestant movement, if by Protestantism one means moral and religious autonomy. It was thoroughly under the Roman Catholic conception of external authority, only it was the authority of a Book and a written law rather than a tradition and a pope. Everything we find among the Anabaptists one also finds in the New Testament. It is simply a matter of emphasis. *If to take the New Testament literally is Protestantism then as over against Luther, Calvin and Zwingli, the Anabaptists were the real Protestants*. They based their teaching upon Luke's estimate of poverty or upon the communism of Acts, or the freedom of the spirit in the Pauline sense, or upon the premillenarianism of the early church and the early Gospels. They took the Sermon on the Mount literally, and they rejected with more or less consistency all things not commanded by the Bible. They saw, generally, *as the reformers did not see*, that primitive Christianity was inherently opposed to the existing and non-Christian social order. They found, of course, no warrant in the New Testament for sacramental magic, because it is not there. All this is not new in church history. From the time of Jovinian and Claudius of Turin, from the days of primitive British Christianity to the Waldensians and Lollards, the New Testament has always raised up men who took it seriously and tested by it at one point or another the traditional dogmatic Christianity. And as dogmatic Christianity is not, in fact, built upon the New Testament, it has never stood the test. .

. . . the revolt of Munster and the peasant wars were made the most of by the small nobility and the reform leaders *to accomplish their own purpose of re-establishing their power on the basis of national and provincial churches as heirs of the rejected imperialism*. The cold-hearted callousness of Zwingli in torturing his former friend Balthasar Hubmaier and forcing from him on pain of death a humiliating and false confession is of a piece with Calvin's attitude toward Servetus or Luther's to Carlstadt. There is nothing in the teachings of the Anabaptists that cannot be shown to at one time or another have had the support of the orthodox reformers. Mysticism mingled with Luther's teaching, legalism and bloody rebellion with that of Calvin and Knox. Zwingli was staggered by infant baptism, and did emasculate to the end the magic sacramentarianism of the Lord's Supper. *It was a question of power, order, and submission to the new heirs of Catholic imperialism* and not a question of 'evangelical purity' or 'dogmatic correctness' that separated the reformers from their persecuted and despised brethren. . . . True it is that the orthodox reformers also professed to take the letter of the Scriptures as their guide and also claimed the guidance of the Holy Spirit. But they neither took it so seriously as the Anabaptists, *nor did they permit themselves to be led by Scripture too far away from the interpretations and ideals of the Protestant princes in Germany or the military Bourgeoisie in Switzerland*. They were in fact, all unconsciously no doubt, yet completely and always the expression of the sober-minded, well-balanced national, rising middle-classes . . .”²⁰

Another contemporary scholar, Joseph M. Dawson, writing on the origins of the religious liberty enjoyed by all in the United States of America today, finds that it came not from the intolerant reformers but from the Anabaptists:

"Not Protestantism, as such, but small independent nonconformist groups, which accepted the larger implications of Luther and Calvin, procured full religious liberty and church-state separation."²¹

Not the Pilgrim fathers and the Puritans brought religious liberty to America — on the contrary, they whipped and burned Quakers at the stake, cheated Indians, etc. It was the Baptists, directly influenced by the Anabaptists of the Continent, who could write as did Roger Williams:

"The Christian church doth not persecute; no

more than a lily doth scratch the thorns, or a lamb pursue and tear the wolves. . . . The Christian religion may not be propagated by the civil sword."²²

If it were not for our Anabaptist forefathers, America might never have become a democracy with religious liberty for all. Think of that the next time you are reproached for being only a "pacifist parasite" by some super-patriot!

Conclusions

Having surveyed the record of the Protestant movement in each of the eight flagrant abuses of Catholicism, and having seen how the famous reformers generally failed to effect a true reformation, we might look also at the political and social results of the movement. Attention has already been drawn to the fact that the Protestant movement was not just a religious movement, but a far-reaching political upheaval of nationalism. In the wake of the reformers' teachings and adherents, a wave of moral deterioration, persecutions, revolution, and "religious wars" spread over Europe. Nation rose against nation, brother against brother, and great predatory armies criss-crossed the map of Europe, where upheaval, plunder, and brutality became the order of the day. A century and a quarter of intermittent warfare followed. By the peace of Westphalia in 1648, after thirty final years of continuous warfare and intrigue, Europe was in ruins, and Germany alone had lost 10,000,000 out of a population of 13,000,000 in only thirty years. Not only the millions of innocent civilians that perished excite our pity and horror, but moreover the cruel atrocities committed against the peaceful Anabaptist martyrs, *in the name of religion*. The great Baptist church historian, A. H. Newman, is forced to raise the following question about the whole bloody carnage:

"We are prompted to inquire whether this war was a necessity; whether this was the only way in which Protestants and Catholics could be taught to respect each others rights? We cannot answer; but we have grave reason for doubting whether the destroyer (Luther) of old evangelical Christianity and the father of the *great politico-ecclesiastical Protestant movement*, which called forth the Counter-Reformation and the Jesuits, and which directly and indirectly led to the Thirty Years' War, was after all as great a benefactor of the human race and promoter of the kingdom of Christ as has been commonly supposed."²³

Not only loss of human life, but the ruin of business, the arts and education, and the abandonment of towns and cities ensued, with a

fearful moral decay overtaking most of the survivors. Nationalism had been born full-fledged, and the first great European "world-war" had been fought, an international war.

I am sure that many of our readers have never known these facts about the tragic results of the Protestant movement. A legend about the infallibility and spotless saintliness of the famous reformers has been cultivated by their followers, and many people have been unwittingly deceived. If we ask whether the early Anabaptists had good reason for rejecting Protestantism and repudiating the famous reformers, we must say, Yes! Anabaptism indeed was "More Than Protestantism." There were four chief points of difference between the Anabaptist movement and the Protestant movement:

1. The Revelation of Authority

Both Anabaptists and Protestants claimed the authority of the Word of God, but only the Anabaptists accepted Christ as the final authority, the absolute arbiter of all life, the final appeal in all allegiances and loyalty conflicts. They accepted Christ as Lord, and rejected the "only-believe" saviourhood that was the center of the Protestant teaching. The Anabaptists believed that Christ must be both our Saviour and our Lord, while the Protestants appealed to Him as Saviour but obeyed the authority of the princes and rulers, and the traditions of early Medieval Christianity. The Anabaptist restitution or reformation was the recovery of the Lordship of Christ, Christ as the Lord of universal morality, making no exceptions for persons nor positions, commanding all men everywhere to repent and bow the knee to Him.

2. The Proclamation of Authority

The Anabaptists believed that the good news of the Great Commission was to proclaim the delivering salvation and Lordship of Christ to all men, as binding upon all men, *not excepting* churchgoers of other "denominations," nor magistrates (who were called to repent, lay down their worldly power, and follow Christ alone). The Anabaptists understood this Great Commission to be binding upon every member in the priesthood of all believers, and saw the chief purpose of the Church as a nurturing, disciplining, *missionary community* going into all the world, declaring the power of the Lamb to deliver, to conquer, and to judge souls. The Protestants accepted, on the other hand, the territorial mass-church, obedient to the religion of its own particular ruler, and to the priests and pastors appointed by the State-church.

It is one of the strange truths of church history

that the Protestant reformers and their followers rejected the Great Commission by the unscriptural theory that it was fulfilled by the apostles! The Anabaptists went everywhere preaching the Gospel, and defying the commandments of the state-church to cease. The Anabaptists' favorite reply to their persecutors who forbade them to preach the Gospel, was the verse: "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof;" therefore, they went boldly and without fear to carry out the Great Commission despite all opposition. But the Protestants, believing that only the State is responsible to provide for the preaching of the Gospel, fiercely contended that Christians had no business going forth in the Great Commission! Aberly, in his book, AN OUTLINE OF MISSIONS (pp. 47-48) tries to explain this strange Protestant rejection of the Great Commission and missions:

"The return of the Reformers to the Pauline message of salvation by grace for Jew and Gentile alike ought to have carried with it the missionary program of the great apostle to the Gentiles. Protestants were, however, at least until after the Thirty Years' War, engrossed in struggles on which their very existence depended. . . . Logical inferences from accepted principles are but slowly drawn when they run counter to prevailing customs. The support of the church was supposed to be the responsibility of the state. The Lord's command to go and make disciples of all nations was for a long time understood even by the theologians to have been given only to the apostles and fulfilled by them. It was thought that nations which had neglected or rejected the opportunity then given could be left to their well-deserved fate. . . . Theodore Beza, from among the Reformed, replied to Saravia in 1592, to disprove his contention that the command to preach the Gospel to all nations was given to the church for all times. Among Lutherans some prominent laymen broached the subject of missions. One was Count Truchses who addressed the theological faculty at Wittenburg about certain scruples he had which he thus expressed: 'Since faith comes alone from preaching, I would know how East and South and West shall be converted to the only saving faith since I see no one of the Augsburg Confession (sic) go forth thither.' The question was answered by the Wittenburg faculty which said in substance that Jesus' command applied only to the apostles and they had already fulfilled it; besides this, it is not the church but the state on which rests the responsibility to provide for the preaching of the Gospel."

This ignorant and unscriptural position

prevailed among the Protestants for almost two centuries. It is one of the ironies of history that while the Protestant forefathers rejected the Great Commission, and the Anabaptist forefathers fervently believed and practiced it, there are today some groups descended from the Anabaptists that actually oppose missions and reject the Great Commission, claiming that it was only for the apostles and fulfilled by them! They even are so bold in their ignorance as to claim that in rejecting missions they are being faithful to their Anabaptist forefathers! Often one hears such people give the reason: "Die Vorvaeter hen's net gedu." (A German dialect expression which means: "The forefathers didn't do it.") In the beginning it was not so, but ye have made the law of God of none effect by your tradition.

3. The Application of Authority

The Anabaptists believed in the free establishment and protection of a *disciplined* Church, consisting only of born-again disciples united in a voluntary, self-binding commitment to the standards and discipline of the New Testament, as interpreted and applied by and through the brotherhood. The Protestants rejected a disciplined church of voluntary disciples, and defended a mass-church of baptized infants. Calvin did operate a limited church discipline, but through the power of stocks, whippings, mutilations, and the gallows for transgressions (such as gambling, swearing, etc.).

4. The Conflict of Authority

The Anabaptists believed that the true Christian cannot compel men with force nor even exercise himself in the realm of worldly justice; he is rather a prophet of God, bearing the cross-love which always suffers opposition because it cannot be silent or indifferent or tolerant in the presence of evil, and remains a salty obstacle to all sin (salt, not leaven). The true Christian is a luminous testimony against all human authority which demands absolute allegiance that men can only absolutely give to Christ the Lord, and therefore the true disciple of Christ is always seen as a threat to human security, compromise, and false peace, and always must suffer enmity and rejection and cross-reproach from the evil world. The Protestants believed that the world could be "Christianized," and that if there was any conflict between a man's duty to Christ and his duty to the State, he must first obey the State, lest society collapse in anarchy. Thus it was that the Anabaptists became the persecuted, and the Protestants the persecutors.

We might briefly summarize these four distinctions, by remembering that the Anabaptist reformation was the restoration of the authority of

Christ as Lord over His disciples, while the Protestant reformation tended to become the rejection of Roman Catholic authority in favor of the authority of the princes and rulers and their territorial churches; briefly, the Anabaptists believed that the true Church was:

- 1) A Church of disciples, obeying the LORD;
- 2) A Church of missionary-prophets, witnessing to all men;
- 3) A disciplined Church, holy and pure;
- 4) A suffering, cross-bearing, non-resistant Church.

This was the faith of our fathers, some four hundred years ago. What about today? Since the principles of religious liberty for which our forefathers died have become generally accepted even by the Protestants now, why should we today desire to be "More Than Protestantism"? Why not just let the crimes and mistakes of the past be forgiven and forgotten, and unite in the ecumenical movement with the Protestants? Because the Protestants have not changed their theology, even if some of their methods are different. They do not uphold the absolute authority of Christ as Lord over the Christian as a disciple.

In concluding this article, I wish to challenge our brotherhood today on twenty counts of abandoning the faith and vision of the Anabaptist reformation:

1. We have lost the prophetic zeal of the Anabaptists, and have turned to pietistic quietism. We no longer prophesy against sin in the nations and in the denominations.
2. Because we no longer vigorously testify of the world and worldly religions that the works thereof are evil, they no longer hate us, and we have become "respectable" at the price of polite silence on popular sins.
3. We have been too much ingrown and withdrawn to ourselves, almost content to be just a group of blood-relatives with familiar names.
4. We are succumbing to the idol of prosperity, hypnotized by shiny machines, big houses, luxuries, comforts, and economic insurance and securities. No covetous man shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven.
5. We are becoming practical relativists; we believe that Christ's commandments are relevant and binding only for those with a Mennonite background — we believe that nonresistance and nonconformity are "Mennonite doctrines,"

that God therefore does not require them of other Bible-professing Christians; unlike the Anabaptists, we seem to have no message for the denominations, no concern for the millions of lost church members who are not disciples of Christ. If nonresistance is only a "Mennonite doctrine," abandon it! If it is Bible doctrine, let us get a deep burden and a bold testimony to those professing Christians in government and in the military services. Either we love our neighbor and refuse to execute carnal judgment on him (whether he be friend, criminal, or enemy), or we are breaking the second of the two Great Commandments, *and cannot be saved until we repent and come out!*

6. We apparently believe today more and more that the Protestants were right in the first place — after all, the "simple gospel" is "only believe," a man need only make "a decision" to be saved once and for all, he need not be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.
7. We now seem commonly to believe that a man can be saved by "accepting forgiveness;" he does not need to repent, be born-again, and receive Christ into his life so that he becomes a Christ-indwelt disciple of the Lord. We do not need to receive Christ and abide in Him; we need only "accept" what He has done, and then go ahead and live like the world.
8. Many of us who still believe in discipleship, appear to think that it is not necessary to salvation, but that it is just something we graciously do to thank God, not that we have to, but just as a little something "extra," a kind of favor to God!
9. Not a few of us seem to think that tolerance of sin and worldliness is next to godliness, is Christ-like love, and that we dare not rebuke or reprove sin and sinners, because that would be "judging."
10. Many think that discipline is legalistic — every voluntary organization, association, or club has its standards and discipline, but only the Church dare not, lest it be "legalistic"!
11. So many among us uncritically praise and exalt the famous reformers, like Luther, that one sometimes wonders if these admirers, might not have joined the Protestants rather than the Anabaptists if they had lived in those days! One sad example of this is to be seen in some of our churches infatuated with religious entertainment, that are using a rather poor and romanticised movie-film glorifying Martin

Luther, in their worship services! This film, at best, is only an entertaining historical romance about a few scenes from the life of the young Luther. It promotes the legendary infallibility of Luther by suppressing his intolerance, violence, vulgarity, and conceit. One of the historians that helped to produce this film has tried to justify it (and Luther) by saying that Luther was after all just a product of his times and made the same mistakes as everyone else in that age. We know that Luther acted against better light. The film is only a kind of cheap, dramatic, but unrealistic historical novel, romantically playing up the hero. This is neither good history, nor true biography, nor even an honest documentary film. Perhaps we are being weakened by members who are members only by the accident of birth and upbringing, and not really by choice — if only they would repent and give up their disloyalty, or leave and go to a church of their own choice and stop undermining our own brotherhood.

12. Our principal emphasis is shifting from evangelism, conversion, and discipleship to emphasis on institutionalized religious education, —which is always a sign of the organizational machine displacing the living organism.
13. We are abandoning adherence to strict Biblical standards, and gradually drifting more quickly to acceptance of pagan American cultural and social standards. As we see more and more cut hair, lipstick, jewelry, ornaments, pins, neckties, etc., we wonder if these can be the descendants spiritually (perhaps only by blood, like the Jews who are merely physical descendants of Abraham!) of that Menno Simons who wrote in such vigorous defense of the whole Gospel, disclaiming the carnal walk of the "reformed" Christians not only because they were not obedient disciples of Christ in nonresistance, but also because:

“They say that they believe, and yet there are no limits nor bounds to their accursed wantonness, foolish pomp, show of silks, velvet, costly clothes, gold rings, chains, silver belts, pins, buttons, curiously adorned shirts, handkerchiefs, collars, veils, aprons, velvet shoes, slippers and such like foolish finery; never regarding that the enlightened apostles, Peter and Paul, have in plain and express words forbidden this to all Christian women. If this is forbidden to women how much more then should men abstain from it, who are the leaders and heads of their women. Notwithstanding all this they still

- want to be called the Christian Church!"²⁴
14. We sense a terrific pressure for the destruction of any remaining signs of peculiarity which set us apart from American crowd-culture — the devotional veiling is on the way out, to say nothing of distinctive attire and head-gear, which are already in most places gone. The early Anabaptists were often recognized by their distinctive clothes and general appearance, but the conformity-neurosis has made most of our present-day "Anabaptists" rush to get rid of any marks which identify them as a Christian in a crowd of worldlings. A truly zealous New Testament Church is at war with the existing carnal customs, practices, and beliefs of the pagan world about it, — but that is no longer true of us! We would not dare to think of testifying prophetically against the sinful world and its works (cf. John 7:7), let alone look different from any worldling!
 15. Today we exult in a kind of popular evangelism that invites men to make "decisions," but not to receive Christ into their hearts, not to abide in Him, not to follow Him, not to seek the fellowship of a church which upholds and disciplines for the standards of the New Testament. Indeed, we find "converts" oftentimes discouraged from uniting with our brotherhood, under the generous false modesty and false charity that we do not want any "proselytes"! Where do we think the first Anabaptists came from? They were all proselytes from Catholicism or Protestantism! If we have nothing to export to others, we have nothing worth keeping for ourselves. New Testament evangelism is making disciples, not just making "decisions."
 16. Subtle inroads are being made on our belief in the authority and inspiration of the Scriptures through the latest theological fad, neo-orthodoxy. We count it of great importance to fraternize with the ecumenical movement, to prove to them that we are not as narrowminded as the Anabaptists!
 17. We ignore the fact that there are undoubtedly millions of professing Christians in Hell, souls that at one time or another "professed" or "accepted" Christ as Saviour, but never submitted to Him as Lord. When will we learn that it is easy to get "decisions," but that the way of discipleship is narrow, and that only disciples shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven?
 18. Many today have faith only in faith (self-assurance), or faith in ceremonial magic

(church-going and liturgies), but we are told that they are Christians too, and that all "churched" people need no further testimony from us. We are also being told repeatedly that this Gentile nation in which we are strangers and pilgrims is "a Christian nation!" Anathema!

19. We see a flood of professionalized ministers about to deluge us, men in whose interest it will be not to be prophets of God leading the people out of the bondage of sin's slavery. Menno Simons was no paid-pet of a spoiled and petulant church council — but his successors may become so.
20. We have lost both persecution and the teaching that it is natural for the Church to be persecuted; we shun all reproach and expect God to make us pleasing even to our enemies (even though Christ and the martyrs displeased the evil world). Now our goal is "success," "good public relations," and "adjustment" to society, with zealous pursuit of refinement, entertainment, culture, prestige, and social climbing.

Men and brethren! What shall we do? Are we still members of a brotherhood which is more than Protestantism and Catholicism? Wherein we have drifted and backslid let us repent and recover the first love, before God takes away our candlestick! Dear reader are YOU betraying the vision of the Anabaptist restoration? Have you been deceived into thinking that there is nothing you can do about the drift worldwards except to stay loyally in the drifting organization? We beseech you by the love of God and His holy Word that you be loyal first to Him and recognize that this first loyalty will not permit you to go along with a drifting multitude. Come out from among them and either fellowship with a church that is true to the vision of our Anabaptist forefathers, or form such a church in your area with like-minded disciples of the Lord Jesus. If you are betraying the Anabaptist vision, we beg of you to REPENT and return to the Bible truth and practices. Do not be guilty of the crime of pushing and dragging the church further worldwards. The true church is the blood-bought Bride of Jesus Christ, not the harlot church which goes hand in hand with the world. Amen.

¹⁸ Roland H. Bainton, quoted in "Church History," June, 1955; p. 150.

¹⁹ Hoffmann, in Pfister, *ibid*; p. 468.

²⁰ Hall, *History of Ethics Within Organized Christianity*, p. 505tt.

²¹ Liberty, *ibid*, p. 28.

²² Liberty, *ibid*.

²³ Newman, A. H., *A Manual of Church History*, vol.

II, p. 411.

²⁴ Menno Simmons, vol. 1, p. 144.

Questions For Use as a Study Guide

The foregoing booklet on Anabaptist history and its practical lessons and challenges for our time, is suitable for use as a textbook in studying church history in our local congregations, in our Bible schools, and in correspondence courses. To assist the student as a guide and test for his study, we append the following questions. The answers to these questions can be found in the text itself, and the questions are both a good study guide and a good discussion guide and review.

1. What was the origin of the name "Protestant"?
2. Why did the Anabaptists refuse to be identified with the Protestants?
3. What were eight evils of the Catholics which needed reforming?
4. Did Luther change his mind and accept compromises instead of pure truth?
5. What is meant by the Protestant mistake of "cheap grace"?
6. Were the Protestants right in accusing the Anabaptists of legalism?
7. What one word sums up the Anabaptist piety and practice?
8. What kinds of idolatry did the Protestant reformers refuse to give up?
9. Were the Protestant reformers Scriptural on baptism and communion?
10. What is antinomianism as accepted by the Protestant reformers?
11. Did the Protestant reformers really believe in religious liberty for all?
12. Did the Protestant reformers ever separate state and church?
13. Did the Protestant reformers believe in non-resistance?
14. Did the Protestant reformers really establish a Bible church?
15. Did Protestantism get confused with nationalism?
16. What were the four chief differences between Protestantism and Anabaptism?
17. Did the Protestant reformers really believe in mission work?
18. Over the years since the Anabaptist restoration, have our churches declined and drifted from the first vision and love?
19. Do we have any message for the drifting denominations today?
20. What can we do to take a stand against worldliness today?