

A Brief Statement Regarding The Name Anabaptist and Mennonite.

The term Anabaptist was initially used as a derogatory term for those sincere believers during the sixteenth century in Europe when the Reformation was gathering pace. These believers rejected the idea of infant baptism, and other unscriptural practices of the existing state church, as not being sanctioned by Scripture, that baptism was only for believers, i.e. those able to make a decision for themselves as to their willingness to follow Christ and live in accordance with the New Testament principles of holy living. Some of these believers had been baptised as infants into the state sanctioned and supported church, and thus choose to be re-baptised as adult believers and make a personal commitment to Christ, hence the term Anabaptist which meant re-baptiser.

It was not long before the term Anabaptist was applied to those early men and women who were baptised on their confession of faith and it is still used today to describe those who follow the way of those early reformers, many of whom were martyred for their faith at the direction of both the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches of the time. The book, *The Martyrs Mirror* gives a detailed account of many of these faithful followers of Christ.

J.C. Wenger in his book “Separated Unto God” (available through Christian Light Publications) quotes from the writings of the Mennonite historian Harold S. Bender the following:the Anabaptist movement was seen as having a threefold major emphasis: (1) on the church as a brotherhood in which the members are baptised on confession of faith; (2) on an ethic of non-resistance in which the members of the brotherhood resolutely followed the teachings of the New Testament on suffering injustice rather than doing wrong and non-participation in warfare, and (3) on the Christian life and discipleship, a bearing of the cross regardless of what the cost might be.

The name Mennonite evolved from that of Menno Simons, (b.1496 – d.1561) a priest in the Roman Catholic Church in Holland who, upon studying the scriptures, was not able to reconcile the teachings and behaviour of the church with the scriptures. As a consequence of his desire to obey the scriptural directives for holy living, he renounced Catholicism and united with the Anabaptists by believer’s baptism. Menno Simons was powerfully used of the Lord to gather together and establish the non-

resistant peaceful Anabaptists through his prolific writings on scriptural issues, published under the title: *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons* and organizing many congregations. He was a hunted man until his peaceful death in 1561. His work and writings were so influential that those who followed his example of faith were called Mennonite, a name which was gradually over time also applied to the brethren in Switzerland, France and Germany. It is from those people that the present day Mennonites in America and many other countries take their name and many have descended.

There are many books available that trace and expound on the birth, growth and continuing legacy of these faithful brethren of the 16th and into the 17th century, who knew that to be re-baptized or refuse infant baptism for their children or be baptised on their confession and come out of the state church sponsored church, was equivalent to signing their own death warrant.

The Anabaptist/Mennonites are a people that have been described by some as Biblicist, that is, they take the scriptures as the inerrant word of God, and as their only rule of life, they have regard to the Old Testament in light of the New Testament teachings, the new covenant superseding the old, Christ having fulfilled the law and putting us under the covenant of grace through which we can have salvation, forgiveness of sin, which under the old covenant was not possible, it required continual sacrifices for the atonement of sins, but Christ came and was crucified and arose from the dead that through the shedding of His blood and the power of His resurrection we may take hold of the words and promise in Ephesians 2:8-9: *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: ⁹Not of works, lest any man should boast.”*

Today there are, as with many other groups that profess Christianity, variances in standards of faith and practise within those groups that call themselves Mennonite, but in all instances we must use the word of Scriptures and determine if what we are doing has a scriptural mandate or application.

May the Lord bless you as you seek His will and direction for your life in spirit and in truth.

Book Titles In *Italics* available at www.anabaptistvision.org