

The Principle of  
NONRESISTANCE  
as held by the  
Mennonite Church

A Historical Survey  
by  
John Horsch

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## PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

The Peace Problems Committee appointed by the Mennonite General Conference to study the problems arising in connection with the practice of the nonresistant principles of the Christian faith have realized the need of a treatise setting forth the attitude of the Mennonite people on this vital doctrine during the various centuries of their history.

Very little concerning the attitude of our brotherhood on this point has been published to date in the English language. Many opinions stated by exponents of this principle concerning the historical attitude of the Mennonite Church have passed through the years as tradition or are based on the testimony of the few who have had access to the original sources and have been able to read the languages in which they are written.

In order to give an intelligent and convincing testimony of one of the great Christian principles to the present and future generations, this record of declarations concerning this principle as held by the church during the testing times of the faith has been set forth in the present study which is heartily endorsed by the committee.

It is the purpose of the committee to add to the testimony of the church of former centuries, as here given, that of the witnesses of the faith in more recent years. The publication of records giving actions in regard to this point by the various governments that had to do with people holding the nonresistant principles is also a part of the program of the committee. This effort on the part of the committee is made in order that this peculiar principle of the Christian faith may be more fully appreciated as both Scriptural and practicable.

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## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

The demand for John Horsch's valuable and unique study of the historical position of the Mennonite Church on the principle of nonresistance has completely exhausted the first edition of 6,000 copies, which was published in 1927. Meanwhile the need for such a treatise has continued, and in fact grown greater.

World conditions have changed to such a degree since 1927 that the danger of war is evident to all. A new generation of young people is growing up.

The Peace Problems Committee of the Mennonite General Conference has therefore decided to reissue this treatise with the addition of new material which has come to light since the first edition was published. May the witness of the past strengthen our faith in the peace principles of the Scriptures for the present.

### UNITED STATES SECTION

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## PREFATORY NOTE

A study of the historical position of the Mennonite Church on the principle of nonresistance has for some time been a desideratum, especially in view of the fact that a number of recent writers have defended the opinion that the early Mennonites did not hold this principle and did not disapprove of all war. Church historians and writers on peace in general have apparently given this question little attention.

In the present study we shall let the primary sources speak for themselves regarding the attitude of the Mennonites during the various centuries on the point in question.

From the testimony cited the reader may form his own conclusions as to the historic position of the Mennonite Church on the principle of nonresistance.

The quotations given indicate beyond the possibility of a doubt that the early Mennonites stood uncompromisingly for this principle.

## FOREWORD TO THE FIFTH PRINTING

We have decided to reprint this booklet to provide a sketch of the history of those who faithfully lived the principle of nonresistance in daily life under very trying circumstances.

Each student at Numidia Mennonite Bible School is required to take the study of nonresistance the first year he attends the school. This booklet will provide additional reading for that course and will expand the student's understanding of the subject from a historical and Biblical perspective.

We are currently seeing in Anabaptist Mennonite circles an ever-increasing confusion between this doctrine and political pacifism. This booklet reminds us that nonresistance is not merely a position we take regarding war but is a principle that is expressed in daily life.

Nonparticipation in politics and government, and not defending our rights by law, are two areas that are an integral part of the doctrine of nonresistance. This booklet presents these truths in the proper light.

Our prayer is that this presentation will assist us in defending and promoting a tenet of our faith that needs continued emphasis.

The Publication Board of the  
Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church

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## INTRODUCTORY

The Christian Church in general has in all ages of its history recognized the fact that our Lord taught the principle of nonresistance, and yet, excepting the earliest Christian centuries, the great majority of Christian professors have always found a way to circumvent the practical requirements of this principle. The Roman Catholic Church has always held that Christ taught nonresistance, not however as a commandment but as an advice; hence, according to the doctrine of this church, those engaging in war do not transgress a divine command and do not become guilty of sin. Martin Luther, the father of Protestantism, defended a peculiar view on this question, a view which is even today held by many Protestant theologians. He taught that a Christian is to be strictly nonresistant and that no one can as a Christian have a part in violence and bloodshed, be it in self-defense or in war. No one can do so as a Christian. But a Christian, he says, is also a "world person," or a citizen, and as such he is under duty to use violence in the service of the government, as a magistrate, officer, or soldier. When in such capacity he acts contrary to the precept and example of Christ, it is not a sin to him but is his duty. He does this as a citizen, not as a Christian. Luther divided the Christian into two personalities, the duty of the one being the opposite to that of the other.' The fact will bear repetition that he in theory defended the principle of strict nonresistance of the Christian. He also emphatically agreed with the Mennonites in the opinion that civil government using force would not be necessary if all men were true Christians?

### **The Original Position of the Earliest Protestant Leaders on the Principle of Nonresistance**

It is interesting to notice that both Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli (the founder of the Reformed Church), in the earliest period of their labors as reformers, were advocates of the principle of nonresistance. This was the period before they consented to the compromise of a union of the church with the state, or in other words to the establishment of all-inclusive state churches.

Luther, in the year 1520, wrote to his opponent, Dr. Johann Eck:

"You say that I would give room to the peace-breakers and murderers, because I have taught that a Christian should abstain from violence and should not fight to recover his belongings of which he was robbed. Why do you not rebuke Christ who has taught this?"

Again, in his booklet, "Why the Pope's Books Have Been Burned," written in the same year, Luther gives many reasons for committing these books to the flames. His twenty-fourth reason is, "Because the pope teaches that it is right for a Christian to meet violence by violence, contrary to Christ's teaching who says, 'Whoever will take thy coat, let him have thy cloke also.'"

Ulrich Zwingli also, in the first period of his reformatory labors, taught the principle of nonresistance. One of the editors of Zwingli's Complete Works, Professor Walter Koehler of Heidelberg University, concedes that Zwingli was in that period a pacifist. Zwingli wrote in 1522:

"Considered from the Christian point of view it is by no means right to have a part in war. According to Christ's teaching we should pray for those who despitefully use us and persecute us, and if an aggressor smite us on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."

Again, in one of his largest books, published in 1523, Zwingli says:

"Christ commands that we should not go to law nor engage in carnal strife, but if one take away our coat, let him have our cloke also, and He has taught this by His own example as well. He also forbids all oaths:"

How radical was the change in Zwingli's attitude toward war in a later period! He personally took part in war, and died on the battlefield of Kappel in 1531.

Johannes Oekolampad, the Zwinglian reformer of Basel, who, like Zwingli, in a later period renounced pacifism, wrote in 1524:

"How can a Christian approve of lawsuits and war? The approval of war among Christians is a doctrine of devils. Christians abhor hatred and war. Or show me a war that is waged in love ... What shall we say about those whose lifework consists of shedding blood? We are bidden to give our life for the brethren, and to consider even our enemies as brothers. But we go to war and wound and kill those whom we have never known, yea, who may have done us some good service. How is it that there are so many who make less of taking the life of a man than of killing a goose?"

## **Nonresistance of the Early Christians and in Pre-Reformation Times**

Until about two generations ago the Mennonite people were a unit in the belief that the Scriptures of the New Testament teach the principle of nonresistance, and that the early Christians accepted and defended this principle. We notice with regret that, with the growth of militarism in certain European countries, the opinion has been advanced, even among Mennonite people, that the church of the first centuries failed to take a decided position against war. This opinion is based principally on the writings of the late Professor Adolf von Harnack of the University of Berlin, Germany. Since this question does not fall under the scope of the present treatise, it must suffice to call attention to the standard work on this subject, namely, the book, "The Early Christian Attitude to War," by Professor C. John Cadoux of Oxford, published in 1919.

It is of particular interest to notice that in a review of this book<sup>4</sup> Professor Harnack stated that it is thoroughly reliable; in fact, he uses the expression that the book is "the last word on this subject." This admission by Professor Harnack is the more remarkable since, as already intimated, he had previously held the contrary opinion. In his book, "Militia Christi," published in 1905, he had attempted to show that the early Christians' attitude in this regard was one of comparative indifference. The book of Cadoux furnishes conclusive evidence that the Christian Church of the first centuries took a decided position as regards the principle of nonresistance, taking substantially the same attitude toward violence and war as did the early Waldenses, the Mennonites, and other nonresistant Christians. Participation in war as well as suing at law was forbidden.

The Waldenses have just been mentioned as a nonresistant sect. Their history dates back a number of centuries before the time of Martin Luther and Menno Simons. The question has been raised, How is it to be explained that the modern Waldenses (in Italy and America) do not object to military service, while in medieval times the Waldenses held the principle of nonresistance? The answer is that during the Reformation period the Waldensians yielded to influences of one of the leading Protestant churches which defended the rightfulness of a union of church and state and of war. In 1532, after the Waldenses had been in touch with theologians of the Reformed Church for a number of years, they held a synod at Angrona in Northern Italy in the presence of William Farel and other theologians from Geneva. With the exception of a small minority they repudiated those doctrines and principles in which they differed from the Reformed Church including the rejection of the oath and military service, and accepted the doctrine of predestination.<sup>5</sup> They became a branch of the Reformed Church.

## **The Peace Testimony of Peter Chelchitzki**

Peter Chelchitzki, a farmer of Chelchitz in Bohemia, was born about 1395. Little is known of his life and his religious connections. He was probably connected with one of the four Hussite groups, the followers of John Huss who was burned at the stake at Constance, Germany, in 1415. That Chelchitzki was a consistent defender of the principle of nonresistance is evident from a number of his extant books. The following quotations will serve as evidence that about a century before the rise of the Mennonite Church there were, even outside of the Waldensian Church, those who maintained a strong and consistent testimony against violence and war. Chelchitzki says:

"Worldly rulers have contentions for the sake of material wealth and worldly honor. Let some one threaten their sovereignty, and at once they engage in war. They seize the men and bring them together like a herd and drive them into the conflict where those on the one side kill and rob those on the other.... And the worst is that they undertake to compel Christians to engage in such conflicts, for on both sides there may be a few who cannot with a good, clear conscience kill and rob others. Yea, brother goes against brother to harm him, when according to the Christian faith he should be ready to die for him. Compelled by self-seeking authorities he goes out to kill and rob his brother, and does not have the conviction and the love to follow the Lord unto death rather than become guilty of such evil deeds.

The one party is praying for their armies and the other party for theirs that they may be victorious. Each party prays for victory against the other. And both are named Christians though each one is wishing well only to his own party. The Christians on both sides engage wrongfully in the bloody strife and pray that they may be victorious over the other side. Whom, now, will God hear? Since on both sides there are Christians, they combat unlawfully with each other and theirs is not a prayer of faith, God does not hear them. The faith of these Christians is as if torn to shreds and their prayer is powerless since it is aimed at shedding the blood of brethren. And if those with whom

they are engaged in such conflict are not brothers, they may be enemies and God has commanded to pray for such and to do them good.

The whole rabble of these divided multitudes are called Christians and together they pray: Our Father which art in heaven. They approach God in this way while each party has in mind the destruction of the other. They think they are serving God by shedding others' blood. And on both sides they say: Forgive us as we forgive. And every party seeks to increase its military force and never thinks of forgiving the other so long as they can hope to overcome them. Therefore their prayers are blasphemies against God."<sup>6</sup>

### **The Beginnings of the Mennonite Church**

The first Mennonite congregation was organized in January, 1525, in or near the city of Zurich in Switzerland, by Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz, George Blaurock, and others. They were known as the Swiss Brethren, and spread in less than a decade over Switzerland, South Germany, and Austria. By their opponents they were called Anabaptists (re-baptizers), because they disowned the validity of infant baptism. Menno Simons' conversion and baptism took place in January, 1536, near Leeuwarden, Holland.

The brethren in the Netherlands, with whom Menno united, at that time were known as Obbenites, since Obbe Philips was their organizer and recognized leader. Between them and the Swiss Brethren there was substantial unity in faith and practice. In the course of time they both adopted the name "Mennonites." The Hutterian Brethren, whose first organization dated from the year 1528, differed from the Mennonites by owning their property in common.

There were various other sects and groups which were called Anabaptists. In fact, all who disowned infant baptism and baptized only those who were instructed and believed, were given this name. The differences between some of these sects and the Mennonites were fundamental indeed. In certain instances these differences were as great as are the contrast between the Mennonites and the Mormons of our day, who also practice adult baptism. The Muensterite Anabaptists, for example, were revolutionists and rank fanatics. Among all the sects called Anabaptists the Swiss Brethren were the first or oldest; all others were of later origin. When we speak of "our Anabaptist forefathers," as some do, we should therefore not lose sight of the fact that the Mennonites did not descend from any other Anabaptist sect.

### **I. THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY: The Testimony of the Swiss Brethren**

The earliest testimony against war by a leader of the Swiss Brethren is that of Andreas Castelberger of Zurich, Switzerland, dating from the year 1523, about two years before the first congregation of the Swiss Brethren was organized by Castelberger and others. Castelberger had held meetings for Bible study which were attended by Lorenz Hochrueiner and others who later united with the Swiss Brethren. Hochrueiner, when asked what Castelberger had taught in these meetings, replied that he among other things "had said a great deal against war and had showed that the evangelical doctrine is radically opposed to it."<sup>7</sup>

Another important testimony to the point was given in September, 1524, by Conrad Grebel, the principal founder of the Swiss Brethren Church, in a letter to Thomas Muenzer who had taken the sword in the interest of the cause which he represented. Grebel wrote:

"The Gospel and those who accept it are not to be protected with the sword; neither should they thus protect themselves. . . . True, believing Christians are as sheep in the midst of wolves.... They must be baptized in anxiety and trouble, tribulation, persecution, suffering, and death. They must be tried in the fire and must reach the fatherland of eternal rest, not by meeting bodily enemies with the sword, but by overcoming spiritual life. They use neither the worldly sword nor engage in war, since for them taking human life has ceased entirely, for we no longer live under the Old Covenant."

Felix Manz, one of the most influential leaders of the early Swiss Brethren, said: "No Christian lives with the sword nor resists evil." In the death sentence pronounced over him on January 5, 1527, it was charged that Manz held that no Christian can carry out the death sentence on any person, nor put to death any one.

The attitude of the evangelical Anabaptists as concerns this question was set forth by Hans Schlaffer who suffered martyrdom on February 4, 1528, at Schwaz in the Tyrol. In his last confession he replied to questions

regarding their principles, and in particular whether he knew of any one who was to be their leader in an uproar against the government. He said:

Our faith, life, and baptism is founded on nothing else than the commandment of Christ, and all the days of my life has no uproar or sedition come into my heart. Yes, I have fled from a house whose inhabitants lived in discord. There is no plot or other intention among us except to amend our lives and to abstain from the vicious, unrighteous life of the world. Not the least among our doctrines is that which enjoins subjection and obedience to the government in all that is good. I know of no other leader or beginner of my faith than Jesus Christ, the Son of God alone.

George Blaurock, who was burned at the stake on September 6, 1529, wrote in a hymn: "I pray thee, Lord, from my whole heart to forgive all our enemies and do not account unto them their transgressions."

The first confession of faith of the Swiss Brethren is the Schlatten Confession drawn up by Michael Sattler and adopted by a conference held at Schlatten in southern Baden near Schaffhausen, February 24, 1527. Sattler was, after the death of Grebel and Manz, the most prominent leader of the Swiss Brethren. He died a martyr, being burned at the stake on May 21, 1527, at Rottenburg on the Neckar. On the question of peace and nonresistance this confession contains the following articles:"

Jesus Christ has made us free from the servitude of the flesh and meet for the service of God through the spirit which He has given us. Therefore we shall surely lay down the unchristian, yea satanic weapons of force, such as sword, armor and the like, together with all their use, whether for the protection of friends or against personal enemies; and this in the strength of the words of Christ, "I say unto you that ye resist not evil."

The government using the sword to punish and put to death the wrongdoers and to guard and protect the good is an appointment of God outside the perfection of Christ. In the law of the Old Covenant the sword is ordained against wrongdoers for punishment and death, and to exercise it the worldly governments are appointed.

In the perfection of Christ, however, church discipline alone is used for the correction and exclusion of those who have sinned, not indeed for the destruction of the flesh but as an admonition and injunction to sin no more.

Here it is asked by many who do not know Christ's will toward us whether a Christian may or should use the sword against wrongdoers for protecting or defending the good, or for love's sake.

Our unanimous answer is: Christ teaches and commands that we should learn of Him, for He is meek and lowly in heart and we shall find rest to our souls. Now Christ did not say concerning the woman taken in adultery that she should be stoned to death according to the law of His Father, and yet He says: "I do nothing of myself but as my Father has taught me." He spoke to her words of mercy and forgiveness and admonition to sin no more. In such a way we also should act, according to the rule of church discipline.

The Schlatten Confession and nearly all other Mennonite confessions contain articles on the question whether a Christian may be a magistrate, or an executive of the civil government.

A confession written in June, 1527, by a minister of the Swiss Brethren, named Carlin, who was imprisoned for his faith in Basel, has the following article:

That the government is ordained of God and that the power is given of God, is stated by Paul in his letter to the Romans, chapter 13. Besides, Christ said that the power of Pilate was of God (John 19:11). But according to the command of the Father (Matthew 17:5) we should hear Christ, the Son of God, alone. Since, now, Christ fled when He was to be chosen king, also He did not pass sentence upon the adulterous woman, and would not judge between two men in matters pertaining to earthly possessions (Luke 12:14), and His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36); moreover nowhere in Scripture is the government said to be of a Christian nature and it is not the Christians' province to judge those that are without (1 Corinthians 5:12-13), but Christians should use church discipline alone; therefore, according to Christ's example it is not in place for a Christian to be a magistrate, but he should avoid all that is doubtful and shun the office of the magistracy. But this does not say that the government should be abolished?<sup>2</sup>

The following is taken from a sermon preached by Hans Marquardt, a minister of the Swiss Brethren, at St. Gall, Switzerland, in 1528.

“We confess that civil government is necessary and is a divine appointment and that the use of the sword by the government is good and necessary, and we say with Paul, (Romans 13), that every man should be subject and obedient to the higher power, not only to a mild and peaceful but also to a tyrannical government, for the reason that there is no power but of God. Therefore all believers, under whatever government they may live, will not complain of heavy burdens, nor will they resist the government or cause trouble or uproar on account of what they may be called upon to bear. In matters of their faith, however, the believers are responsible to God alone to whom they owe greater obedience than to man. Therefore all our brethren esteem their faith in God through Christ Jesus, our Saviour, as the highest, greatest and most valuable thing, and of this we do not suffer ourselves to be robbed even if our life is at stake. But in matters which do not concern faith and conscience and do not conflict with our duty to God, we are ready to obey the civil government in anything that may be asked of us. And if the government, contrary to justice and right, confiscates our property and reduces us to poverty, we bear and suffer it, since it is impossible for us to escape such oppression without transgression and disturbance.

But that the Christian should be an executive of the government, or a magistrate, we do not admit. Christ says, in Luke 22, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But among you it shall not be so, but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve." Here the believers are forbidden the execution of government by force. And the fact that under the Old Covenant God has permitted His people the use of the sword does not concern or bind us, for the old law has been replaced by the new commandment of Christ that we should love our enemies.... The believer is not to be an earthly ruler, or to use violence, or go to war, or use the sword."<sup>3</sup>

In the discussions held in Zofingen, in the Canton Bern, Switzerland, in July, 1532, the spokesmen of the Swiss Brethren said:

In Matthew, chapter 5, Christ forbids the believers all use of force. He says that rather than go to law they should permit others to defraud them, they should not strive with any one and should give the cloak to him who takes away their coat. The civil government was ordained of God to punish the evildoers and protect the good.... We believe the civil government should be separate from the church of Christ and not be established in it. Whatever we owe to the government: interest, tithes, taxes and customs, we give willingly and obediently. We obey the government in everything that may be asked of us that is not contrary to the will of God.<sup>4</sup>

In March of the year 1538 an eight days' discussion was held in the city of Bern. Here the representatives of the Brethren said:

Christ, in teaching the principle of nonresistance, does not desire to abolish the civil government. He recognizes the rightfulness of the government, but teaches that it should be outside the Christian Church. This is our position on this question. . . . On this point the Gospel differs from the Mosaic law.<sup>5</sup>

Heinrich Bullinger, the successor of Zwingli as the head of the state church of the Canton Zurich, wrote two books against the Swiss Brethren which were published in 1531 and 1560. He states that the Brethren considered war "the greatest evil conceivable." Further he says:

“They believe that Christians should stand ready to suffer (rather than strike back). No Christian may be ruler. The government should not undertake to regulate matters of faith and religious practice. Christians do not resist violence and do not take recourse to law. They do not use the law courts. Christians do not kill. The punishment used by them is not imprisonment and the sword but only church discipline. They do not defend themselves, therefore they do not go to war and are not obedient to the government on this point.”<sup>7</sup>

Appended to Bullinger's second work just mentioned is a booklet written by spokesmen of the Swiss Brethren giving their reasons why they did not make common cause with the state church. The following citation is taken from this booklet:

“The theologians of the established church have in the first period of their reformatory labors advocated the Christian, evangelical opinion that Christians should not protect themselves, or their evangelical doctrine, by worldly, carnal force, sword, weapons or resistance, nor defend themselves in this way against their adversaries and opponents, but should use only the Word of God as the sword of the Spirit and other weapons which are mentioned in Ephesians, chapter 6; and that they should not avenge themselves, not resist evil; the worldly, Mosaic sword should not be found among them; they should not seek justice before a court of law on account of our earthly

possessions or honor, but should be willing to suffer and bear the cross, if they would be Christians. And this, their former doctrine, is clearly founded on the New Testament Scriptures.”

Pilgram Marpeck (1495?-1556), who after Michael Sattler’s death was the most prominent minister of the Swiss Brethren Church, wrote:

To say that those of the Old Covenant were Christians. . . , though the earthly, Mosaic sword was used among them, is equivalent to saying that such use of the worldly sword is permitted in the church of Christ today. Through which the true spiritual order, the sword, discipline, ban, power and government of the Holy Spirit, of the true Church of Christ and the spiritual priests, would be broken up and annulled. And through such confusion (vermischung) of the two priesthoods and other things of the Old and New Testaments nothing follows but the introduction of a desolation and wasting of the holy city. Dan. 9, Matt. 24, etc.-Today [there is] another King, another Kingdom, another priesthood, another law, which is not a carnal law of ruling, or worldly, earthly judicial procedures as that of yesterday, but a spiritual, and a law or commandment of the Spirit,-love and patience, which God "yesterday" promised and "today" for the first time wrote in the hearts, and the Man Christ commanded His priests who were appointed today [in the New Covenant]. Also that they should love all people, not merely their friends or dear ones, but also their enemies, and not to resist evil, as is clearly shown in Matthew 5, Luke 6 and Romans 12. Also that one should not use carnal weapons against another; nor they against their enemies. Isaiah 2, Micah 4, Matthew 5. All bodily, worldly, carnal earthly fighting, conflicts and wars are annulled and abolished among them through such law. Psalms 4, 5, Hosea 2: Which law of love, Christ. . then, as the present High Priest, Himself observed and thereby gave His followers a pattern to follow after.-In contrast, the worldly government is not one which shows mercy, but is a revenger (Romans 13), as the one breaking the law of Moses died without mercy (Hebrews 10). And this law today outside of Christ stands un-annulled by Christ for vengeance and discipline over the wicked.”

In the discussions held at Frankenthal in the Palatinate from May 28 to June 19 of the year 1571, between representatives of the Swiss Brethren and the Reformed state church, the spokesmen of the Brethren said:

“We agree with you in the opinion that a Christian should not revenge himself, but Christ teaches (Matt. 5) that even if we have been wronged, we should not cause the government to use violence against any one for our sake. Our thought is not that the office of the magistrate should not be recognized, yet we would not by our going to law be the cause that vengeance is exercised by the government against the transgressor.

You say that a Christian could be a magistrate and punish wrongdoers with the sword. We cannot accept this without proof from Christ and the apostles.

We confess that the magistracy, according to Paul’s teaching (Rom. 13) is ordained of God. But that a Christian may serve in such an office to exercise vengeance by the sword, for such teaching we demand scriptural evidence.

All believers are pointed to the example of Christ. His apostles have neither engaged in war nor used the sword for punishment but have manifested love toward enemies as well as friends.

You say that the peace of Christ should be within the heart of the believer but that he could nevertheless engage in war if he is asked to do so. We do not find an apostolic example that would show this.”

In 1589 the Swiss Brethren of the Canton Zurich in a "Supplication" addressed to the authorities, said:

It is the business of the government to protect the good and, by the use of force, to punish the evil according to their transgressions. Therefore to be a magistrate using the sword and to be a Christian are two things which do not agree. We recognize the government as a necessary institution.... But we do not believe that the civil authority should be within the church of God.<sup>21</sup>

### **The Testimony of the Hutterian Brethren**

Jacob Hutter, after whom the Hutterian Brethren were named, wrote in a letter to the Moravian authorities, in 1535, when the congregation under his care had been driven from their dwellings by a detachment of soldiers upon the command of the authorities:

At the present time we find ourselves on the wide, wide heath; if God will, without disadvantage to any one. We will not do a wrong or an injury to any man, yea, not to our greatest enemy, neither to Ferdinand (King of Austria)

nor any one else, great or small. All our actions and conduct, word and work, life and walk, are open; there is no secret about it all. Rather than knowingly to rob a man of a penny we would willingly give up a hundred guilders. And before we would give our greatest enemy a blow with the hand, to say nothing of spear, sword or halberd as in the manner of the world, we would be willing to lose our lives.

As every one sees and knows, we have no weapons of defense, such as spears or guns. In short, in our preaching and speaking and our whole walk of life our object is to live in peace and unity according to the truth and will of God, as the true followers of Christ.<sup>22</sup>

Jacob Hutter was, after terrible tortures, burned at the stake in 1536, at Innsbruck.

The confession of faith of the Hutterian Brethren, written by Peter Riedemann, contains articles on the point of nonresistance and war. The exact time when this confession was written is unknown. It is supposed that the first edition was printed in 1545. Following are pertinent quotations from this confession.<sup>23</sup>

### **ON WAR**

Christ, the Prince of peace, has established His kingdom, that is His church, and has purchased it by His blood. In this kingdom all worldly warfare has ended. (Luke 2:14; Ephesians 5:1-2; Isaiah 11: 6-9; Micah 4:3). Therefore a Christian has no part in war nor does he wield the sword to execute vengeance, as also Paul exhorts and says: "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written: Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Deuteronomy 32:35; Romans 12:19-21). Since vengeance is the Lord's and not ours, it should be committed to Him and is not to be exercised by us. Being followers of Christ we must manifest His nature who, though He had all power over His enemies, did not recompense evil for evil (1 Peter 2:21-23). He did not use His power against His enemies nor did He permit others to defend Him. He said to Peter: "Put up thy sword" (Matt. 26:52; John 18:10-11). Here is seen with what sort of a mighty army our King met His enemies and in what manner He slays His adversaries and executes vengeance. He heals the high priest's servant's ear which Peter had cut off. Now He who has done this says: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:32; Luke 9:23).

Christ wills that we should do as He has done, hence He commands us and says: "But I say unto you that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matthew 5:39). This shows clearly that we should not avenge ourselves nor engage in war.

But if it be said that David who was loved of God, and other saints, have waged war, therefore it is right now, if there be occasion or authorization for it; our answer is: No. That we should not do such things, although David and other saints engaged in them, is clear from the above quoted words of Christ: "Resist not evil," though "to them of old time it was said: An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" (Matthew 5:38). Here Christ Himself points out the difference, therefore there is no need of using many words. Christ's words indicate that a Christian must not go to war nor use vengeance. But he who notwithstanding does these things has denied Christ's nature and forsaken His ways.

### **ON MAKING WEAPONS**

Since, as said above, Christians should make their swords into useful tools, or lay them down, they can much less make swords, for such weapons serve for nothing but to kill, for the wounding and destruction of men; and Christ came not to destroy men, therefore He rebuked His disciples and said: "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of" (Luke 9:55). As if to say: Does the spirit of grace teach you to destroy others, and would you act in a carnal way? (Gal. 3:3). If you would be my disciples, you must be led by my Spirit and not walk after the flesh; "for they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:8).

Now, since Christians should not use or exercise vengeance, they must not make the weapons by which such vengeance and destruction may be exercised, lest they make themselves partakers of others' sins. Therefore we make neither swords, spears, guns nor other similar weapons. But whatever is made in the interest and for the daily use of men, such as bread knives, axes, hoes, and the like, we may consistently make and do make. But if someone would say that it is possible even with such tools to injure or kill a man, our reply is that these things are not made for such purposes; therefore we are free to make them. But if some one would use these tools to any one's injury, this is not our responsibility; let him answer for his own deeds.

## **WHETHER A CHRISTIAN MAY USE THE LAW**

Since, as said above, all that is temporal is foreign to us and is not our own (Luke 16:11, 12), therefore a Christian cannot quarrel or dispute or go to law about it but, as one who has turned away his heart from the world and directed it to the heavenlies, he is minded rather to suffer wrong, as also Paul says, 1 Corinthians 6:7: "There is clearly a fault among you to go to law one with another. Why do you not rather take wrong? Why do you not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?"

### **REFUSAL TO PAY WAR TAXES**

In Moravia it was in the year 1579 that for the first time a sum of money was demanded from the Hutterian Brethren as a war tax. In accord with their principle of nonresistance and their Confession of Faith which forbids paying war taxes, they refused to give it. The authorities in consequence seized some of their property, such as horses, cattle, and sheep, to cover the amount demanded as war taxes. "We suffer the spoiling of our goods" (Heb. 10:34), wrote a chronicler of the Brethren, "rather than do that which would be a stain and burden on our consciences." Confiscation of property for this purpose was repeated in 1584, and again in 1589. Beginning with the year 1596 property to cover the demanded war taxes was for a long period taken annually by the authorities from the Brethren.

### **The Testimony of the Dutch Mennonites**

The martyr Jan Claes, who had printed and distributed a number of Menno Simons' books, and was executed in 1544 at Amsterdam, wrote:

"Christ and those who are His own were in the beginning put to death. In this you may know who are His own. Not those who boast of His name and defend their own cause with the sword, but those who live after the example of the Lord and prove their cause by the divine Word. They are the true witnesses."<sup>21</sup>

Adrian Cornelis, who suffered martyrdom at Leyden, in 1551, wrote:

"Woe to you who shed the innocent blood of those who have no desire to defend themselves with material or carnal weapons but only with God's Word. This is our sword, and it is two-edged and sharp."<sup>25</sup>

The martyr Jan Geritz, who was burned at the stake in 1566 at The Hague, wrote:

"See, my good friends, here is the weapon and sword of my faith, with this and none other. Not with the sword or spear of iron and steel, I would attack the kingdom of antichrist. I say with the Apostle that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty before God."<sup>28</sup>

Jan Pauw, deacon of the first Evangelical Anabaptist congregation at Amsterdam, wrote that he would not with material weapons protect himself in the persecution.

Menno Simons' writings contain many expressions on nonresistance. Following are a few selections:

The regenerated do not go to war, nor engage in strife. They are the children of peace who have beaten their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, and know of no war. They render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's. Their sword is the sword of the Spirit which they wield with a good conscience through the Holy Ghost. (Part II, p. 170b).<sup>27</sup>

Since we are to be conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8: 29), how can we then fight our enemies with the sword? Does not the apostle Peter say: "For even hereunto were ye called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow his steps; who did no sin neither was guile found in his mouth; who, when he was reviled, reviled not again" etc. (1 Pet. 2:21-23; Matt. 16:24). (Part II, p. 435b).

Again, our fortress is Christ, our defence is patience, our sword is the word of God, and our victory is the sincere, firm, unfeigned faith in Jesus Christ. Spears and swords of iron we leave to those who, alas, consider human blood and swine's blood of well-nigh equal value. He that is wise, let him judge what I mean. (Part I, p. 81b).

I am well aware that the tyrants who boast themselves Christians attempt to justify their horrible wars and shedding of blood, and would present it as a good work by referring us to Moses, Joshua, etc. But they do not reflect that Moses and his successors, with their iron sword, have served out their time and that Jesus Christ has now given us a new commandment and has girded our loins with another sword. . . . The defenders of war and blood-shed do not consider that they use the sword of war contrary to all evangelical Scripture against their own brethren, namely those of like faith with them who have received the same baptism and have broken the same bread with them and are thus members of the same body. (Part I, p. 198).

My dear reader, if the poor, ignorant world with an honest heart accepted this our hated and despised doctrine, which is not of us but of Christ, and faithfully obeyed it, they could well change their deadly swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, level their gates and walls, dismiss their executioners and henchmen. For all who accept our doctrine in its power, will by God's grace not have any ill will to any one upon earth, and not against their most bitter enemies, much less wrong and harm them by deeds and actions; for they are children of the Most High who from their hearts love that which is good and in their weakness avoid that which is evil; nay, hate it and are inimical thereto. (II: 103a).

O man! man! look upon the irrational creatures and learn wisdom. All roaring lions, all frightful bears, all devouring wolves, live in peace among themselves with their own species. But you, poor, helpless creatures, created in God's own image and called rational beings, are born without teeth, claws, and horns and with a feeble nature, speechless and strengthless, yea neither able to walk nor stand, but have to depend entirely upon maternal care-to teach you that you should be men of peace and not of strife. (1:76a).

Peter was commanded to put his sword into the sheath. All Christians are bidden to love their enemies, do good to those who do them evil, and pray for those who abuse and persecute them; to give the cloak also if any one sue them at law for the coat; if they are stricken on the right cheek to turn to him who abuses them the other also. Say, beloved, how can a Christian, according to the Scriptures, consistently retaliate, rebel, war, murder, slay, torture, steal, rob and burn cities and conquer countries? Matt. 26:52; John 18:10; Matt. 5:12, 39, 40. (11:306b).

We confess and have always confessed, as long as with our small talent we have served the Word of the Lord that the office of the magistracy is ordained of God; and we have always been obedient to them when their demands were not contrary to the Word of God, and we desire to do so all our lives. For we are not so ignorant not to know what the Word of God teaches and demands of us in this respect. Taxes and duties we pay, as Christ has taught and Himself has rendered. We pray for the imperial majesty, kings, lords, princes and all in authority, and honor and obey them. (Part II, p. 302b).

Captains, knights, soldiers and such like bloody men are offering to sell soul and body for moneyz<sup>8</sup> and swear with uplifted hand that they will destroy cities and countries, apprehend and kill the citizens and inhabitants and rob them of their possessions, although they have never harmed them nor given them any provocation. Oh, what an accursed, wicked, abominable business! (Part I, p. 137a).

Dirk Philips, the most prominent co-worker with Menno Simons, says:

The people of the Lord arm themselves not with carnal weapons, as sad to say, some have done for want of understanding, but with the armor of God, with the weapons of righteousness, at the right hand and at the left ... and with Christian patience, with which to possess their souls and overcome all their enemies.<sup>29</sup>

A conference of Waterlandian Mennonites, held in 1568 at Emden in East Friesland, made the following decision concerning those who had given offence by taking part in drilling for military service:

'If a brother has taken part in this, he shall desist from it, confess to sorrow for the offence and ask the forgiveness of God and the church before he may be recognized as in peace with the church.'

Henry Alewijns, of Middleburgh in Holland, who, with two other brethren; was burned alive on February 9, 1569, says in his extant confession of faith, written for his children:

It is needful to distinguish between the New and the Old Covenant. Under the Old Covenant Israel engaged in war, revenge was taken on enemies, there was fighting and taking human life; and under the old Law this was done by the will, command, permission and also help of God. But now, in the dispensation of the Gospel under the New Covenant, these things cannot be permitted, they are plainly forbidden by the word and example of Christ, Himself God and the Son of God, whom we are commanded to hear (Matt. 17:5). These things, I say, are plainly and clearly prohibited, not by man but by God Himself. All revenge is denied and forbidden the people of God. They are commanded to commit all vengeance unto God, not to resist evil but to give to him that taketh away the coat also the cloak, and to turn to him that smites them on the right cheek the other also; yea to love their enemies, to pray for their persecutors and to flee from them from one city to another (Matt. 5:39; Rom. 12:17; 1 Thess. 5:15). And they that are thus afflicted are, according to Christ's words, blessed and are promised their reward in heaven.

In short; the Christian must not fight at all; and yet he must fight, but not with weapons of iron, steel, stone, wood, or other carnal weapons but with spiritual weapons which are mighty before God. Read, my children, what weapons Christians wield and what war they wage, as it is plainly and clearly set forth in Ephesians, Chapter 6.

Christians have no other warfare at this time, for the prophecy given with reference to this time is fulfilled that the swords should be made into plowshares and the spears into sickles, etc. Therefore we may not engage in war.<sup>31</sup>

In the discussions between Mennonite and Reformed theologians, held in 124 sessions at Emden in East Friesland, from February 27 to May 17, 1578, the spokesmen of the Mennonites said:

From the Scriptures which you have cited it cannot be shown that the office of the government, including the use of the sword, should be exercised by those within the church.

We say that during the time when the enemy is near or before the gates of the city, we would not with weapons of war do guard service, nor would we send another in our place. But so long as there is no occasion to fight an enemy we are willing to pay another to do such service.

The short Mennonite confession of 1591, called the "Concept of Cologne," contains the following article:

No vengeance is permitted; nay it is forbidden, not only with outward weapons but also to give railing for railing.<sup>33</sup>

In the public discussions of Leeuwarden in Friesland, in 1596, Peter of Cologne, one of the Mennonite speakers, said that a believer in Christ may fight with no material weapons but only with the weapon of the Spirit which is the Word of God.<sup>34</sup> He said further:

War is forbidden the believers, for we find that those who would ascend into the hill of the Lord must walk in His light and that they shall make their swords into plowshares and their spears into sickles, etc. Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:1.<sup>35</sup>

### **A Baseless Charge**

In the Reformation era the persecutors of the evangelical, nonresistant Anabaptists often advanced the charge that their teaching on nonresistance was but a cloak to hide their evil intentions against the civil governments. Zwingli in particular often made this charge. He wrote:

Anabaptism is practiced for no other purpose but to furnish an excuse for conspiracy against the government.<sup>36</sup> And again: As soon as the number of the baptized is strong enough for effectual armed resistance, they will rise in arms against the government.

Zwingli said further, in June, 1525, that the proof for these assertions is found in their disobedience to the government, since they preached and baptized contrary to the orders of the civil rulers." However, only a few years before Zwingli made these charges he had earnestly admonished his followers to obey God rather than men, even though to do so was interpreted as disloyalty to the government and as insurrection."

It is needless to say that accusations of this sort against the Swiss Brethren and Mennonites were wholly unfounded. Neither Zwingli nor any one else could point to a single instance of tumult or riot, or any other transgression of this sort, caused by any Anabaptist. The rise of the revolutionary Anabaptists-the Muensterites-took place after Zwingli's death. It is of course a fact that they disobeyed some of the religious regulations and orders of the civil authorities, but this does indeed not prove the point. That the charges of disloyalty to the government are unfounded is recognized today by all writers who have studied their history from the sources. Dr. Adolf Fluri of Bern, Professor Wilhelm Hadorn,<sup>40</sup> and other impartial writers have pointed out that the Swiss Anabaptists always consistently adhered to the principle of nonresistance. The same is true of all the early Mennonites. Dr. G. Uhlhorn said in the great Protestant Encyclopedia '41 that Swiss Anabaptism was of an absolutely peaceful nature.

### **The Fate of the Anabaptist Sects Which Did Not Accept the Principle of Nonresistance**

As already stated, the name "Anabaptists" was given to all who rejected infant baptism and baptized only upon oral confession. This included certain sects whose teachings stood in the strongest contrast to Mennonitism. The Anabaptist sect of Muenster, for example, were rank fanatics and political revolutionists. They taught and practiced polygamy, as do the Mormons of our day. The Mormons, by the way, would in that period have been held to be Anabaptists, because they do not baptize infants.

And then again, there were Anabaptists who differed from the Mennonites on practically only one point, namely, nonresistance. The most noteworthy of these were the followers of Balthasar Hubmaier.

Dr. Balthasar Hubmaier labored as an Anabaptist leader and minister at Waldshut (valds-hoot), Baden, and Nikolsburg in Moravia. His booklet, "On the Sword," is addressed to the Swiss Brethren.<sup>42</sup> In this booklet he attempted to persuade them by many arguments that their position on the principle of nonresistance was unscriptural.

At Nikolsburg, under the protection of the Lords of Liechtenstein, Hubmaier, within a short period, won many followers. After persecution arose his large congregation became extinct within a short span of time.

That fact deserves notice that not only the followers of Hubmaier but all Anabaptists who did not teach the principle of nonresistance, had a very brief history. Few of them indicated a willingness to endure persecution. Hubmaier's large congregation in Waldshut, after an Austrian army had taken possession of the city, accepted again their former Roman Catholic creed upon the command of the authorities. His church at Nikolsburg also had but a brief history. Of the Anabaptists that did not teach nonresistance, a very small number died a martyr's death, and yet in their history the words of Christ were verified that they who take the sword shall perish with the sword. Within a few years after the conversion of Menno Simons (1536) the Anabaptist sects which did not advocate nonresistance had become extinct. Only the Anabaptists who taught nonresistance—the Mennonites and Hutterian Brethren—survived the persecutions.

### **The Question of Military Exemption in Early Mennonite History**

During the period of the severest persecution there were scarcely any standing armies. In case of war, armies consisted for the most part of mercenaries. Later, when citizens were called upon for military service, Anabaptists were not considered citizens. So extremely intolerant was the attitude of the governments toward the Anabaptists that they were treated as criminals and were not wanted in the armies.

In the year 1528 the authorities of various German states used detachments of soldiers and police to apprehend and put to death all Anabaptists. They were not given a hearing nor was there a formal sentence passed. The question to be settled was simply whether the one apprehended had been baptized on the confession of his faith and this was, as a rule, easy to decide. If he did not give a negative answer when asked, he was put to death. Many suffered martyrdom at the hands of detachments of soldiers and bands of police.<sup>43</sup>

In 1529 the procedure of executing the Anabaptists without trial or sentence was given the sanction of imperial law. In this year the German Diet (the assembly of the Estates, or representatives of the Empire), convened at Spire, passed the death sentence summarily upon all Anabaptists, and this took place a number of years before the rise of any revolutionary Anabaptists, such as the Muensterites. Renouncing the established church and being baptized on the confession of faith was officially made a capital offense. It was expressly stipulated by this Diet that Anabaptists were not entitled to a hearing before a court and that no formal sentence need be passed. 24

In Roman Catholic countries even recantation, as a rule, would not save the life of one who had received adult baptism, since the law, as passed by the Diet of Spire, demanded that "all rebaptized persons" should be put to death." The rule was that those who denied their faith were beheaded instead of being burned at the stake. One of the many who suffered such a fate was the Mennonite minister Gillis of Aachen who, after recantation, in 1557, was beheaded at Antwerp. As early as 1527 Duke Wilhelm of Bavaria gave the orders: "Those Anabaptists who recant shall be beheaded and those who do not recant shall be burned at the stake."

According to the laws of the empire it was a crime to give lodging to an "Anabaptist." In many places houses in which Anabaptists had been permitted to lodge were confiscated by the government and in many instances razed. The house of a certain Jan Neulen, for example, was confiscated for no other reason than that Menno Simons had entered it without the protest of its owner. Many houses were destroyed in various provinces for similar reasons.

This explains why, in the earliest period of their history, there is no record of any effort on the part of Mennonites to secure exemption from military service. The fact that there is no such record does not by any means prove that they were not conscientious objectors. There is convincing proof that the Mennonites, from the beginning of their history, held the principle of nonresistance.

It was only after severe persecution had ceased and the Mennonites had been granted a measure of toleration that they were expected to render military service. The first country to tolerate them was Holland. When that country became involved in war, the Mennonites for the first time encountered difficulties on account of their refusal to render such service. In 1577 Prince William of Orange, the ruler of the United Netherlands, granted them exemption, and this exemption was ratified by his son and successor, Prince Maurice.

## II. THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

The confession of faith of the Waterlandian Mennonites, drawn up by two of their most prominent ministers, Hans de Ries and Lubbert Gerrits, and published in 1610 at Alkmaar, has the following article on "The Office of the Civil Magistracy or Government."<sup>45</sup>

The worldly authority, or civil magistracy, is a necessary ordinance of God, instituted and appointed for the maintenance of general government and to make possible a good natural civil life, for the protection of the good and the punishment of the evil.

The Lord Jesus did not institute the office of the magistracy in His spiritual kingdom, the church of the New Testament, nor has He included it in the offices peculiar to His church (1 Corinthians 12:28; Eph. 4:11). He did not call His disciples or followers to be worldly kings, princes, rulers or authorities (Matt. 20:25-28; Luke 22:25-27), nor has He ordered them to accept such offices or to rule the world in such a worldly manner. Again He did not give to the members of His church instructions befitting such an office or government. But He, whom they were bidden by a voice from heaven to hear, has called them to follow His nonresistant life (Heb. 12:2-3) and His cross-bearing example, and in His example nothing is less in evidence than worldly authority, civil power, or the sword. Taking this into consideration and, furthermore, in view of the fact that with the office of the civil magistracy many other things are connected, such as war, violence, punishing enemies (wrongdoers) by depriving them of possessions and life, and other things which agree either badly or not at all with the self-denying life of a Christian—for these reasons we shun such offices.

In the confession written by Jan Centsen in Amsterdam, 1630, we have the following:<sup>4</sup>

Christ enjoined on His people to follow His defenseless, crossbearing life prohibiting all revenge, not only with arms but also to return railing for railing; and on the contrary He has commanded us to pray for our enemies, to do good unto them that wrong us and, in short, to shun many things which are connected with the office of the magistracy; therefore we do not accept civil offices.

Article 14 of the Mennonite Confession of Dort, 1632,<sup>47</sup> reads as follows:

Regarding revenge and resisting our enemies with the sword we believe and confess that the Lord Jesus Christ has forbidden His disciples and followers all retaliation and revenge, and has commanded them not to "return evil for evil nor railing for railing," but to "put up the sword into the sheath" or, as the prophets foretold, "beat them into ploughshares" (Matt. 5:39, 44; Rom. 12:14; 1 Pet. 3:9; Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:8).

From this we see that, following His example, life, and teaching, we cannot cause suffering, harm, or grief to any one, but we must seek the highest welfare and salvation of all men. We believe that, if necessity requires it, we should flee for the Lord's sake from one city or country to another and suffer "the spoiling of our goods," rather than to cause suffering to any one. And if we are struck, we should turn the other cheek also, rather than to retaliate or strike back (Matt. 5:39; 10:23; Rom. 12:19).

The Waterlandian Mennonite churches had the reputation of being somewhat less conservative than the great majority of the Mennonites of Holland, and it has been claimed that they took an undecided attitude as regards the principle of nonresistance. But this principle is taught with special explicitness and emphasis in the larger Waterlandian Confessions of 1580. This confession surpasses in this respect the Dortrecht Confession, since it explicitly disapproves of the acceptance of such civil offices as might require action inconsistent with this principle; although as a matter of fact this is implied in all the Confessions teaching nonresistance. In 1613 a member of one of the Waterland congregations in Amsterdam was taken to task by the church for the reason that he had severely attacked "two thieves who had come into his room to steal." "He confessed that he was sorry for what he had done and asked God and the brethren to forgive him, declaring further that, in order to obtain forgiveness, he was willing to bear and fulfil anything which, according to the Word of God, may be asked of him, and he further agreed that this confession should be brought before the congregation."

The Waterlandian Mennonites in Amsterdam decided, in 1619, that members who traveled on armed ships (sailing, principally, for the East Indies), or who shared in the ownership of such ships, as well as those who consented to serve as jurors in "cases of accusation for capital crimes or when such services would otherwise conflict with the love of God, or our neighbor, or the law of Christ, could not be permitted to partake of the communion." These decisions were restated and approved by the same group of churches in 1631 and again in

1647.<sup>4</sup> At Harlingen during the same century the rule was that those who transgressed in this way were excommunicated.<sup>o</sup> Many Mennonites who had become identified with the Netherlands East India Company withdrew from this company early in the sixteenth century because their ships carried cannon and other means of defense.

Vincent de Hond, a prominent minister among the Old Flemish Mennonites at Haarlem, wrote some time during the first quarter of this century:

From all these and many other passages of Scripture it is clear that we cannot accept the office of the magistracy and, what is more, we cannot be obedient in things that are contrary to the teaching of the Lord.

Therefore, if any one, be it even the government, would command us to resist evil with outward weapons, we are not under duty to obey and cannot do so even if we should be made to suffer for it. For it is better to suffer than to burden the conscience by doing that which we understand to be forbidden by the Lord 61

I understand that the expressions "government" and "sword of the government" have the same meaning, for the government reigns with the sword and there is no government without the sword, that is, without force or power. No government can exercise its office without punishment.<sup>52</sup>

Jacob Janz, minister of the Old Flemish Church on the Dutch island of Ameland, wrote about 1650:

Is it not to be deplored that the members of Christ's body and of His spiritual kingdom should be compelled to take part in the abominable bloody war? Such a demand is made of those who are citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of peace; of those who in Christ have laid aside all enmity, hatred, envy and strife. . . . And though they "walk in the flesh, they do not war after the flesh." "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God" (2 Corinthians 10:3, 4).<sup>63</sup>

George Hanson, minister of the Flemish Mennonite Church at Danzig, wrote in his "Instructions in the Faith, For Young People," in 1671:

The weapons which we need to this end are, according to Paul's teaching, none other than the whole armor of God, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God (Eph. 6:11-17). Christian believers can use no other weapons.<sup>54</sup>

Jan Dionijssen Verburg, a Mennonite minister of Rotterdam, said in a booklet published in 1678:

Christians are forbidden to engage in war, whether it be called defensive or offensive war, that is to say, whether the purpose is to ward off bodily violence or to inflict it on others. The difference which is often made between offensive and defensive, that is, between attacking and resisting attack, is nothing more than an excuse which serves to becloud the issue. The fact is that a defensive war differs from an offensive one only in this respect that the former is waged against an enemy who first attacks us and the latter against one whom we attack first. Nevertheless all that is found possible to do in the way of destruction, murder and devastation is carried out in the one case as well as in the other. And men fail in their Christian duty toward their enemies even if they defend the walls of a city without undertaking an attacking sally and committing one of the abominations named &<sup>5</sup>

Engel Arentson, minister of the Mennonite Church at Rijp in Holland, wrote in a booklet in 1693:

What is war but a sea of misery, a wilderness filled with horrors of every description? Sometimes, it is true, the evil is given a good appearance by the assertion that it serves to protect right and innocence. But who could believe that one could be made happy by the misfortune of others?-Who was ever able to reconcile war with the principles of righteousness and equity?

Galenus Abrahams, a prominent Mennonite minister of Amsterdam, in his "Short System of Christian Doctrine," published in 1699, wrote:

Furthermore we believe that to Christians it is not only prohibited to demand an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, or to engage in war against their enemies, but that all resistance which they might offer to protect their property or life, or by which they might destroy that of their neighbor is expressly forbidden them. We believe that

they are in duty bound, according to the holy, heavenly doctrine of their Redeemer and His perfect example, to love their enemies, to bless them that curse them, etc.<sup>17</sup>

Abrahams also says at another place:

All resistance by force and all attempts having for their object the defence or protection of ourselves, or our families, or property by affronting, wounding or killing our fellow man, we believe to be forbidden the Christian, as well as vengeance of every description.<sup>'1</sup>

A noteworthy statement testifying to the strict attitude of the Mennonites of Switzerland on the point under consideration is found in a book published in 1693 at Berne, Switzerland. The title is "Proberstein des Taeufertums" (Touchstone of Mennonitism). The author, George Thormann, a minister of the Reformed state church, wrote this book upon the request of the ecclesiastical and civil authorities of the Canton Bern. He says:

They are conscientiously opposed, not only to taking any part in war, but even to arms; they prohibit this to their people as a great sin.

### **III. THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

A member of the Mennonite Church at Alkmaar in Holland, Dr. Klaas Toornburg, in 1688 published a book containing a noteworthy defense of the principle of nonresistance. He notes with regret that some of the Mennonite churches in Holland had discarded their earlier position on this point.<sup>19</sup> There is, on the other hand, much material to establish the fact that during the eighteenth century various Mennonite groups, comprising many congregations, faithfully maintained the historic attitude of the church. While the following quotations refer to Mennonite groups in the Netherlands, North Germany, and Poland, the churches in other countries-Switzerland, South Germany, France, and America-were of one mind with them.

A number of Mennonites of Holland, in a "Vindication" of their brethren in Switzerland who were persecuted for their refusal to serve in the army, wrote in 1710:

It is true, we believe and confess that the Lord Jesus Christ has forbidden His disciples all vengeance and retaliation, wherefore we, in accordance with His blessed example, life and doctrine, consider ourselves under obligation not to bring suffering, oppression, or affliction upon any one, much less to resist the enemies with the sword. And in our humble opinion there arises no danger to the state or our dear fatherland from our attitude. Certainly this has been established by experience during more than one hundred years of the history of the United Netherlands. The Mennonites can and will the more fervently pray for the protection of the father-land and the state, the higher they prize de liberty of conscience which they enjoy in this land, even if for conscience' sake they cannot fight with carnal weapons<sup>o</sup>

The Mennonites of Emden, Germany, in 1713, published a confession in which they say:

We believe that it is our duty to abstain from military service.

Abraham Verduin, a Mennonite minister at Koog in Holland, wrote in 1714:

The Mennonites believe and teach that, as subjects of Christ's spiritual kingdom, they do not have liberty to accept the office of worldly rulership, since with this office are connected so many bloody wars, fightings and contentions and other dangers of doing that which before God is sin.<sup>6z</sup>

A German non-Mennonite writer, Simon Friedrich Rues, in a work entitled "Impartial Information about the Present Condition of the Mennonites," published in 1743, says of the numerous group of the Old Flemish Mennonites:

They believe that the government is ordained of God, and therefore render willing obedience to its laws and commands. They teach that taxes and duties must be paid without murmuring and without asking for what purpose they are to be used. They are thankful to God for the blessing of being permitted to live a quiet and peaceable life under the protection of the government. They believe, however, that in the church of Christ there is no room for government as such, and if all people were true Christians and the true church of Christ would comprise all men living on earth, there would be no need for the civil government and God would not desire that there should be governments. But since this has never been realized and it cannot be hoped that it will be realized, God has instituted the office of the government. He did this in order that the world may not be made a den of thieves. All men are obligated to obey the magistracy, not only from fear but for conscience' sake. Nevertheless they readily

admit that they do not think it right that Christians should hold governmental offices. They say ... that the duties of a magistrate and of a Christian do not agree, for the worldly governments must exercise vengeance, force and violence, but this is forbidden the believer under the New Testament dispensation (Rom. 12:17-21; Matt. 5:38-48). Finally they do not believe that they have sufficient courage and constancy to take upon themselves the various services and difficulties of this office without harm to their Christian life.

They are very strict as concerns the exercise of force and the use of weapons. While many other Mennonites are far more lenient on this point, the members of this group of churches still purport to be nonresistant Christians. They believe that a Christian may not even use force against such resistance as is contrary to the law, but that he must forfeit his property, liberty, and life to his enemies when he is attacked. Therefore none of their members is allowed to have any weapons. The merchants among their number are not permitted to send freight on armed ships. Hence they confine their business mostly to points on the North Sea and the Baltic, instead of risking to send freight to places where, in the absence of provisions for defence, there is danger of falling prey to piracy.<sup>63</sup>

The catechism of Peter Hendriks, minister of a Mennonite Church at Sapmeer in Holland, was for the first time published in 1744, and was used in many of the Old Flemish churches. It has the following on the point of nonresistance:

Since serving in offices of the government involves many dangers and is closely connected with retaliation and war, as well as with the oath, which Christ has forbidden, therefore His followers must consistently abstain from accepting such offices.<sup>64</sup>

A confession of faith published in 1747 by the Friesian Mennonite churches of Holland and intended for the use of candidates for church membership, contains the following sentences:

I also believe that Christians cannot engage in war nor exercise vengeance against those who may have wronged them, but they must, according to Christ's example, bear the injustice and remember that vengeance is the Lord's.

I believe that the office of the worldly magistracy cannot be consistently held by Christians because it has to do with things named above which, I believe, Christ has forbidden His followers.

In the catechism of the Friesian Mennonites in Holland, published in the same year, the twenty-third part, "On Vengeance and War," comprises 52 questions. Following is the translation of a few of the questions and answers of this part.

**Question.** What is the third reason that a Christian is not permitted to meet violence, or to engage in war or strife?

**Answer.** The express command of our Saviour Himself: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; but I say unto you, that ye resist not evil" (Matt. 5:38, 39). He teaches here entire nonresistance and that we, rather than to use force for self-protection, turn the other cheek to him who has smitten us.

**Question.** If war is forbidden the Christian, why did John the Baptist not testify against it but taught the soldiers to be content with their wages? (Luke 3:14).

**Answer.** If John the Baptist had forbidden the soldiers to do military service, he would have gone beyond his commission, because he was not the Christ. He came before the law of Christ was given (Gal. 6:2) and had no authority to give a new law.

**Question.** Would not God's people be quickly destroyed from the earth if they did not resist evil?

**Answer.** No: for the Lord, who has taken upon Himself to protect them, is He who has the hearts of men, even the most ungodly, in His hands and He can direct them for the best of His people.

**Question.** Does not the example of Paul (Acts 23:16-24) teach us that we may at least have a part in war by hiring other persons to serve as our substitutes?

**Answer.** By no means.

**Question.** What do you further learn from this?

**Answer.** That I should in my patience possess my soul (Luke 21:19) and follow my Saviour in a "meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (I Pet. 3:4); that if I am reviled, I revile not again, if I suffer I threaten not, but commit myself to Him that judgeth righteously. (I Pet. 2:22, 23).

**Question.** What do you further learn from this?

**Answer.** That I must carefully shun everything that may lead to strife and enmity; that I must not take advantage or speak evil of any one or wrong him in any.

Gerard Roosen, pastor of the Mennonite Church at Hamburg, Germany, published a "Confession of Faith," in 1753, which contains the following paragraph:

All these Scripture passages show conclusively that we cannot exercise vengeance against any one, nor resist evil by force, but should much rather bear and suffer the wrong that has been done us. We should esteem our neighbor's life more highly than our temporal possessions. "For this is thankworthy if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully" (1 Peter 2: 19).<sup>67</sup>

The following is taken from a confession of the Old Flemish Mennonites of Groningen, Holland, printed in 1755:

We believe that we must abstain from everything that is at variance with Christian nonresistance and humility, and therefore we prefer not to accept civil offices.

War is contrary to Christian love which teaches us not to hate our enemies, but to love them, to bless them and pray for them.

Cornelis Ris, pastor of the Mennonite Church at Hoorn, in Holland, published, in 1766, a confession of faith of which the following is a part:

From these Scriptures it is, in our opinion, quite clear that for a true follower of Jesus Christ it is inconsistent, unbecoming and not permissible to wield weapons of war to the destruction of our enemies, how much less can be injure and destroy the innocent ones who have not wronged us but upon whom in war often falls the burden of misery and woe. For it is, we believe, impossible that war, as we know it, can be carried on without open violation of the fundamental principles of Christ's kingdom and without harboring many vices and practices which indicate the nature of the devil and of wild beasts rather than that of the followers of the Lamb who are called to show forth His virtues (1 Peter 2:9).

Besides, we believe that all malevolent treatment which we may experience is intended to exercise us in the faith and in the patience of the saints, as we follow the example of Jesus Christ. His holy apostles and many thousands of Christians in the early centuries and in later periods, when suffering for conscience' sake, experienced in this the grace of God making all things work together for their good. Such a peaceful, nonresistant life was moreover plainly prophesied for the subjects of Christ's kingdom.<sup>e9</sup>

In the catechism of the Old Flemish Mennonites in Prussia, printed in 1768, the answer to the question, "May church members take part in military service?" is, "No, not by any means:" The same catechism contains a confession of faith from which we quote Article 10.

"Concerning vengeance we believe that our Saviour Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount has altogether forbidden all vengeance and retaliation. He not only prohibited all vengeance to be taken at our own hand but also such as may be exercised through the authorities against one's enemies. While such vengeance (through the government) was permitted and even commanded those of the Old Covenant, we are called to follow Christ's example and footsteps in this matter. If some one reviles us or takes our goods, or resists or smites us, we as Christians must suffer and bear it with patience (1 Peter 2:21; 2 Corinthians 11:10; 1 Corinthians 4:11). And we understand that all going to law is forbidden. Rather than appealing to a court of law, we should yield to our opponent's demands, according to the example of the believers who took joyfully the spoiling of their goods (Hebrews 10:34). Yea, according to the doctrine of our Saviour Jesus Christ, we must love our enemies, bless them that curse us, do good unto them that hate us and pray for those who despitefully use us and persecute us (Matthew 5:44), that we may be the children of our Father which is in heaven."<sup>70</sup>

The Mennonite catechism written by Jacob de Veer of Danzig, and printed in 1791, has the following questions and answers:

**Question.** May a member of the church take part in military service?

**Answer.** No, for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but spiritual (2 Corinthians 10:3-4; Ephesians 6:12), and moreover it was foretold by the prophets concerning the time of the Gospel of grace that the swords should be made into plowshares and the spears into pruning hooks (Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3). This concurs with the words of

Jesus, Matt. 26:52.

*Question.* Is it sufficient, however, that we avoid outward revenge?

*Answer.* No, but we must banish all thought of revenge from our minds and not even desire that evil may befall him who has harmed us, much less can we rejoice over it and feel that he deserved it because of the way he dealt with us.

*Question.* Does such reasoning agree with Jesus' teaching?

*Answer.* Yes, for Jesus has taught us: Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good unto them that despitefully use you and persecute you (Matt. 5:44). And He has confirmed this by His own example, and on the cross He prayed for His enemies (Luke 23:34).<sup>71</sup>

#### **IV. THE NINETEENTH CENTURY**

Until the beginning of the nineteenth century the Mennonite people on the whole maintained, with various degrees of consistency, their historical antiwar attitude though the principle of nonresistance was not everywhere upheld among European Mennonites. In consequence of the Napoleonic wars Europe was militarized to a large extent during this century. Universal military service was generally introduced in continental Europe. With notable exceptions there was during this century among European Mennonites a gradual recession from their historical attitude on the point in question as well as on other points of principle and practice. Where the principle of nonresistance had been permitted to lapse, the way was prepared for the acceptance of military service. Many, however, whose conscience did not permit them to render such service, migrated to America.

In the period from the third quarter of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the World War, Russia was the only European country in which the Mennonites were exempt from all military service. The Mennonite young men of military age were under duty to devote a number of years to forestry on state lands. This arrangement was entirely separate from the military organization; to accept it was therefore consistent with the profession of the principle of nonresistance.

After about the middle of the nineteenth century there is among the Mennonites of Holland no indication of adherence to the antiwar principle. In recent years, however, this principle was revived in various Dutch Mennonite circles. A number of Mennonite young men, consequently, refused to take part in military drill and were taken to account by imprisonment.

While during the nineteenth century there was obviously an almost general decline on the part of European Mennonites on the point in question, there is conclusive evidence that during the first half of that century some of the European Mennonites, besides those of Russia and others who migrated to America, continued to maintain the principle of nonresistance.

The Old Flemish Mennonite Church at Haarlem in Holland published, in 1825, a new edition of the Catechism by Peter Boudewyns which, in the previous century, had been in use in many churches. The following questions and answers are taken from this catechism:

*Question.* Is serving in the office of the magistracy required of believers under the New Dispensation, the same as under the Old?

*Answer.* No, for the kingdom of our King Jesus is not earthly but is a spiritual and heavenly kingdom and is therefore not of this world, as the Lord Jesus Himself declared, John 18:36. And we believe that we have no liberty to seek worldly leadership or to accept and serve in the office of the worldly government, since our spiritual King, Jesus, has expressly said unto His disciples: "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them and they that are great exercise authority upon them, but it shall not be so among you, but whosoever will be great among you, let him to be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant" (Matt. 20:25, 26).

*Question.* Since it is stated in Scripture that "the powers that be" are ordained of God and that those who hold this office are God's servants (Born. 13:1-6), why is it not consistent for believers to accept such office?

*Answer.* Because the office of the government is ordained of God in the world but not in the Christian church. And indeed, those of whom Paul speaks as God's servants were at that time unbelievers. With the office of the government are connected various duties that are inconsistent with the meek and nonresistant nature of the Christian. And it is certain that retaliation, with which the office of the government is connected, is forbidden the

Christian, even as the Lord Jesus clearly teaches, Matthew 5:39.

**Question.** Does this command (Matthew 5:39) not mean that personal revenge is forbidden rather than the vengeance exercised by the magistracies who do not avenge themselves but execute vengeance upon wrongdoers for the punishment of the wicked and the protection of the good?

**Answer.** No, it refers also in particular to the revenge exercised by the government. For private vengeance was not permitted the Jews. Vengeance was committed to their magistrates; and in contrast to the Mosaic law the Lord Jesus has said: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you that ye resist not evil." Jesus spoke these words in reference to the law of vengeance, as found in Exodus 21:25; Leviticus 24:17-21; Deuteronomy 19:21. These passages of Scripture refer to judicial vengeance, as is clear from the context. Now, the Lord Jesus, in contrast with the law of the Old Covenant, forbids the believers vengeance and resistance. This, then, is an additional reason that it is not consistent for the believer to serve in the office of the government. Therefore we do not feel at liberty to desire such offices or to serve in them.

**Question.** What does this teach us further?

**Answer.** That we must shun all offices which are connected with judicial authority having for their purpose vengeance and punishment of transgressors. We should leave all these things to the worldly authorities and their servants, and should prove ourselves obedient subjects and meek, nonresistant Christians.

**Question.** May Christians, then, not use violence to go to war, as did the Israelites?

**Answer.** The kingdom of God is not an earthly but is a spiritual and heavenly kingdom. And the conflict of the Christian is not against flesh and blood, or with carnal weapons. "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal" (2 Corinthians 10:4). And how can Christians who must love their enemies and do good unto them, be disposed to injure or kill them, or for temporal reward serve in an office involving such things? We believe therefore that to wage war or to do military service is inconsistent with the profession and duties of a Christian.

**Question.** But how is it then possible that Christians are not deprived of body and life, goods and possessions and that the little flock of nonresistant Christians can exist at all upon earth?

**Answer.** The first is not always possible, and the Christians have often to endure much oppression; spoiling of goods, grief and suffering, as the Lord Jesus has indeed foretold them. But as concerns the second part of the question, it should be said that the persecutors and wicked can not do all that they may desire but they are subject to the power and restraint of Almighty God who can put a ring in the nose of the tyrants and who will not permit the scepter of iniquity to wholly suppress and destroy His people. Thus also in the Apostles' time Christians were at times oppressed and persecuted and then again permitted to enjoy rest and quietness. And Christians also have liberty to flee to places where they may be exposed to less dangers, for Jesus said to His disciples: "If they persecute you in one city, flee into another" (Matt. 10:23). And it has pleased God now and again so to direct worldly governments that they have not only permitted nonresistant Christians to live in their realms but have also protected them from their enemies and oppressors.

**Question.** Is it not altogether possible to transgress against Christian love and nonresistance without using violence and weapons?

**Answer.** It is indeed possible, namely when one, from a spirit of revenge, shows himself partial, vindictive, unforgiving, hard, and unmerciful toward his neighbor, and would thus either secretly or openly retaliate for an injury, real or imaginary. This is clearly inconsistent with Christian duty and love, since we should love and do good not only to our friends but to our enemies as well (Matt. 5:43-44). It will not suffice for Christians to refrain from using vengeance but they must forgive injury (Matt. 6:14-15) and overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:21). And finally one transgresses against the principle of nonresistance by using inconsiderate words, by evil speaking, tale-bearing against his neighbor, by wishing him evil and the like, contrary to the teaching of Peter (2 Pet. 2:21) or by speaking angrily or with bitterness against his neighbor. All these things are inconsistent with the Christian meekness and are expressly forbidden in Scripture.

**Question.** What does this teach us?

**Answer.** This teaches us that we must in no way, neither in word nor in deed, transgress against Christian revengelessness and nonresistance, but must in every respect conduct ourselves as meek and nonresistant Christians loving not only our friends and benefactors but also our enemies and injurers. We must do them well and pray for them, keeping continuously before our eyes the perfect example of our Saviour and striving to follow Him, and thus

give evidence that we are Christians and children of peace who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit and live in love and peace with all men as far as possible, that we may not only in name but also in deed and in truth be meek, nonresistant Christians.<sup>72</sup>

A confession of faith of the Mennonites of Prussia, written by Gerhard Wiebe of Ellerwald, near Elbing, in 1792, was reprinted at Elbing in 1837. Article 10 of this confession contains the following paragraph:

From these passages of Scripture we see that all revenge is forbidden us; therefore we must not use the sword against our enemies. Paul says, 2 Corinthians 10:3-4: "Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God." And since the Lord Jesus has commanded Peter to put up his sword into the sheath, we must not draw it to defend ourselves against our enemies, or to meet violence with violence but we should rather bear and suffer it.

We must not only avoid the sword of war, but our heart should not yield to revengefulness. We should "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth" (Rev. 14:4), not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but be still and bless our enemies if we would inherit a blessing.<sup>73</sup>

In April, 1863, Heinrich Ensz, a Mennonite minister in South Russia, wrote in a letter to Johann Toews, a minister of a Mennonite Church near Elbing in Prussia:

If nonresistance is supposed to mean nothing more than the refusal to do military service (as is held by many whose lives, alas! agree with this opinion), we have a glaring inconsistency. There is at the present time the greatest need for efforts by word and pen to the end that we may all realize that our nonresistance must prove itself in our daily life and walk. There must be practical evidence of the love which we should have one to another which is the particular mark of discipleship.

We know that even before the time of Menno Simons, yea from the Apostles' time there were always those, though few in number, who were conscientious Christians and who not only testified before the authorities to the plain and simple teaching of the Scriptures on the point of nonresistance but gave evidence of the sincerity of their profession by an unblameably daily life following faithfully unto death, as nonresistant Christians, in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus "who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not."

Therefore it is our most ardent desire that, for the best interests of us all, immediate efforts be put forth to the end that we may in all consistency and meekness lead quiet and nonresistant lives, that it may not be said of us: They profess it but do not do it. But if, as is stated in letters from Prussia, one avenges himself on another and it so happened that one was severely struck by another so that it might have cost his life; if one goes to law with another for the sake of earthly things, bringing lawsuits before worldly authorities which is radically contrary to Christ's teaching (Matt.5; Luke 6; Rom.12; 1 Corinthians 6), how can the government believe us that we are nonresistant Mennonites, contrary to the evidence indicating that we are filled with the spirit of retaliation? Friend Toews, you undoubtedly know that the Holy Scriptures demand consistency and that resistance can in no point be permitted (Matthew 7:12). If we in every respect lived in humility of heart and were upright, pious and nonresistant, as our confession of faith demands, how faithfully would our civil authorities, as well as your honored government which is animated by a real spirit of toleration, speak a good word for us to those who, on account of our inconsistencies, begrudge us our liberties.<sup>74</sup>

The small group of conservative Flemish Mennonites of Balk, Holland, which in 1653 immigrated to America under their ministers Smit and Symensra, were apparently the last of the Mennonites of the Netherlands to uphold the principle of nonresistance. Before leaving their native land for America they, as concerns the question of finding substitutes to serve in the army in their place, said, "We do not find liberty to do through others what we believe to be sin for ourselves." They settled near New Paris, Indiana, and were eventually amalgamated with the Salem Mennonite congregation.

## **V. NONRESISTANCE PRE-EMINENTLY A NEW TESTAMENT DOCTRINE**

Many fundamental Christians, outside the so-called peace churches, believe that the Old Testament commands, except the ceremonial law, are binding for the Christian Church, the same as the Scriptures of the Old Testament. In plain fact, however, there are many portions of the Mosaic law, besides those containing the ceremonial law, that

are not binding in the New Covenant. It is noteworthy that Herbert Booth, the author of the book, "The Saint and the Sword," which is the most thoroughgoing defense of the principle of nonresistance from the Bible viewpoint, is not a member of one of the so called peace churches.

Our Lord, after quoting literally from the Old Testament law: "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" (Ex. 21:24; Lev. 24:20; Deut.19:21), goes on to say: "But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil. . . . Love your enemies," etc. (Matt. 5:38-48). On such points as war, the oath, and divorce, Christ's teaching is at variance with the Old Testament law. He is pre-eminently the Lord and Lawgiver, as well as the Saviour of men. In the light of His teaching, the law of the Old Covenant is not faultless. Hebrews 8:7. War, being contrary to His teaching, is sin.

It has been supposed by various writers that Jesus in the words, "I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34), spoke of the material sword and declared Himself against the principle of nonresistance. The supposition, however, that He came into the world to send the material sword is simply contrary to fact. He did not come for any such purpose. That He should have made a statement to that effect is unthinkable and impossible. If the purpose of His coming had been to send the carnal sword, Christianity would necessarily be a "religion of the sword," somewhat of the order of Mohammedanism, possibly. The parallel reference in Luke 12:51 has "division" (separation) instead of "sword," and this is undoubtedly the meaning, as the context in both Matthew and Luke clearly indicates. The conflict which resulted from Christ's coming into the world is not one that is to be decided by the carnal sword. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal" (2 Corinthians 10:4). The conflict with evil is of a spiritual nature, as fully described in Ephesians 6:10-18. The sword to be used by the Christian is "the sword of the Spirit."

As an argument against nonresistance, the passage in Luke 22:36 has also been quoted, "He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one." Opinions may differ as to our Lord's intended purpose in uttering these words. The question which concerns us here is, whether He intended to say that the disciples should make practical use of the material sword. As we may directly see, this was by no means the case. Yet the disciples may have understood Him so. Just a few moments later, when the multitude came on the scene to arrest Jesus, one of the disciples asked, "Lord, shall we smite with the sword?" Peter, without waiting for a reply, drew the sword and injured the high priest's servant, Malchus. Christ, then, while healing the injury Peter had done, addressed him with the solemn words, "Put up ... thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword:"

Peter, as well as the rest of the disciples, evidently took these words of Christ to heart. Apparently none of them ever transgressed again by using the sword for self-defense. Peter, in his first epistle, points out with emphasis that Christ gave us the example of meekness and nonresistance, and that upon His followers devolves the solemn duty to "follow his steps." 1 Peter 2:20-23.

Evidently the context of the passage under consideration (Luke 22:36) must be taken into account to understand the meaning of these words. Verse 38 reads, "And they said, Lord, behold, here are two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough." Do not the words of Jesus, "It is enough," indicate that the two swords were not to be used by the disciples against their antagonists? Or was it Jesus' thought, as some have supposed, that, since He was about to return to the Father, the disciples needed the material sword for self-defense? Did Jesus mean to indicate that they should use the sword against the persecuting governments? Would they not have proved themselves transgressors by becoming insurrectionists against constituted authority? Or was it His thought that they should use the material sword in defense against their neighbors who would antagonize them? Would not the disciples, by taking in such a way the civil law into their own hands, have become guilty of glaring transgression?

Again, could it be supposed that Jesus meant to say that the disciples should have swords ready to be used against the multitude armed "with swords and staves" which was just then drawing near to take Him? Was it His thought that the disciples should engage in an armed struggle with the multitude? Would in this case two swords have been enough for the eleven disciples? Would eleven disciples, even if they all had swords, have been enough to defend themselves with the sword against the multitude? Would not the disciples, by making Gethsemane the scene of carnal struggle and bloodshed, have made our Lord the head of a band of wrongdoers, if He had permitted it? Think of the defeat which His cause would have suffered, had the disciples made such use of the carnal sword. Such is the absurdity of the opinion that they were to use the two swords for self-defense and that Jesus here taught

against peace and nonresistance.

Clearly, Jesus' words, "It is enough," could not have meant that the two swords were "enough" for self-defense, or were to be used for such a purpose. But they were enough to give occasion for an impressive object lesson to the disciples concerning the use of the sword: "Put up. . . thy sword." Besides, the two swords may have had some symbolic significance as is the opinion of various commentators.

It is of interest to note that in recent decades various prominent theological writers in this country and Europe have admitted that war is sin, that it is indeed the most appalling outbreak and manifestation of sin in the world. And yet they do not disapprove of military service. It is a distinctive principle of Mennonitism that there never can be an excuse for sin.

If participation in warfare were consistent with Christian principles, war could not be so great an evil as it is generally recognized to be. Without question anything one may do that is consistent with true Christianity cannot be an evil. As already stated, the causes of war are ever present among the nations of the world. It is not within the power of the Christian Church to change the nature of the world and to remove the causes of war. The practical and highly important question is: What is the Christian to do in case of war, when he is bidden to have a part in it?

It is an easy way out to say, as some do, that the Sermon on the Mount was not intended for this age. Any one reading this sermon carefully must realize that Christ asked His hearers to make it the rule of their lives. And the plain fact remains that war is absolutely and intrinsically contrary to Christian principles. It is the very opposite of what Jesus taught concerning practical Christian duty. If He had never preached the Sermon on the Mount, this would not change the fact of the anti-Christian character of war. The unsophisticated Christian conscience revolts against participation in war.

To say that war is consistent with Christian principles means that the Christian Church of the first three centuries misunderstood Christ's teaching. It is an established historical fact that the early church did not permit participation in war.

## **VI. A FEW HISTORICAL INCIDENTS**

In the year 1596 a pious and faithful brother and follower of Jesus Christ, named Dirck Willems, of Asperen in Holland, was apprehended and burned at the stake because he had been baptized on the confession of his faith and had united with the Mennonite Church. At the time of his arrest he was warned of the coming of an officer and made his escape through a back door of the house. The officer pursued the fleeing man to a frozen dyke. The ice was of doubtful strength but Willems, knowing what his arrest would mean, risked crossing the dyke. He reached the other side in safety. The officer, realizing the danger of breaking through the ice, hesitated to follow him, but the presence of a higher officer caused him to take the risk. He broke through the ice, and the fleeing man, hearing his cries for help, perceived that his pursuer was in danger of his life. After a moment's consideration he returned and aided the officer in getting out of the dyke, thus saving his life. The officer's heart was touched. He wanted to let him go, but the burgomaster very sternly called on him from the other side to consider his oath, whereupon the officer seized and arrested Willems. After severe imprisonment and great trials, he was put to death, as stated above, in May, 1569, giving his life in testimony of the truth.

Some time during the early part of the seventeenth century a Mennonite minister, Peter Adrians Houttuyn, of Hoorn, was one night awakened by a disturbance made by a burglar whom he found in the upper part of his house. Going to the foot of the stairs he called to the thief above: "Friend, come down; you will not be harmed." The thief came down and Houttuyn said to him: "Come to see me tomorrow morning and I shall talk further with you." The man who had broken into his house was in great need. He was on the following day engaged as an employee in the warehouse of the one he had been attempting to rob, and served his employer faithfully for about twenty-five years.<sup>78</sup>

About the year 1550 certain clergymen in Flanders were commissioned to spy out and arrest Anabaptists. One of these men, the inquisitor Peter Titelman, was met at one time in an inn by an officer of the law who asked him in surprise how he, with so few attendants, dared to undertake this. "If I," remarked the officer, "would in such a way attempt to arrest vagrants and transgressors, my life would be of short duration." "Friend," replied Titelman, "there is no reason for anxiety in my work, for I seize only nonviolent, good people." The bailiff, after reflecting upon

Titelman's words, said: "If you arrest the good people and I the bad, who then can remain outside of prison?" This is a testimony to the nonresistant character of those whom the inquisitor undertook to arrest.

In the time before the entire cessation of the persecution in Switzerland, during the eighteenth century, a number of unprincipled young fellows went at nighttime to an old Mennonite minister's home in the Emmenthal, Canton Bern. To try his sincerity as a defender of the principle of nonresistance they began to tear off the thatch from the roof of his house. The minister, awakened from his slumbers, arose and with dismay beheld the work of destruction going on. What did this man of God (for such he proved himself to be) do? No doubt, the scene stirred his heart to indignation, but he did not act upon such an impulse. He considered what attitude he, as a Christian, should take under such provocation. Silently praying he returned to the house and addressed his wife, "Mother, you had better arise and prepare a meal; workmen have come to us." His wife was startled but soon understood. Meanwhile the marauders continued their malicious work of destruction. Then the aged minister went out to them. "You have worked long, and no doubt are hungry," he said; "now come in and eat." Hesitatingly they came into the house and finally, upon invitation, sat down at the table. Then the old patriarch bared his head and folded his hands. And the marauders?-they sat in silence. Then he prayed so fervently, so lovingly, and so earnestly, both for them and for himself, that their hearts were softened and their conscience awakened. They became heartily ashamed of what they had done. The food did not seem to taste good to them. They arose and went again to the roof, not indeed to finish their work of destruction but to reconstruct the roof as best they could, that the fiery coals which had been gathered upon their heads might cease to cause them pain.

When, in 1759, the French army under Count de Stainville had defeated the Prussians led by von Buelow, they encamped near the cloister Schaken, in Waldeck. Their commander sent his aide-de-camp, named Stadler, with a detachment of soldiers in search for forage for the horses. They met a Mennonite farmer whom they ordered to show them a field of barley which they could use as pasture for their horses. "For what reason," he asked, "must I go foraging with you?" "There is a good reason," was the reply, "namely, that we shall compel you." The officer brandished his sword before the man's face, saying: "Does this make it any clearer?" "I am not afraid of your weapon," said the farmer quietly, "but come with me, for God has said: 'If any man will ... take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also.'" He walked ahead of them, leading them through a grove and along various roundabout ways for a considerable distance. When he stopped, Stadler said to him: "It seems to me we have passed a number of fields of barley; why have you not led us to them?" "Because they were the property of others," he replied, "but here is a field that belongs to me-let your horses go into it and eat their fill:"<sup>8</sup>

The dehumanizing effect of war is well illustrated by a description of the outrages inflicted upon the Hutterian Brethren in Moravia (Czechoslovakia), during the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). Their chronicler wrote of the period beginning with 1821:

"Altogether it was a very fearsome, miserable and evil time. It is impossible to write or tell of all the great and inhuman cruelties which were inflicted upon us and others in this godless, accursed and devilish war at the hands of the Spanish, Walloon, Polish and German imperial forces. I cannot tell what awful devilish things were perpetrated on many good, pious and honorable sisters who had loved sobriety and purity from their youth, yea, on children, both boys and girls. Women with child and mothers on their deathbed as well as virgins were most outrageously attacked and tortured. The men were burned with glowing irons and red-hot pans; their feet were held in the fire until their toes were burned off; wounds were cut into which powder was poured and then set afire; fingers and ears were cut off, eyes were forced out by inhuman torture; men were hung up by the neck like thieves; all sorts of diabolical brutality and unheard of godlessness were committed, half the shame of which is not to be written. Such things were openly practiced by the imperial soldiery who believed themselves to be the best of Christians. It would be impossible for one who had not himself seen and witnessed it to believe that a human being could conduct himself as did these demon-possessed men. It would have been no wonder had the heavens turned pale, the earth shaken and all the elements trembled; yea, one would suppose that the devil himself would have been more fearful of the might, power, glory and majesty of God than these shameless men. May God lead them to realize it, to whom and to whose righteous judgment we commit it all."<sup>79</sup>

## NOTES

1. Luther in his *Sermons on Matthew, Chapters 5-7*, Weimar Edition of Luther's Complete Works, vol. 32, pp. 299-555; Koestlin, J., *Luthers Theologie*, Stuttgart, 1901, vol. 2, p. 326; Koestlin, J., *Die Gtaubensartikel der Augsburgischen Confession erlaeutert*, Halle a. S., 1891, p. 80; Koestlin-Kawerau, *Martin Luther*, Berlin, 1903, p. 116; Horsch, J., *Die biblische Lehre von der Wehrlosigkeit*, Scottdale, Pa., 1920, pp. 25-30.
2. *Dr. Martin Luthers Saenxtliclae Werke*, 1?rlangen Edition, vol. 22, pp. 66-70; Boehmer, *II.*, *Luther isra Lichte cler neueren Forschtng*, Leipzig and Berlin, 1918, p. 245; Wernle, P., *Der'Evangelislce Glaube nach den Haupt.schriften der Reformatoren*, Bd. 1, *Luther*, Tuebingen, 1918, pp. 124-37.
3. Published by Headly Bros., London.
4. Published in *Tlxeologische Literaturzcitung*, Leipzig, 1921, No. 11/12, col. 126.
5. Stachelin, E., *Oekolatinpads Beziehungexr zu den Konranen*, Basel, 1917, pp. 26, 32; P'uesslin, J. C., *Beytrac,qe zur Kirchen-Gcsrlichtc des Sch2ccilwerlawd( 's, Zuerich, 1741-53, I'ierter Ted, pp. 406ff.; 13cnclcr, T'.*, *Wschichte der Waldenser*, Ulm, 1850, p. 135.
6. Vogl, C., *Peter Cheltschizki, eirL Prophet an der li'ende tier 7.eiten*, ZucricU und Leipzig, 1926, pp. 92-94.
7. Egli, E., *Actensawmlung zur Geschichte der 7.uercher Reformation*, Zuerich, 1879, No. 623. The date given by Egli is incorrect.
8. Cornelius, C. A., *Geschichte des Ilfuensterischen Aufruhrs*, Leipzig, 1860, Bd. 2, pp. 240-49. An English translation of this letter was published by Walter Rauschenbusch in the *American Journal of Theology*, January, 1905.
9. Egli, E., *Die 7\_uercher Wiedertaeufer zur Reformationszeit*, Zuerich, 1878, p. 97.
10. Egli, *Actensarnmlung*, No. 1109.
11. There are two modern reprints of the Schlatten Confession: by Walter Koehler, Leipzig, 1908, and by Heinrich Boehmer in *Urkunden zur Geschichte des Bauernkrieges und der Wiedertaeufer*, Heft 50-51, Bonn, 1910. A translation was published by W. J. McGlothlin in *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, Philadelphia, 1911. The citations here given are translated from the edition by Koehler. The title under which this confession was first published is, *Bruederlich Vereinigung etzlicher Kinder Gottes sieben Artikel Betreffend*.
12. Oecolampadius, J., *Underrichtung von dem Widertauuff, von der Oberkeit, und von dew Eyd, auff Carlins N. Widertauuffers artickel*, Basel, 1527, sig. D3.
13. Goetzing, E., *Vadians Deutsche Historische Schriften*, Bd. 3, St. Gallen, 1877, p. 501.
14. *Handlung oder Acta gehaltener Disputation und Gesprocch -u Zoffingen inn Berner Biet mit den Widertoeffern*, 1532, pp. 946, 97b. 51
15. The protocol of these discussions, comprising about 75,000 words, is in the State Archives of Bern. It has never been printed. The Mennonite Historical Library in Scottdale, Pa., has an exact certified copy.
16. "Das ergist uebel das man erdencken mag." Bullinger, *It.*, *Von dem unverschampten fraefel, ergerlichem verze'yrren und urawarhajftern leeren der selbs,qesaradten Widertoeu\$ern*, 1531, p. 139b.
17. Bullinger, H., *Der Widertoeu\$eren ursprvng, fueryarsg, .Sectm, Waesen, etc.* Zuerich, 1561, fol. 16.
18. *I'erantwortuuy etlicher die ntan Toeaaffer newnt, uff die fragen hVarumb sv nit zur hirchen gangind;* printed as an appendix to Bullinger, *Der N%iderinCliff erere ursprung*, fol. 21431. Bullinger had frequently referred to this booklet of the Swiss Brethren and therefore decided to publish it. The quotation here given is found in fol. 218b.
19. *Gerchichtbuch der Flutterischen Brweder herausyeyeben (lurch Dr. R. Wolkun von Elias Walter*, Macleod, Alta., 1923, p. 112.
20. *Protocoll, Das ist Alle handlung des gesprechs zu Franckenthal in der Churfuerstlichen Pfaltz*, Heidelberg, 1571, pp. 408, 410, 428, 470, 474. 21. Bergmann C., *Die Taeuferbewegung irn Kanton 7uerich*, Leipzig, 1916, p. 63.
22. Wenger, J. C., *The Theology of Pilgram Marpeck*, Mennonite Quarterly Review, October, 1938, p. 240f.
23. *Rechenschaft unserer Religion, Lehre rend Glaaabens. l'on den BruedPrn, die man die Hutterischen nennl*, 1902, pp. 105-11.
24. *Ilrt Offer des lleeren*, p. 85. 25. The same work, p. 116.
26. The same work, p. 398.

27. The figures given with the quotations from Menno Simons indicate the places where they are found in English *Complete Works*, Elkhart, Ind., 1871. These passages were revised by comparison with the Dutch editions of Menno's Works, of 1664 and 1681.
28. Armies in that period consisted chiefly of those who served voluntarily for hire.
29. *Enchiridion or Hand Book of the Christian Doctrine and Religion*, Elkhart, Ind., 1910, p. 361.
30. Gyserinek, J., *De II'eerlonshFid Volgens de I)aopsgezinden*, in *De Gids*, 1890, p. 120.
31. Van Braght, T. J., *Martyrs' Mirror*, Scottsdale, Pa., 1938, p. 752. 32. *Protocol, I)at is Alle handelinye des Ghesprecks tot Ernbden, etc.*, Amsterdam, 1616, pp. 229, 232.
33. *Concept van Ceulen, van den eersten Mey, Anno 1591*, Vlissinghe, 1666, p. 6.
34. Quoted ;Mannhardt, W., *DieII'ehr/rciheitder.Altpreussischen ?Ilennaniten*, blarienburg, 1863, p. 31.
35. Quoted; Twisck, P. J., *I='erschejde Artikulen des Geloofs en Sententien, uit Oude en Niuwe Leeraers vergadert*, Hoorn, 1694.
36. Zwingli, *S&mtliche Werke*, Vol. IV, p. 383. 37. The same work, p. 427.
38. The same work, p, 592. 52
39. The same work, Vol. II, p. 514.
40. Hadorn, *Die Reformation in der deutschen Echweiz*, p. 108. 41. Hauck-Herzog, *Realenzyklopedia*, Vol. I, p. 482.
42. A translation of the booklet, *On the Sword*, was published by Henry C. Vedder in the book, "Balthasar Hubmaier," New York, 1905, pp. 273-310.
43. Beck, J., *Geschichtsbuecher der OViedertaeufer in OesterreiclaUngarn*, Wien, 7833, p. 58; Loserth, J., *Doctor Balthasar Hubmaier und die Anfaenyde der lf'iedertaufer in .Llaehren*, Bruenn, 1893, p. 190; Roehrieh, F. W., *Zur Geschichte der straszburgischen iViedertaeufer*, in *7eitschrift, f. d. hist. Theologyie*, vol. 30, p. 5.
44. The official text in full of the Edict of the Diet of Spires of 1529 against the Anabaptists may be found in *Aller des Heiligen Roemischen Reichs ,9ehaltene Reichstage, Abschiede und Satzungen*, Mainz, 1660, pp. 210-11. Full text is to be found also in *.9nabaptisticum et Lnthusiasticurn Pantheon mad Geistliches Ravest-Hausz, etc.*, 1702, pp. 6-8; likewise edited by Ludwig Keller in *Monatshefte der Comenius-Gesellschaft*, vol. 9, Berlin, pp. 55-57. It will be recalled that the revolutionary Anabaptists of Muenster arose at a later date, namely, in 1533.
45. This confession may be found in Schijn-Maatschoen, (*geschiedenis der Christenen voelke in de Vereenigde Nederlanden onder de Protestanten Mennoniten Gerlaarnd worden*. 1 Deel, Amsterdam, 1743, pp. 238-79. McGlothlin, *Bnptist Confessions of Faith*, pp. 24-48, contains an English version which, however, is not translated from the original Dutch but from an unsatisfactory Latin translation.
46. This was the Confession of the so-called High German 'Mennonites in liolland. A complete translation is found in van Braght, *Martyrs` Mirror*, pp. 32-36.
47. The confession in use among a majority of the Mennonites in the United States.
48. Dyserinck, in *De Gids*, 1890, p. 145.
49. Blapot ten Cate, S. *Geschiedenis der Doopsgezirnden in Holland, Zeeland, etc.*, I Deel, Amsterdam, 1847, p. 158.
50. *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen*, Verzameld en Uitgegeven door Dr. de Hoop Scheffer, Amsterdam, 1847, p. 158.
51. Quoted in *Christelijck Hatiys-Boeck, Over de Volqheende flrtijckelen des Christelijeken Ghelaofs, etc.*, Vergadert door I. ll. B. (1643), p. 549.
52. The same work, p. 744. 53. Quoted by Twisck, p. 420. 54. Quoted by Mannhardt, Appendix, p. 27.
55. Quoted by Dyserinck in *De Gids*, 1890, p. 304. 56. Quoted by Mannhardt, Appendix, p. 31.
57. *Korte Grondstellingen van de Christelyke Leere der Doapsgezinden*, Amsterdam, 1699, p. 30.
58. *I'eredediging der Christenen die Doopsgezinde genaamd worden*, Amsterdam, 1699, p. 74.
59. Dyserinck, in *De Gids*, 1890, p. 144. 60. *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen*, 1909, p. 154. 53
61. Quoted by Mannhardt, Appendix, p. 39.
62. Quoted by Dyserinck in *De Gids*, 1890, p. 309.
63. Rues, S. F., *Aufrichtige Nachrichten von dem Gegenzcaertigen Zustande der Mennoniten oder Taufgesinnten*, Jena, 1743, pp. 23-26.
64. Hendriks, P.,

*Schriftamrlyke Katechismavs waarin de Grond-Lere der Doopsyezinden in't gemeen, dog der zogenoemde Oude hlamingen in't byzonder, met den Woorde Gods open gelegd is*, Groningen, 1744, p. 285.

65. *Kort Begrip van de Leere der Waarheyt Polgens het Gevoelen der Doops-Gesinde Christenen, etc.*, Uytgegeven volgens Kerkelyke Resolutie, Amsterdam, 1747, p. 359.

66. The same work, pp. 263-71.

67. Roosen, G., *Evangelisches Glaubens-Bekaevdtvzisz der Tau}}Gesinneten Christen ader also genandten Mennoniten*. Gedrukt im Jahr Christi 1753, p. 35.

68. Quoted by Mannhardt, Appendix, p. 51.

69. Ris, C., *De Geloofsleere der zvaare Mennoniten of Daopsyezinden*, Hoorn, 1766, pp. 142-44. A translation of this work was published under the title, *Mennonite Articles of Faith*, by the Mennonite Book Concern, Berne, Ind., 1904.

70. *Confession, oder Kurtzer und einfaeltiger Glaubens-Bericht der Alten Flaentischen Tau(f-Gesinneten Gemeinde in I'reussen*, Gedrukt im Jahr 1768, pp. 92 and 26.

71. Quoted by Mannhardt, Appendix, p. 54.

72. *Ozadercywinge des Christelyken Geloofs, Volgens de Belydenis der Chri.rlenen die 3nen de Oude G'laamsche Mennonifen noemt, bVaarin derzelver Leere erz Genzcentelyke Huishoudinge Schriftsnattiy vnnrgesteld en bewewen word*. Door Pieter Boudewyns, Sneek, 1825, pp. 276-92.

73. Quoted by 'Mannhardt, Appendix, p. 56.

74. The letter was printed in *Botschafter der Wahrheit*, Hillsboro, Kansas, December 1, 1926.

75. Van Braght, *Martyrs' Mirror*, Scottdale, Pa., 1938, p. 741. 76. Dyserinck, in *De Gids*, 1890, p. 161.

77. Hellenberger, J., *Bilder aus dem Pilgerleben*, 1880, p. 126. 78. *Doapsyezinde Bijdragen*, 1872, p. 94.

79. Horsch, J., *The Hutterian Brethren*, 1931, p. 54.