

**THE  
GOLDEN  
YEARS**

# **The Golden Years**

**THE MENNONITE  
KLEINE GEMEINDE IN RUSSIA  
(1812-1849)**

## Acknowledgements

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*Delbert F. Plett*

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# Foreword

In this study Delbert Plett interprets the experience of the Kleine Gemeinde during its "Golden Years" in Russia from 1824 to 1849. This was a period of "internal peace, balanced consolidation and steady growth."

Plett features three nineteenth century Kleine Gemeinde leaders. The first is Klaas Reimer, founder of the Kleine Gemeinde who died in 1837. This section includes a large number of quotations from Klaas Reimer's unpublished autobiography, *Ein Kleines Aufsatz* (a short Exposition). The second is Heinrich Balzer, a minister in the Ohrloff Mennonite Church who joined the Kleine Gemeinde in 1833 and became its most capable intellectual leader. He died in 1846. His booklet, *Faith and Reason* is utilized heavily and reprinted in whole. The third major leader Plett presents in his study is Abraham Friesen, minister and Aeltester in the Kleine Gemeinde in Russia from 1823-1849. He represents most fully the "Golden Age" of the Kleine Gemeinde in his strong personality, wise and balanced leadership, and Anabaptist Mennonite theological outlook. In this section Plett quotes from a large number of writings by Friesen and other Kleine Gemeinde leaders during this era.

This study is significant for a number of reasons. First, Plett unfolds the development of the Kleine Gemeinde with the kind of detail and immediacy that no other study has done. This is largely due to the very heavy dependence on quotations from source materials. Second, the study allows the reader to peer into early nineteenth century Mennonite life in the Molotschna settlement, and to some extent also into the life of Prussian Mennonite churches. This is a very valuable contribution since so many of the records and writings of the Molotschna settlement and of the Prussian Mennonite churches were later destroyed. Third, this study discusses the tensions in the Russian Mennonite settlements between three different interpretations of being Mennonite. Plett identifies the three as cultural Mennonitism, Pietist Mennonitism, and Anabaptist Mennonitism. From the documents quoted, it becomes evident that the discussion about Pietism was already vigorous long before the era of Eduard Wuest in the 1850's. It also becomes evident that there was present in the Mennonite community, especially in the Molotschna, a significant effort to rediscover the Anabaptist Mennonite teachings of the sixteenth century, with special emphasis on non-resistance and peace, not swearing the oath and separation of church and state. Plett's main contention in this study is that the Kleine Gemeinde stood within the Anabaptist Mennonite position. The Kleine Gemeinde attempted seriously to be Anabaptist Mennonite within the context of pressure from both the cultural Mennonites who attempted to maintain a status quo, and Pietist Mennonites who attempted renewal along lines in conflict with the Anabaptist Mennonite principles.

Plett, however, includes in this study much more than the story of the Kleine Gemeinde. In the tradition of the *Martyrs' Mirror*, a seventeenth century Dutch Mennonite book of Anabaptist martyrs and a book which the Kleine Gemeinde also used, Plett recounts the history of Christianity from its beginnings in the first century. Through the whole history he weaves a thread of faithfulness to the scriptural teachings of peace, non-resistance, rejection of force, adult baptism and separation of church and state. It is this view which he identifies as Anabaptist Mennonite although he also argues it is essentially the Biblical message.

Plett's study provides a fresh interpretation of a segment of the Russia Mennonite experience. The strength of his study lies both in his interpretation of events from the perspective of Anabaptist Mennonitism, and also in the many documents, letters, memoirs and poems which he quotes. His study becomes a veritable guide to the source material from the first half of the nineteenth century of Russian Mennonitism.

Plett also has a missionary motive in producing this study. He links the early nineteenth century Kleine Gemeinde renewal to the twentieth century "Recovery of the Anabaptist Theology" movement associated with Harold S. Bender. He even reprints Bender's "The Anabaptist Vision" in this volume. Plett is hoping for a renewal among present descendants of the Kleine Gemeinde to the Anabaptist Mennonite theological position. But Plett also addresses a larger audience and purpose. He is convinced that this form of Christianity is that to which all people are called.

*Dr. John Friesen, Associate Professor of History and Theology  
Canadian Mennonite Bible College, Winnipeg, Manitoba  
February 25, 1985*

# Author's Preface

## Introductory Remarks

This book tells the story of the golden years of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia. It commences with the origins and founding of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in 1812 and outlines its subsequent historical development to the mid-century mark. For convenience this book will occasionally be referred to as **The Golden Years**. This work represents the continuation of some six years of historical research and gathering of source material. It is a sequel to the book **History and Events** which was published in 1982.<sup>1</sup> **History and Events** was a documentary style history of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde for the years 1866-1876. The section of twenty maps contained in **History and Events** will be useful as a general reference for the reader.

One of the comments that has been made about **History and Events** is that it did not contain sufficient background material for the reader not familiar with the Kleine Gemeinde. It must be recognized that an introduction can only set the stage for the main subject and therefore the reader should have available a number of the books recommended in **History and Events**. This should include at least one book dealing with the concept of an Anabaptist-Mennonite theology, and at least one book dealing with Mennonite history in general.

It is emphasized that certain books were mentioned only to give the reader some reference to available material. In the category of general Canadian Mennonite history, reference should also be made to Frank H. Epp, **Mennonites in Canada 1786-1920**.<sup>2</sup> Very helpful to those who have had limited exposure to Mennonite history, is an introductory pictorial book by Lawrence Klippenstein, **David Klassen and the Mennonites**.<sup>3</sup> In the category of writing pertaining especially to the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde mention is made of the 1977 M.A. Thesis of Rev. Harold J. Dyck entitled "The Theological Development of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference formerly the Kleine Gemeinde from its roots to the present day".<sup>4</sup> This is an excellent look at Kleine Gemeinde faith and thought and remains highly relevant to the topic notwithstanding that a good deal of source material has become available since that time. The best treatment of the Russian Mennonites currently available is the 1978 doctoral thesis of James Urry, "The Closed and the Open, Social and Religious Change Amongst the Mennonites in Russia (1789-1879)", Unpublished Thesis, University of Oxford, London, England, 830 pages.

## Historians of the Kleine Gemeinde

Over the years there have been many capable historians in the Kleine Gemeinde. Foremost of these was Peter P. Toews (1841-1922) who served as the Aeltester of the Blumenhoff (Gruenfeld) branch of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde from 1870-1881. His work entitled **Sammlung von Briefen und Schriftliche Nachrichten zur Historie der Kleinen Gemeinde der Mennoniten an der Molotschna**<sup>5</sup> is the single most significant work presently available on this topic. The intervention of subsequent events did not allow the historical interest of Aeltester Peter P. Toews to culminate in a more extensive study. He had substantially completed the archival and research work necessary for such an undertaking and this present work is possible largely due to the fact that a good portion of the material which Aeltester Toews had collected is still extant and available.

One aspect which makes the work of Aeltester Peter P. Toews particularly significant is his sound and thorough methodology. Of particular value is his readiness to acknowledge the historical work of others in the Gemeinde. Aeltester Peter Toews advises us that much of what we presently know about the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde during the first half of the 19th century is due to the farsighted historical consciousness of the following men<sup>6</sup>: **Minister Klaas Friesen** (1793-1870) of Rosenort, Molotschna. He was the youngest brother of Abraham Friesen, the second Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde, and the father of Abraham M. Friesen, Cornelius P. Friesen and John P. Friesen who later settled in the village of Blumenort, Manitoba. **Rev. Johan Dueck** (1801-1866) of Muntau, Molotschna. He was the father of Abraham L. Dueck the Aeltester of the East Reserve Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Manitoba during the 1890s. **Deacon Isaac Loewen** (1787-1873) of Lindenau, Molotschna. He was the forefather of

all the Kleine Gemeinde Loewens. **Johan Toews** (1793-1873) of Fischau, Molotschna. He was the father of Aeltester Peter Toews, and of Cornelius P. Toews who was one of the 1873 Russian Mennonite delegates to America. **Heinrich Reimer** (1792-1884) of Muntau, Molotschna. His son Heinrich Reimer (1818-1876) settled in Blumenhoff, Manitoba. Consequently his descendants for many years were known as the Blumenhoff Reimers in order to distinguish them from the Reimers in Steinbach and Blumenort, Manitoba, who were descendants of Klaas Reimer, the founding Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde. All five of the foregoing men were dearly beloved pillars of the Gemeinde in Russia.

## **Russian Mennonite Historiography**

Much of Russian Mennonite faith and practice by the end of the 19th century was based on the thesis that pietism was the culmination of the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement of the 16th century. Consequently Russian Mennonite historiography has been very critical of any Russian Mennonite group which did not adopt this position. Russian Mennonite history has routinely been written from the pietist-cultural Mennonite perspective. In this historiography the Anabaptist-Mennonites are invariably portrayed as poor misguided souls, who although well-intentioned, have not yet come to the truth. In reviewing the history of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde, and other Anabaptist-Mennonite groups, one quickly realizes that there is another side of the story which is equally valid and true. The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde and other Anabaptist-Mennonite groups also have a history as well as any other segment of Russian Mennonite society. Hopefully, the reader will recognize that this history has an equal right to be told.

Some readers will find it surprising that anyone would challenge the thesis that pietism is the perfect fulfillment of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. This is the question which the reader will have to pose if he is to attain an understanding of the Russian Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. It was central to the faith of the Kleine Gemeinde that the true and perfect fulfillment and culmination of the Anabaptist-Mennonite vision was Anabaptist-Mennonite faith, life, theology, and practice itself. No foreign spiritual inspiration had been required at the time that the martyrs had shed their blood to seal their faith. In the view of the Kleine Gemeinde the multitude of Anabaptist-Mennonite writings and role models were a more than sufficient spiritual tradition and heritage for the future as well. They saw no reason to turn to pietism for renewal, an option which was later pursued by other Mennonites.

No claim is made that the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde had a perfect understanding of Anabaptist-Mennonite theology and practice. Nevertheless the founding of the Kleine Gemeinde was largely an attempt to recapture the Anabaptist-Mennonite vision. It is particularly significant that the Kleine Gemeinde was certainly one of the leading Molotschna Mennonite groups which was conscious and cognizant of this vision.

## **An Analytical Model**

An analysis will quickly reveal that Russian Mennonite society consisted of a great diversity in spiritual tradition and faith. For this reason it is necessary to establish a socio-economic-religious model for the purpose of analysis from which clear and unambiguous reference can be made to all Russian Mennonite groups. An attempt will be made to use terminology which is free of judgmental connotation in order not to disparage the views of certain groups and so that their self-view as Mennonites need not be questioned.

It is recognized that it is meaningless to use the same term "Mennonite" to describe differing spiritual traditions whose fundamental values were often in direct conflict with each other. Accordingly the term "Mennonite" will be reserved for the instances where reference is being made to all the variant groups of Mennonites in a particular geographical area; e.g. The Molotschna Mennonite Church as referring to all six Mennonite Gemeinden in the Molotschna colony in 1840. In order to refer to the various individual Mennonite groups within this overall Mennonite Church it will be necessary to use hyphenated terms.

First. Those Russian Mennonites who actively maintained the teachings and practice of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith will be referred to as Anabaptist-Mennonites. In their view the essence of the Anabaptist-Mennonite inspiration was the rebirth and continuation of the nonresistant Christian church which had been instituted by Christ and his apostles. The term Anabaptist by itself was very inappropriate as baptism on faith was only an incidental aspect of this vision of New Testament Christianity. Nevertheless the teaching of baptism on faith did

result in the rebaptism of many followers. As a tragic result the nonresistant Christians came to be lumped together with all manner of spiritualists, militants, and chiliasts as rebaptizers under the hated term of Anabaptist.

It was the position of the Anabaptist-Mennonites that Reformation leaders such as Menno Simons and Dirk Philips had consolidated diverse groups of nonresistant Christians into an organized movement and established Christian confession. The similarity to other rebaptizers was only superficial and therefore it seems quite appropriate to distinguish these nonresistant Christians as well as their followers in the faith as Anabaptist-Mennonites. The reference to Mennonites (originally Mennists) also seems quite appropriate as Menno Simons was undoubtedly one of the leading theologians and evangelists of the early Dutch Anabaptist-Mennonite church.

Second. Suitable terms must now be found for the other Russian Mennonite groups. When Jakob Enns was elected as the first Aeltester of the Molotschna Flemish Mennonite church in 1805 it quickly became evident that he had little understanding of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. In fact the early leadership of the Molotschna Grosze Flemish Gemeinde was largely devoid of any consciousness of the Anabaptist-Mennonite vision or of the need to emulate the same<sup>7</sup>. Nevertheless Aeltester Jakob Enns would have been shocked at the suggestion that he and his followers were no longer Mennonites. After all they lived in a settlement reserved exclusively for Mennonites and did all the things, wore the traditional clothes, and ate the food as had become customary among the Prussian Mennonites during the preceding two centuries. For these people being a Mennonite had become largely a cultural or ethnic experience. Consequently no term is more helpful in describing these people than the term "cultural-Mennonites". It is recognized, of course, that many individuals continued earnestly in the faith, and that the "cultural" Mennonites as a community continued to emphasize certain Anabaptist-Mennonite teachings such as adult baptism and nonresistance, to a degree.

This does not completely solve the problem as these cultural-Mennonites also included those to whom the traditional social and economic practice quickly became an important article of faith. The term conservative or orthodox has been employed but this does not seem suitable as a further explanation must then be provided as to the sense in which the particular group is orthodox or conservative. A Mennonite group which had adopted a conservative form of pietism could be called conservative Mennonites. Likewise a group which had adopted a conservative 17th century Prussian life-style which might have been progressive at the time. On the other hand there were other Russian Mennonite groups equally devoid of any consciousness of the Anabaptist-Mennonite vision and of the need to emulate the same, who grasped eagerly at any economic innovation or other means of conformity with the secular world. According to the selected nomenclature these would also be called cultural-Mennonites.

A variety of tendencies are evident among the cultural-Mennonites. The groups at the opposite extremes of this cultural spectrum can be identified as being progressive on the one hand, and regressive or reactionary on the other. In between these extremes one would find every shade and variation of opinion. These differing viewpoints will be identified by the following hyphenated terms. Those cultural-Mennonites who eagerly adopted technological and social innovation can be referred to as progressive-cultural Mennonites. Those who opposed such innovation can be referred to as reactionary-cultural Mennonites.

Third. This leaves one significant and vital branch of the Russian Mennonite church for which suitable terminology must be established. No religious movement since the physical onslaughts of the Roman Catholic inquisition had such influence on the Dutch/Prussian/Russian Mennonite Church as did "pietism". This movement will be further defined and discussed in chapter four. Suffice it to say here that the influence of pietism in all three countries had resulted in the establishment of important branches of the Mennonite church which to a greater or lesser extent had adopted some form of pietist faith. Consequently these branches of the Mennonite Church will be referred to simply as pietist-Mennonites. The influence of various differing forms of pietism will be recognized by adding adjectives as necessary. Thus the mild form of pietism or historic pietism which influenced the Orloff Gemeinde under Johann Cornies can be referred to as exactly that. Likewise the more radical form of pietism (Wuerttemberg Separatism) which influenced the formation of both the Mennonite Brethren and the Templers during the 1860's will simply be characterized as a radical pietism.

This completes the terminology for the socio-economic-religious model which will be adopted in this book. Of course there will be infinite variations and permutations of the three main types of Mennonite groups outlined. Thus the progressive Orloff Gemeinde formed in 1824 quickly evolved to combine the progressive cultural elements of a Johann Cornies with a mild form of pietism to create what became a mild pietist-cultural Mennonitism. This was also the spirit and character which eventually became imprinted on the faith and life of the greatest majority of the Mennonites remaining in Russia after the emigration of the 1870's.

In stark contrast to the progressive Orloff group was the reactionary cultural Mennonitism of Aeltester Jakob Warkentin of the Molotschna Grosze Gemeinde. It was these two groups which were locked in a bitter fight for the very soul of the Molotschna Mennonites during the second quarter of the 19th century. The Kleine Gemeinde as a group with a fervent Anabaptist-Mennonite orientation represented a third option among the Molotschna Mennonites.

## Glossary of Terms

From the preceding analytical model the reader can determine that this work is based on a somewhat unique orientation. Therefore it is necessary to provide definitions and explanations for several words and concepts which will be employed from time to time.

a) **Apostolic Church:** a reference to the various churches or Gemeinden described in the New Testament. The Anabaptist-Mennonites had a firm belief that not only was their faith and life to reflect that of Christ and his Apostles, but also that their church or Gemeinde was to emulate the organizational and functional structure of the Apostolic churches as described in the New Testament. It was their view that in order to be a part of the Church of Christ as referred to in the New Testament their Gemeinden should be founded and constituted on the same basis and principles. The period of the Apostolic church was considered to be the classical or golden era of the Christian faith and therefore was to be emulated whenever and wherever possible.

b) **Aeltester:** The term Aeltester in the German language is sometimes translated into English as "elder". Other Mennonite groups have adopted the term "Bishop" to describe the office and person formerly referred to in German as Aeltester. It seems that both translations are somewhat misleading so that for the sake of clarity the term Aeltester will simply be retained in this work. The office of Aeltester is an excellent example of the scriptural or evangelical (see below) organization of the Anabaptist-Mennonite Gemeinde (see below). The Anabaptist-Mennonites interpreted the admonition of the Apostle Paul to Titus "to ordain Aeltesten (elders) in every city" as meaning that every Gemeinde was to be under the supervision of an Aeltester. The evangelical duties, obligations and functions of this office and office holder in turn were defined in some 200 passages in the Old as well as New Testament. In addition the writings of Anabaptist-Mennonite leaders such as Menno Simons, Dirk Philips, Thielman J. von Braght, etc., as well as the guidelines and traditions which developed over several centuries, were given considerable weight in determining the powers and duties of the Aeltesten relative to their Gemeinde and the individual members. The Aeltester was democratically elected for life from among the ministers (Lehrer) of the Gemeinde. The Aeltester was responsible for the spiritual and secular welfare of his Gemeinde. His duties included the conduct of brotherhood meetings, performance of baptism and pastoral oversight.

d) **Evangelical:** The Anabaptist-Mennonites used the term evangelical in its traditional sense "of relating to, contained in, or in harmony with the New Testament especially the gospels". Thus if the Anabaptist-Mennonite would refer to something as having been done in an evangelical manner he would mean that it had been done in accordance with the scriptural teaching and example of Christ and his disciples. This must be distinguished from "evangelicalism" such as the 16th century evangelizing of the Roman Catholic Inquisition which literally murdered people if necessary to "save a soul". The concept of an evangelical faith must also be distinguished from protestant "evangelicalism" such as the snake oil hucksterism of the 19th century American wild west evangelists. Their misrepresentations and commercial exploitation of the weak and susceptible in order to "save a soul" represented little improvement over that of the Catholic Inquisition. Both types of "evangelicalism" were firmly rejected by the Anabaptist-Mennonites who felt that a discipleship inspired by love for Christ prohibited them from using any force or deceit to achieve even the most revered objectives. The Anabaptist-Mennonite believed that the great commission would be fulfilled through the prac-

tice of the evangelical teachings of Christ and that Christ would lead and guide his church as required for the redemption of mankind.

The traditional or Anabaptist-Mennonite usage of the term evangelical must also be distinguished from the use of the term in reference to the contemporary American “evangelical movement” with its central focus on the individual conversion experience. In fact, many branches of the “evangelical movement” specifically confess that the teachings contained in the gospels are not in force during the present age (Dispensationalism). The reference to the American Evangelical movement here includes the Fundamentalists, who grew out of the 19th century evangelical movement, and the so-called neo-evangelicals who do not share all the “fundamental” teachings of the Fundamentalists.

e) **Gemeinde:** The German word Gemeinde in the Bible is translated as either congregation, church or community. The use of these terms is confusing because of the modern North American image of the church as being a separate building-oriented devotional group organized on a congregational basis under the authority of a board of directors with a corporate constitution setting forth the rights, duties, responsibilities, and terms of office, of the pastor, the church members, etc. In order to avoid confusion the term “Gemeinde” will simply be retained to denote the Anabaptist-Mennonite concept of the Church of Christ as a visible and suffering church constituted and regulated by scriptural authority. The individual Gemeinde was the local authority or community which represented the peaceful Church of Christ. It was in and through the Gemeinde as a part of the body of Christ that the individual believer found and experienced fulfillment of his salvation.

f) **Hermeneutics:** The method or rules of scriptural interpretation. The teachings of the Anabaptist-Mennonites were founded solely on biblical authority. The hermeneutical principles of the Anabaptist-Mennonites were as follows: Every verse in the Bible or apocrypha was relevant to any questions which might arise so that no biblical research was complete without a verse by verse consideration of the entire Bible. Where apparent conflicts of interpretation existed the Anabaptist-Mennonites accorded precedence and supreme authority to the gospels. The remainder of the New Testament was of lesser authority while the Old Testament was subject to the entire New Testament. The Apocrypha ranked the lowest in authority and was mainly regarded as a valuable historical and inspirational source. The result of this hermeneutical scheme was that the Anabaptist-Mennonites tended to interpret the gospels literally and the apocalyptic writings symbolically. Some Protestant groups, such as the American Fundamentalists (dispensationalists), reverse the emphasis and interpret the apocalyptic writings as well as certain Old Testament prophecies, literally and the gospels symbolically.

In general the Anabaptist-Mennonites speak of reading the Bible in the spirit of the whole. By this they refer to the centrality of Christ and his church in the sense of the commandment to “come and take up the cross and follow Me”. The Anabaptist-Mennonites would interpret every scriptural passage in this light; e.g. The literalist would interpret Mark 14,22 “take, eat, this is my Body” to mean that the bread in communion was reconstituted so that the communion bread was now actually transformed into the flesh of Christ. Not so, say the Anabaptist-Mennonites who would refer to another passage where Jesus himself explained what he meant by such a reference to flesh, and that in fact “it is the spirit which quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you they are spirit and they are life”. John 6, 63. The Anabaptist-Mennonite noted that Christ had been received up into heaven where he sat on the right hand of God, and that therefore his flesh and blood could not be physically present in the communion bread and wine. Mark 19, 20; Hebrews 12, 2. Instead it was understood that the communion bread and wine symbolized the Holy Spirit which Christ bestowed upon the Church which he had instituted.

The hermeneutics of the Anabaptist-Mennonites was based on a progressive revelation which came to a focus in the teaching and life of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Gospels. By comparison the hermeneutics of the Protestants came to a focus in the epistles of Paul and especially Romans. As a result many Protestants viewed the unfolding of biblical revelation from the viewpoint of the teaching of Paul and not that of Christ. The mystics and spiritualists went even further and allowed that the revelatory work of God was not fulfilled in the New Testament and claimed that God continued to reveal himself to his chosen people through the Spirit. Nevertheless both Protestants and mystics referred to evangelical authority selecting

scriptures and texts in order to develop their teaching on a particular point. This has been referred to as “flat bible” or horizontal hermeneutics as opposed to the progressive historical approach of the Anabaptist-Mennonites.

g) **Lehrer:** The word Lehrer can be translated into English as teacher but is usually used in the Bible in the sense of minister. Here again the Anabaptist-Mennonites understood the office of Lehrer to be constituted by God through the scripture as was the case with the office of Aeltester. Likewise it was felt that the responsibilities and function of the office were defined by numerous passages of scripture. The Anabaptist-Mennonites held the same understanding with respect to the office of deacon as well as of many other concepts relevant to the day to day functioning and organization of their Gemeinde. Where something was not specifically dealt with in the Bible the leading Anabaptist-Mennonite authorities such as Menno Simons, Dirk Philips, etc., would be consulted. If they did not deal with the point, common sense would govern or frequently previous historical precedent would be referred to. Naturally a considerable body of tradition would develop over several centuries.

h) **Ohm.** The senior and most honoured members of the Gemeinde were referred to as “Ohms” meaning elders. The members of the ministerial (Lehrdienst) including deacons, ministers and Aeltester, were invariably included among the Ohms. The Ohms were consulted and referred to when major decisions had to be made by the Gemeinde and the individual members.

### **Acknowledgements and remarks.**

It is regrettable that it is impossible to write the history of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde without referring to other Russian Mennonite groups. This is unfortunate, because in order to write a factual and accurate history it is sometimes necessary to refer to various aspects of other groups which are unfavourable from the Anabaptist-Mennonite point of view. This is a difficult and delicate task, as one does not want to create any disrespect nor hurt any feelings. Therefore all attempts have been made to record this history objectively and without prejudice. Notwithstanding the best efforts, errors will have occurred, and for these I ask the reader for indulgence and forgiveness.

A few brief notes regarding methodology. Where substantial differences occur, biblical quotations follow the meaning of the Luther translation. Source material has been translated for the primary purpose of retaining the original meaning to the full extent possible. Therefore English grammar and diction has always been sacrificed. Where the English meaning of a particular word has remained somewhat unclear the German word has been inserted in brackets in the text. Of course these translations are far from perfect and consequently anyone undertaking any serious study on the basis of the source documents hereby published, is always referred to the original German manuscripts.

I trust that Russian Mennonite historiography will benefit from this historical effort. Certainly this work will again underline the need of a concise and balanced general Russian Mennonite history. I conclude these remarks with an admonition frequently repeated in the writings of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde: “Examine and prove everything and the good retain”.

### **Footnotes. Author's Preface.**

1. D. Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba, 1982. 165 pages.
2. (Toronto, Ontario, McMillan, 1974), 540 pages.
3. (Agincourt, Ontario, Book Society of Canada, 1982), 75 pages.
4. Unpublished Masters Thesis, Mennonite Brethren Bible Seminary, Fresno, California, 1977), 232 pages.
5. Unpublished Manuscript, Blumenhoff, Borosenko, South Russia 1874.
6. Ibid, 1-2.
7. See Sections 11.03 to 11.08.
8. For a discussion of this point, see William Klassen, et.al. *Anabaptist Interpretation of the Scriptures* (Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas, 1966).

# *Part One.*

## *The Anabaptist-Mennonites*

### **Chapter One.**

#### **The Church And The Reformation**

##### **1.01 Introduction.**

The Roman Catholic Church at the end of the 15th century was a fallen and corrupted theocracy. "For a century or more Western Europe had sought for the reform of the church 'in head and members' and had failed to find it."<sup>1</sup> The social and religious forces involved came to a momentous deciding point in 1517 when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the castle door in Wittenberg. The resulting century long struggle between the Catholic church and the Protestant reformers is known as the Reformation.

The Anabaptists, consisting of an assortment of spiritualists, mystics, millennialists and revolutionaries, constituted the third wing of the Reformation. Their only common bond was the desire for a radical reformation of church and society.<sup>2</sup> The radical wing of the reformation also included peaceful Anabaptists such as Conrad Grebel, Jakob Hutter and Menno Simons. Their vision was nothing less than the restoration of the "peaceful revolution" which had been proclaimed by Christ and his disciples. It is necessary to consider the essence and practical manifestation of this vision prior to proceeding with a study of the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites of the Molotschna Colony in South Russia.

The fundamental inspiration of the Anabaptist-Mennonites was the restitution of the full gospel teachings of nonresistant Christianity. Their faith cannot be understood without a consideration of the history and development of the Christian church from its inception to the Reformation. This history will be divided into three periods or phases. First, the period of the Apostolic or New Testament church, 33-313. Second, the period of a fallen Christendom, 313-1517. Third, the continuing parallel struggle for truth.

##### **1.02 The Apostolic or New Testament Church, 33-313.**

The history of the Christian church commenced with the birth of Jesus Christ. His advent heralded the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and the covenant which God had made with the patriarch Abraham. Jesus Christ was the Messiah or long awaited Redeemer who would bring salvation unto His people. He disappointed the popular Jewish expectation of a Christ who would institute a political empire to dominate the kingdoms of the world. Instead, Christ proclaimed a peaceful spiritual Kingdom. The gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John provide an account of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. The birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus are the most significant historical occurrences of all mankind.

The dispensation of grace inaugurated by the advent of Jesus was further manifested by the outpouring of the Holy Ghost on the believers in Jerusalem on Pentecost. With this blessing the church of Christ quickly grew with new congregations reported in Judea, Samaria, Damascus, Antioch and the Island of Cyprus. At the heart of this growth was the persecution which had commenced with the stoning of Stephen in Jerusalem. Antioch soon became a leading center of the infant Christian faith where it was preached and accepted by many Greeks. Here the followers of Jesus were nicknamed "Christians" by the hostile populace, a title little used by the followers of Jesus themselves till well into the second century.<sup>3</sup> The ministry and churches founded by the Apostles and their followers are generally referred to as the Apostolic churches.

The church of Christ also encountered momentous difficulties in its early period. The congregation at Corinth was wracked by party strife, immorality, ostentatious living and the influence of heathen teachings. The greatest difficulty was a doctrinal difference which developed between the church at Jerusalem, which was largely made up of Jewish converts, and the other growing churches such as Antioch whose membership was made up of Gentiles.



The apostle Paul was the God chosen leader and theologian who would heal these rifts and set the infant Christian church on a sound evangelical basis. His missionary ministry of visitation and letter writing was to become the model for the peaceful church of Christ. The greatest of the Pauline epistles was the letter to the Romans in which he demonstrated that the teaching of Christ had released the church from all obligation to Jewish legalism. His journey to Jerusalem to further resolve the schism resulted in his arrest and eventual transport to Rome to face the charges against him. From prison he continued to write to his beloved congregations. Tradition holds that he was beheaded near Rome under the terrible persecution of Nero in the year 64.<sup>4</sup>

The apostolic church was a suffering persecuted church. Many of the apostles came to an untimely death for the sake of their faith. Numerous accounts of the martyrs of the early church have been collected by Thielman J. van Braght who published them as Part One of his **Bloody Theatre or Martyrs' Mirror of Defenseless Christians**. James, the son of Zebedee, was beheaded in the year 45. Philip was stoned in 54. The apostle James the Lesser was stoned and clubbed to death in 63. James the brother of the Lord was stoned and beaten to death in 63. Barnabas was burned in 64. Mark died in 64 as he was being dragged to the stake for burning.<sup>5</sup>

The persecution of the followers of Jesus became an official policy of the mighty Roman Empire under the Emperor Nero in the year 66. As a result, large numbers of Christians were arrested. Many were crucified. This included the apostle Peter who is said to have been crucified with his head down. The apostle is to have requested this mode saying that he was not worthy to be crucified in the same manner as his Master. Others were torn to pieces by lions and women were tied to mad bulls and dragged to death. Others were burned at the stake in the garden of Nero where his guests could enjoy the spectacle.<sup>6</sup> The beheading of the apostle Paul has already been referred to. The year 70 included a number of noteworthy martyrs: the apostle Andrew by crucifixion; Bartholomew was tortured, flayed and finally beheaded; Thomas was tormented with hot plates and then cast into a furnace; Matthew the evangelist was nailed to the ground and beheaded. The slaughter continued. Luke the evangelist was hung from an olive tree in 93. John the evangelist was banished to the Isle of Patmos in 97. Timothy was stoned to death in 98.<sup>7</sup>

Persecution against the followers of Jesus continued throughout the second century. Notable martyrs of this period included Ignatius, Polycarp and Justin. Ignatius was the bishop in Antioch who was arrested and taken to Rome where he was thrown to the wild beasts. Polycarp was the bishop of Smyrna who was sentenced to be burned at the stake. He refused to be tied for his execution saying that God would empower him to stand firmly to the end. Justin Martyr (100-161) was a theologian who had written in defense of the Christians. He was scourged and beheaded in Rome.<sup>8</sup> In 166 the Emperor decreed that the property of the Christians would be given to their accusers. This brought about a new wave of persecution. The horrible tortures included the massacre of Christians in the theatres and sports stadiums by lions and other animals. Another wave of persecution commenced under the Emperor Decius who made an all out attempt to destroy the church.<sup>9</sup>

The apostolic church also grew inwardly through the development of doctrine and organization. The foremost leaders in the church after the apostles were the apostolic fathers. It is said that they were personally taught by the apostles. These included Clement and Hermas of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp of Smyrna, and Barnabas of Alexandria.<sup>10</sup> The early church espoused and practiced a simple Christianity. "Profoundly loyal to Christ, it conceived of Him primarily as the Divine Revealer of the knowledge of the true God, and the Proclaimer of a 'new law' of simple lofty and strenuous morality."<sup>11</sup> Some of the early Gemeinden possessed an unlimited confidence in charismatic leadership and gifts. Such a Christianity was very susceptible to false teachings. Self-seeking and false claimants to divine guidance soon arose who misled the church.<sup>11a</sup> Two movements gained in strength and threatened to overwhelm the church during the later half of the second century. The first danger came from the Gnosticism which was based on wisdom through which salvation and a true understanding of the universe and salvation were obtained. Gnosticism incorporated many concepts into its teachings and therefore consisted of many sects and a great variety of forms. Through its spiritualism Gnosticism rejected the historical premises of Christianity.<sup>12</sup>

The other serious peril came from the Montanism which professed that the promise of a Comforter had not been fulfilled at Pentecost. The movement was named after Montanus who

proclaimed himself to be the instrument through whom the spirit spoke. He professed a new dispensation in which the promise of Christ was fulfilled and replaced by the Holy Spirit. He was joined by two prophetesses who proclaimed that the end of the world was imminent and that the heavenly Jerusalem was about to be instituted at Phrygia where the believers should gather. In preparation the believers took up a strict asceticism consisting of fasting, abstinence, celibacy, etc. This was an attractive teaching at a time of secularization in the church.<sup>13</sup>

Such diversity underlined the need for the establishment of sound doctrine in the Christian church. Fortunately a number of leaders arose who were able to provide clarification in several areas. These leaders included Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement and Origen who are known as the church fathers. The Apostles Creed came out of the struggle against Gnosticism and Montanism. This creed or confession of faith was a summary of what the apostles had taught and was adopted so that believers might be spared the agony of false teaching such as Gnosticism and Montanism.<sup>14</sup> The Apostles Creed affirmed belief in one God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. It also affirmed belief in a holy Christian church, the communion of saints, forgiveness of sins, the resurrection and eternal life. The doctrine of the trinity was later clarified and further developed by a series of councils including Nicea(325), Constantinople(381), Ephesus(431) and Chalcedon(451).

The organization of the apostolic church was simple and functional. The church in each area was organized as a community or society of believers. The individual congregation or community will be referred to as the "Gemeinde". The initial leadership of the Gemeinden was in the hands of the apostles who were chosen directly by Christ or the Holy Spirit as in the case of Paul. But a reliance on charismatic gifts would soon be abused so that a somewhat more formal structure developed. Each Gemeinde was led by a threefold ministry consisting of Bishop(Aeltesten), ministers or teachers(Lehrer) and deacons.<sup>15</sup> The members of the ministerial and the more senior and prominent laymen were also referred to as elders (Ohms) or presbyters in Greek. The Aeltesten of the various Gemeinden were nominally of equal authority but invariably certain individuals came to be regarded as more authoritative. Common problems were dealt with by periodic conferences of the leaders of the Gemeinden in a particular region. The office of Aeltester was well established by the second century gaining strength through the strong leadership needed to repel the threat of Gnosticism and Montanism.<sup>15a</sup>

The apostolic church consisted of peaceful, nonresistant believers. Under persecution they went to their deaths like sheep to the slaughter. But the purity of the Apostolic church would not be maintained for long. By 153 A.D. the original division of worship into a worship service for prayer and instruction, and a separate service for the Lord's Supper had ceased. Now it became a part of the service of worship and edification. By the year 253 the view that the Lord's Supper was a sacrificial sacrament necessary for salvation was already at hand.<sup>16</sup> In the apostolic church only believers were to be baptised as a symbol of their faith. By the middle of the second century the view that baptism actually washed away sins was well established. The first mention of infant baptism is found in 185 when the practice is discouraged. But infant baptism did not become universal until the 6th century.<sup>17</sup> A hierarchial structure soon replaced the simple organization of the New Testament church.

### **1.03 The Fall of the Church, 313-1517.**

It is impossible to set an exact date for the fall of the Apostolic or New Testament church. As is evident from the above, many signs of serious decline were evident by the second and third centuries. But the year 313 figures prominently in any attempt to date the decline of the church. In the previous year the Roman Emperor Constantine had won a life and death military campaign against his enemies. Constantine believed that he had won the battle because he had been aided by the Christian God and therefore he also became a Christian. In 313 he issued the Edict of Milan whereby Christianity became a religion equal in status to the various heathen religions practiced at the time. In 380 the emperor Gratian issued an edict that Christianity was to be the only religion.

The result of this decree was that Christianity quickly became the official religion of the powerful Roman Empire. Through the patronage of Constantine the Church grew in wealth and soon became the richest religious organization in the Empire.<sup>18</sup> It now became an honour to be a Christian. Many heathen were converted to Christianity because this was a requirement for military and state service. Christianity became a tool of the state and an instrument for the

advancement of the ambitions of the Caesars. The New Testament believers church had become the Catholic or universal state church as opposed to the various small remnant groups of Christians who did not agree with the teachings of the state Christianity. Christians now killed and persecuted others. A fateful union had begun.<sup>19</sup>

It has been said that Christians converted the world but that the world conquered Christianity. Thousand of heathen now flocked into the church who were not really Christians. Heathen practices and ideas engulfed the church. One writer lists a number of unscriptural practices which the church had adopted by the fifth century.

“exorcism (Expelling of evil spirits); prayers for the dead; a belief in purgatory (place in which souls are purified after death before they can enter heaven); the forty-day lenten season; the view that the Lord’s Supper is a sacrament, and that its administrators are priests; a sharp division of the members of the church into clergy (officers of the church) and laity (ordinary church members); veneration (adoration) of martyrs and saints, and above all the adoration of Mary; the burning of tapers or candles in their honour; veneration of the relics of martyrs and saints; the ascription of magical powers to these relics; pictures, images, and altars in the churches; gorgeous vestments for the clergy; more and more elaborate and splendid ritual (form of worship); less and less preaching; pilgrimages to holy places; monasticism; worldliness; persecution of heathen and heretics.”<sup>20</sup>

The spiritual decline of the universal or state church was very much aided by the growth of a powerful hierarchical structure. Originally the Aeltesten or bishops had all been of equal rank but soon the bishops in the large city congregations became more powerful. In time the leading bishops in Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople and Rome came to be known as the five patriarchs. These were Gemeinden which had been founded by the apostles. Over the centuries the churches of the eastern patriarchs declined in power so that the patriarch of Rome became more prominent. This was very natural as Rome was the capital city of the mighty Roman empire which now supported and promoted the goals of the church. Eventually the supremacy of the bishop of Rome was acknowledged by the bishops in the western or European churches.<sup>21</sup> Soon the bishop of Rome came to be known as the pope, from the latin Papa, and ruled as the supreme head of the so-called Christian church in the western part of the Roman empire. Consequently his church became known as the Roman Catholic church.<sup>22</sup>

Gregory the Great is generally regarded as one of the leading popes of the early period of the church. His reign from 590-604 is representative of the medieval Roman church. He was the first pope to seize broad political power and to exercise the power formerly invested in the emperor. “Gregory served as secular ruler by appointing heads of cities, by raising armies, and by making peace treaties.”<sup>23</sup> He used the old political divisions of the empire to constitute new ecclesiastical structures. The church under his leadership also became involved in education, the administration of justice, and the care of the poor. Pope Gregory sent forth missionaries which resulted in the conversion to Christianity of England.<sup>24</sup> Evangelization was also carried out by means of the sword. During the second half of the first millenium since Christ, the church conquered and converted the barbarians of northern Europe.

The Christian church experienced a major setback through the rapid growth of Islam during the seventh century. The followers of Mohammed eventually overran the entire eastern half of the Roman empire and all of Africa which included several early church strongholds. By the end of the century the Arabs were threatening Europe itself. The Islamic forces conquered Spain and invaded France where they were defeated by a mighty Christian army under the leadership of Charles Martel, or Charles the Hammer, in 732 in the battle of Tours. Charles the Hammer was followed by his son Pepin who also became King of the Franks. Pepin formed an alliance with the pope in Rome defeating the Italian nobles who then surrendered some of their land to the pope. Thus the pope also became a secular ruler. Charlemagne, the son of Pepin, continued the alliance and was crowned as emperor by the pope in the year 800. The empire of Charlemagne stood for three things: law and order, civilization or culture, and Christianity. He also defended his empire and its Christendom against the invasion of the Saxons, who were a fierce German tribe.<sup>25</sup>

In the meantime the power of the Roman church was increasing rapidly. Much of this influence originated with the growth of papal power. The Mohammeden conquests had removed from the scene all the major rivals of the Roman bishop. By the eighth century the Roman pat-

riarch was generally acknowledged as the leading authority in the church. The Roman bishop or pope soon found it advantageous to claim a special authority for his theocracy. This was the doctrine of Apostolic succession which claimed that the pope stood in direct physical succession to the apostle Peter to whom Christ has entrusted the keys of the Kingdom. This doctrine was supported by the fact that historically Rome was one of the original apostolic congregations or Gemeinden. The power of the Roman pope was also aided by two mysterious documents. One document known as the "Donation of Constantine" purported to be an edict of Constantine ordering all the officials of the Christian church in the west to be subject to the Roman bishop. The "Isidorian Decretals" represented that the pope had been the supreme authority since the beginning. Although these documents were later shown to be forgeries they were accepted as genuine at the time and greatly aided the growth of papal power.<sup>26</sup>

With the fall of the empire of Charlemagne western Europe was divided into countless political entities under the feudal system of government and social organization. The Roman Catholic church was now the single most important political and secular power. But by the tenth century the Italian feudal lords had gained control over the papacy. The winner of the political squabbles of the day would frequently depose the pope and appoint his own protegee. In one period from 891 to 955, there were no less than 20 popes. Eventually the popes looked elsewhere for assistance and formed an alliance with Otto, the king of the Germans. In appreciation of his assistance the pope crowned Otto as emperor thereby restoring the empire of Charlemagne and Rome. Henceforth it was known as the Holy Roman Empire. Worse was yet to come. In 1033 the group of Italian nobles who controlled the papacy at the time appointed a 12 year old boy as Pope Benedict. His conduct was so bad that he was deposed. Later he resumed the papacy but then sold the office when he tired of it. This resulted in a tremendous outcry so that Benedict now refused to surrender his office. There were now three popes: Benedict, the pope who had replaced him as well as the pope who had purchased the office.

Eventually the Roman church tried to free itself from the political manipulation of the Italian nobles. A religious revival known as the Cluny movement was taking place in the church at this time. These reformers again called upon the German emperor for assistance. The emperor responded by appointing Pope Leo the Ninth, who was a Cluny supporter. The new pope and his successors were able to institute some reform. The revitalization of the papacy culminated in the reign of Hildebrand who became pope in 1073. Hildebrand believed firmly in the complete supremacy of the papacy over all secular power. He now challenged the power of the German emperor to appoint the church officials in his realm. When the emperor refused to abandon this practice the pope responded by excommunicating the emperor who initially conceded. But the end result was that Emperor Henry IV marched into Rome and deposed the pope.

During the years 1096 to 1291 the Roman popes also used the crusades as a tool in order to expand Christendom. The idea was that religious armies would be sent against the Turks in order to restore the Christian church in the east. Crowds were whipped into religious fervour with descriptions of how these infidels had desecrated the holy land. Those who would die in the war against the Turks were given full assurance of salvation.<sup>27</sup>

The papacy reached its greatest height under Pope Innocent who tolerated no opposition from secular powers. When the King of England became insubordinate he was excommunicated (1208) which meant that his subjects were no longer obligated to obey him. By the end of the thirteenth century this power again declined. Pope Boniface (1294-1303) excommunicated King Philip of France but this measure did not have the desired effect. By now nationalism had become a strong factor so that the nobles of France loyally supported their king. As a result Philip defied the pope (1309). The French kings now controlled the papacy for some 70 years. This was not acceptable to the Italian nobles who countered by constituting their own pope in 1378. There were now two popes who denounced, excommunicated, and anathematized (pronounced curses on) each other. In 1409 a council was held to rectify this deplorable situation with the result that another pope was constituted. In 1417 the Council of Constance finally appointed a fourth pope who was able to supercede the other three.

By now dissatisfaction and disrespect for the papacy was rampant. But these cries for reform were usually silenced by bloody persecution. By the 16th century the Roman church had become a corrupt political machine which was more concerned about its own power and self perpetuation than the teachings of Christ. But the problems went far deeper. The church itself

was filled with immorality and greed. Historian Will Durant has summarized the problems of the church under the following headings:

First. The most serious problem was the enormous wealth of the church. In some areas the church owned as much as three-quarters of all the land. This was not appreciated by the local nobles and princes because the church lands were exempt from taxation. At the same time the revenues from these properties flowed to Rome like a river of gold.

Second. The church regarded itself as the principal instrument of civilization; i.e. it felt obligated to maintain law and order, education, culture and morality. This required a vast administrative system. Often the ecclesiastical rulers were also civil governors of their region. These rulers taxed and spent like princes and lived in open immorality. They led their armies in war. Corruption was rampant. Anything was available for a price including ecclesiastical offices, dispensations and divorces. Those who purchased the church offices usually lived far away and merely lived off the revenues and pensions of the office.

Third. The personal morality of the clergy was scandalous. A wealthy church no longer required manual labour and consequently religious services were also neglected. Literally thousands of monks spent their time drinking in taverns and in the pursuit of women. Erasmus made the charge that "many convents of men and women differ little from public brothels". Fornication, drunkenness, gluttony, gambling, and dissipation were commonplace. Thousands of priests had concubines. Some confessors solicited sexual favours from female penitents.

Four. The sale of indulgences was practiced which would eventually spark the Reformation. Indulgences originated with the concept that the Catholic church had been given the authority to forgive sins. But this did not include the power to release sinners from the requirement that they perform penance for their sins. But many saints and martyrs had earned merits above the penances required of them. In addition the Catholic church believed that it possessed an infinite supply of these merits which could be conceived as a treasury from which the pope might draw to cancel some or all the penances which would have to be performed on earth or in purgatory. The end result was the sale of indulgences which provided remission of the earthly penalties of sin. The practice soon became widespread. Agents sold indulgences on a commission basis. A similar practice was the solicitation by priests of money for the saying of masses to reduce the time of a soul's punishment in hell. This in turn caused difficulties as only the wealthy could afford to pay for these masses.

Five. Other problems centered on the separation of piety from religion. Salvation was supposedly absorbed from the sacraments and a multitude of rites and relics. Excommunication and interdiction were cynically used as the tools of socio-economic and political oppression. Publications and learning were censored by the clergy. Heretics were brutally eradicated by the Inquisition. Spies abounded seeking for those not in accord with the existing order. As a result the people in many areas were bitterly turned against the clergy and the church.<sup>28</sup> This was the profile of the Roman Catholic church on the eve of the Reformation.

#### **1.04 The Struggle for Truth.**

The union of church and state under the emperor Constantine in 313 heralded the decline of the New Testament church as body of believers who practiced the teachings of Christ in their daily lives. But the development of the universal or catholic church did not completely supercede and eradicate this ideal. **The Martyrs' Mirror** contains the records of those who remained true to the concept of a believers church and who gave their lives for the sake of their faith. It is evident that over the centuries thousands of saintly Christians were martyred because they refused to accept the heathen superstitions which were infiltrating and subverting the Christendom of the day.

The opposition to the Catholic church also included many dissident groups founded on teachings which were later seen as being heretical. This included the Gnostics and Montanists who have already been mentioned. These movements also included the following: Arianism, Monophysites, Donatism, Eunomians, Anomeans, Apollinarians, Macedonians, Sabellians, Massalians, Novatians, Priscillianists, Manicheism, Pelagianism, Nestorianism, and countless others.

Frequently these movements were connected with local desires for independence. Of special importance was Arianism whose adherents evangelized the Germanic tribes in the third

century. Donatism denied the efficacy of the sacraments when administered by priests who were in a state of sin. The emperor Constantine mounted a major military effort to eradicate Donatism. Pelagius attacked the concept of original sin. Nestorius courted martyrdom with his doubts about the mother of God.<sup>29</sup> Other dissidents such as the Montanists endeavoured to maintain the purity and earnestness of the New Testament church. Contemporary writings indicate that the Montanists disapproved of infant baptism and the oath. They also practiced nonresistance and non-conformity. Nevertheless the Montanists were heretical in some aspects of their beliefs.<sup>30</sup> Many of these dissidents were earnest and zealous Christians. It is tragic that many of them fought and died for concepts and beliefs which were false and heretical.

One of the major reasons for the initial growth in the universal or Catholic church was the constant need for councils and creeds in order to combat these heretical movements. These church councils developed important evangelical doctrines such as the trinity and the Apostolic creed which have been almost universally accepted in Christendom. Other doctrines had no Biblical basis and were to become the root of much evil in the universal church. The victories of Constantine and other emperors brought thousands of heathen into the church because conversion was a requirement for military service or simply because it had become popular to be a Christian. These heathen converts knew nothing about an experiential Christianity in the apostolic model. In fact they brought pagan teachings into the universal church. All pagan religions had their sacrifices, priests, altars, relics, images and superstitions. Soon the church also adopted similar rituals and practices. The superstitions of the heathen religions were transferred to the crucifixes and to the relics of the saints and martyrs.<sup>31</sup> Others considered themselves Christians only because they had been born to parents who had been practicing Christians. These Christians knew nothing of a personal conversion to Christ and His Kingdom, and therefore could be referred to as nominal Christians.

These factors resulted in the concept of a higher and lower morality. The common Christian obtained salvation through the administration of the sacraments. At the same time there was the ascetic ideal of Christian perfection. Early Catholic theologians distinguished between the 'advice' and the requirements of the gospel. Scriptures such as the advice of Jesus to the rich young ruler were only for those who would live a holier life. This resulted in the development of monasticism which was based on the ideal of ascetic abstinence and voluntary poverty.<sup>32</sup> Many in the monastic movement contributed to the fall of the Catholic church as it diverted attention from the evangelical teaching of a believers church of practicing Christians.

The universal Catholic church also included many sincere and earnest Christian leaders who endeavoured to advance the cause of Christendom. Ambrose (340-397) was converted and baptised as an adult. At this time he gave all his money to the poor and became a leading Catholic bishop and writer. He was fearless in upholding a high standard of Christian living. Ambrose adhered to the so-called "just war" doctrine. Jerome (340-420) was a Catholic monk who lived in a cave in the Holy Land. He translated the Bible into Latin from the original Hebrew. This became known as the Vulgate Bible. The greatest of the early Catholic teachers and writers was Augustine (354-430). Augustine defended the church against the error of Pelagius who denied the concept of original sin. This teaching became the theological basis for infant baptism. His book *The City of God* had a great influence on all subsequent Christian thought. Regrettably, Augustine also endorsed the persecution of dissenting Christians which he advocated on the basis of Luke 14:23.

By the fourth century, western monasticism was in a chaotic condition. Saint Benedict (480-547) was the great reformer of Roman Catholic monasteries. He viewed the monastery as a permanent and elite formation of Christian soldiers. In time this ideal was lost so that many monasteries became breeding places for wickedness. In the tenth century there was a spiritual renewal which resulted in fresh interest in the monastic life. In 910 a new monastery was founded at Cluny in France which represented a renewed faith. The Cluny movement spread to other monasteries. Several popes and emperors were supporters of the Cluny movement. The need for reform in the church was acknowledged by Pope Innocent who ruled from 1198 to 1216. But he condemned the Albigensians and Waldensians. He was also anti-semitic and ordered that no Jew could hold authority over a Christian. At about this time the Dominican and Franciscan orders were constituted by the Catholic church. These orders became very popular for their missionary work and their care for the poor.

Other groups developed at this time which were not contained within the framework of the

Catholic church. These included the Albigenses who believed in a good God and an evil God. This was known as dualism. The Albigenses believed that all secular matter was the work of the evil God and rejected the Old Testament. They believed that Christ did not have a real body and that He did not die a real death. The Albigenses were heretical.

The Waldenses were followers of Peter Waldo a rich merchant in Lyons. He believed that the church should be founded and guided solely by the New Testament model. In 1176 he sold all his goods and distributed his money to the poor. He had his followers go about the country two by two preaching and helping the needy. They would not swear an oath and were non-resistant. They also rejected the sacraments. The teachings of the Waldenses was very successful with the result that the Catholic church instituted the Inquisition to eradicate the movement. The Inquisition was the name of the church tribunal which would question the suspect for heretical teachings. Anyone found guilty was released to the civil authorities if they would not recant; i.e. excommunicated. The civil authorities usually burnt these heretics at the stake. The Waldenses were so popular in France that the Inquisition was unable to handle the situation. A crusade was declared against the Waldenses with the result that the blood flowed like water. The Waldenses eventually found a refuge in the high valleys of the Alps.<sup>33</sup>

There were also individuals who challenged and rejected many of the teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic Church. One of these was John Wycliffe (1320-1384). Wycliffe was a professor at the university of Oxford who criticized the church for its wealth and secular power. He advocated a radical reform and restoration of the New Testament ideals of poverty and simplicity. He believed that the Bible should be the ultimate authority for Christians and translated the Bible into English so that it could be read by the common people. The church tried to destroy Wycliffe but he was protected by nobles who sympathized with his teachings. His followers were known as the Lollards. They denounced the pope and practiced simplicity and other evangelical teachings. The church enacted a law against the Lollards so that they were excommunicated and burned at the stake.

The teachings of Wycliffe also spread to continental Europe. Here they influenced John Huss (1369-1415) who was a priest and dean of theology at the University of Prague in Bohemia. Huss adopted the teachings of Wycliffe and preached against the immorality of the church. He also believed in predestination. He rejected the practice of selling indulgences and believed that Christ was the only head of the true church. The church reacted by excommunicating Huss and after a period of imprisonment Huss was burned at the stake. A terrible slaughter of the followers of Huss now took place. Some toleration was finally granted by an accord of 1436.

The Medieval Mystics were another important influence on the thought and life of the reformers. The mystics sought a direct union with God by the cultivation of an inner personal religion. For the mystic the ultimate authority in matters of faith was his own personal experience. Consequently the mystics rejected both the sacramental authority of the Catholic church as well as Biblical authority. They believed that they could best know God through self-denial, meditation and direct revelation. Many mystics were influenced by Joachim of Fiore (died 1202) who claimed to be completely taught by the Holy Spirit. He rejected the authority of Scripture but used the books of Daniel and Revelations to support his understanding of history. A new age was imminent which would be followed by a millenium in which those chosen by God would reign supreme. Many religious leaders in the 16th century relied on this reasoning to predict the end of the world. Martin Luther was influenced by the German mystics Eckhart and Tauler.<sup>34</sup>

Mysticism found considerable support in Holland and Germany. It was especially popular among a movement known as the Brethren of the Common Life. The Brethren differed sharply from the medieval mystics in that they were devoted students of the Bible. They placed great authority on the Bible which they interpreted quite literally. As a result of their personal faith the Brethren of the Common Life became known for their piety and discipleship. The movement also placed considerable emphasis on Christian education. Their schools soon gained a good reputation for piety and learning. Thomas a Kempis (died 1471) was one of the best known of the Brethren of the Common Life. John of Wessel was another leader. He was a professor at the University of Erfurt in Germany. He taught salvation by grace alone. He also rejected indulgences and transubstantiation. The church of his day did not approve of such ideas and threw Wessel into prison where he died in 1489.<sup>35</sup> Both Erasmus and Luther

had studied under the Brethren of the Common Life.<sup>36</sup>

The Renaissance was one of the most important factors which made the Reformation possible. The Renaissance was the 14th and 15th century recovery of the knowledge and culture of ancient Greece and Rome. The movement was originally inspired by the increase in commerce and first came to bloom in Italy which was the center of trade at the time. Initially the movement idolized the pagan teachings of antiquity which included vices as well as virtues. Consequently the Italian phase of the Renaissance came to be known for its extravagant immorality.<sup>37</sup> Humanism was the life and breath of the Renaissance. A renewed emphasis on education and culture diverted the attention of people from the superstitions of the medieval world. Humanism reflected a new spirit of freedom and inquiry. The arts and sciences flourished. Humanism in northern Europe has more of a religious character and dealt with the difficulties of the church. Here the humanist scholarship was directed into a renewed study of the Bible and classical Christian writings. The Christian humanists were found in most major universities and cities where their scholarship did for Christianity what the Italian Renaissance had done for the knowledge and culture of ancient Rome and Greece.

Erasmus (1466-1536) was the leading writer and scholar among the Christian humanists. He ridiculed and satirized the abuses and corruption of the church but always remained Catholic. Erasmus believed that reform would come without destroying the church. He stressed the fundamental goodness of man. He believed that the purity of the church could be restored through Christian education and piety. His writings stressed a simple stoic Christian life divorced from religious institutions. The scholarship of Erasmus and other Christian humanists made available the historical sources through which the reformers were able to determine that the church had fallen.<sup>38</sup> The work of Erasmus was so influential that it was said that "Erasmus laid the egg (the reformation) and Luther hatched it".<sup>39</sup>

By the end of the 15th century many influences and problems came to a head. The scholarly efforts of men like Erasmus brought about a tremendous revival in the understanding of Christianity. The invention of the printing press resulted in the rapid dissemination of this new knowledge. In a short time many editions of the Bible had appeared in each of the major European languages. These Bibles and the popular scholarly works of the Christian humanists became available at a time of spiritual hunger, especially in Germany. This spiritual interest found expression in pilgrimages and the veneration of relics. Superstition was rampant and a 13 year famine commenced in 1490. The peril of a Turkish invasion was very ominous.<sup>41</sup> The peasants in Germany were in a state of unrest with four insurrections taking place around the turn of the century.

## 1.05 The Protestant Reformation

This was Europe on the eve of the Reformation. A veritable tinderbox of discontent and revolt waiting for the spark which would set it ablaze. Martin Luther (1483-1546) was the man who would make the first break with Rome thereby igniting the fires of the Reformation. Luther was a Catholic monk and the head of his monastery. He was a doctor of theology and professor at the University of Wittenberg. In the monastery he had lived a life of strictest asceticism. He felt deeply oppressed by his sin and did all in his power to earn his salvation through good works. Luther kept minute lists of his wrongdoings and meticulously performed the penances prescribed for him. His feeling of utter despair and sinfulness punished his conscience dreadfully. His "seelenangst" reached the point that he felt himself to be the unloved child of destruction. God loved everyone but himself for God was just.<sup>41</sup> But through the study of the Bible and especially the writings of the apostle Paul he was finally able to realize some comfort for his soul. Later he recalled how the words "The just shall live by faith" from the epistle to the Romans had suddenly caught his mind. This seemed to deal exactly with his spiritual needs. Until this point Luther had been attempting to earn salvation by his own works. Now Luther realized that man could never earn his own salvation which was pure and simply a work of the grace of God. For Luther the insight of the apostle Paul in Romans 1:17 had become the key to the understanding of the work and nature of God.<sup>42</sup>

This conversion experience probably took place in 1512.<sup>43</sup> In 1517 Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the castle door in Wittenberg. This was the spark which kindled the Reformation. The 95 Theses challenged the legitimacy of the indulgences which were shamefully being auctioned at the gates of Wittenberg. Luther had not expected that these 95 scholarly points



would cause such commotion. It was not unusual for a professor to publicly post his theses with a view that perhaps another scholar might challenge him to a public debate. But the invention of the printing press had changed things. Within two weeks the writings of Luther had spread over all of Germany. Luther had placed his finger on one of the most sensitive spots of the mighty Roman Catholic church.

The theology of the church by now held that the salvation of man was dispensed by the priest in the administration of the sacraments. By challenging the indulgences, Luther was attacking the very foundation of the Catholicism of the day. His theses were interpreted as an attack against the supreme authority of the pope. The essence of protestant reformation theology was: 1) that salvation was by grace alone, 2) men gained salvation directly from God as a gift and not through the church hierarchy, 3) the true church was the body of the elect and not an ecclesiastical organization, and 4) the Bible was to be the final authority in matters of faith and morals.

The Roman Catholic church responded to the theses of Luther by denouncing him as a heretic in 1520. He replied by burning the papal bull and in 1521 his excommunication was made absolute. These years were stormy ones for Luther as he defended his faith before diets (parliaments) and kings. The Roman Catholic establishment made every effort to deal with Luther as they had resolved earlier opposition. But circumstances had changed for many of the secular rulers sympathized with Luther even though they were motivated mainly by a desire to be freed from the oppressive Roman yoke. The ruler of the lands in which Wittenberg was located was the Elector Frederick of Saxony, who sympathized with the teachings of the reformers and protected Luther.

Slowly but surely central and northern Germany was reformed. The papacy was rejected and the priesthood eliminated. Only two of the sacraments were recognized, the Lord's Supper and baptism. Luther denied the teaching of transubstantiation but he still allowed that Christ was present in the bread because the Godhead was present everywhere. The reforms were instituted in those principalities in Germany and northern Europe which had a ruler sympathetic to the Protestant cause. Freedom of religion meant freedom for the ruler to choose the faith of his subjects.

Although his early writings had advocated the idea of a priesthood of believers, Luther eventually dropped the idea. During the time of the peasant revolts against the princes in Germany (1524-1525) Luther threw his support behind the authority of the state. Luther's view of the revolting peasants was stated as follows: "On the obstinate, hardened, blinded peasants, let no one have mercy, but let everyone, as he is able, hew, stab, slay, lay about him as though among mad dogs, ...so that peace and safety may be maintained. ...And beyond all doubt, these are precious works of mercy, love and kindness....."<sup>44</sup> Luther believed that man had a dualistic nature meaning that murder, theft and plunder in the service of the state was not attributed to the Christian as sin. Indeed such service was the obligation of the believer as the state was given authority from God. In spite of his "spiritual insensitivity" Luther deserves full credit for inspiring the Reformation and for his establishment of the principle that man was saved only by faith. The reform church established by Luther called itself The Evangelical Church (Evangelische Kirche).

The second of the major protestant reformers was Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531). Zwingli studied in Basel, Berne and Vienna where he was very much influenced by the Christian humanists. He entered the service of the Catholic church and in 1519 he became the pastor of the church in Zurich. Originally he had intended to reform the church through education but he came under the influence of Luther and in 1518 he also attacked the sale of indulgences. He reformed the church in Zurich by the removal of images, altars, relics and processions. The regulation of the church and the care of the poor was placed in the hands of the city council. The educational system was improved. Zwingli differed from Luther in his understanding of the Lord's Supper. He believed that Christ was only in heaven, and that the bread and wine were merely symbols of the body and blood of Christ. It is here in Zurich that the peaceful Anabaptist movement first came into bloom. The popularity of Zwingli after his death in battle in 1531 declined and eventually the areas which he had reformed adopted the teachings of Calvin.<sup>45</sup>

John Calvin (1509-1564) was the third major Protestant reformer. Calvin was born near Paris, France, where he studied the classical languages and the writings of the church fathers.

He was influenced by the teachings of Jacques Lefevre who published a commentary on the epistles of Paul with an emphasis that God saves through grace alone. An essay in this vein was published in 1533 and attributed to Calvin with the result that he had to flee for his life. He wandered about for two years, finally settling in Basel, Switzerland, where he wrote his famous **Institutes of Christian Religion**.

This book is considered to be one of the most important writings of the Protestant Reformation. Calvin accepted Luther's fundamental formulation that man is saved by faith alone but his doctrine also contained a special emphasis on the providence of God. God is good and he moves the minds of man and the mechanism of nature to act according to his will. "Chance is an appearance to us because his eternal council is hidden within his breast".<sup>46</sup> This emphasis on the providence of God revived the old Augustinian teaching of predestination. Calvin bravely asserted the doctrine to its logical consequences when he wrote "that Christ died on the cross not for all mankind, but only for the elect; that God does not will that all men be saved; that men were created by God who he decreed from all eternity to be consigned to an eternal destruction". Calvin argued that all men were deserving of death and that if any were chosen for salvation this was an act of grace.<sup>47</sup>

The salvation of God is effected by the Holy Spirit who works when and where he wills creating repentance and faith which was the crucial connecting link with God. Here Calvin went beyond the formulation of Luther by asserting that "This new life of faith is salvation, but it is salvation unto righteousness".<sup>48</sup> The consequential works of the believer are the evidence that he was chosen. "We are justified not without, and yet not by works". The standard for the Christian was the law of God. Thus Calvin left the door open for a works-righteousness as strict as that which Luther had rejected in Catholicism.

The organizational reformation conceived by Calvin was far more thorough than that of Luther. He asserted that three institutions had been constituted or chosen by God. Namely, the church, the sacraments and the state. All three were divine institutions established to maintain the Christian life. Calvin promoted a church polity resembling that of the New Testament church. Calvin also proposed a new catechism and introduced a liturgy.<sup>49</sup>

In the meantime the French preacher Farel had come to Geneva where his fiery teaching swayed support in favour of a reformation of the church. By 1535 his teaching had gained great strength. A riot swept through the city, the images were demolished, the mass abolished, and the monks and nuns were driven away. In 1536 the General Assembly voted to establish Protestantism as the official religion of Geneva. Farel felt inadequate for the task of restoring peace to the city and of implementing the decision to reform. Consequently he invited Calvin to come to Geneva for this purpose. Calvin now presented his ideal of a model city of God to the city council. The proposal was rejected and Calvin was banished. But three years later his opponents were defeated and Calvin now returned to Geneva with a free hand to institute his reformation.

Calvin now drew up his **Church Order** which was a set of regulations for governing the church. The organizational basis was the congregation which was ruled by pastor, teacher, elder and deacon. The elders were chosen by the congregation and together with the pastors formed the consistory which had the duty to see to the purity of the church. Consequently the consistory was also obligated to excommunicate offenders who were then directed to the civil authorities. For Calvin the concept of separation of church and state meant that the church had the freedom to excommunicate. Bitter opposition arose against the strictness with which this discipline was applied and Calvin might have been deposed had it not been for the case of Servetus. Servetus was a Spanish heretic who came to Geneva where he was arrested and tried. The opponents of Calvin tried to save Servetus and thereby lost a great deal of popularity. Servetus was found guilty and burned to death. Calvin now used this stigma to vanquish his opponents. After 1555 Calvin was the undisputed ruler of Geneva. He now proceeded to institute his social gospel. He established the University of Geneva which trained the leaders of government and the church. Soon these graduates were all over Europe where they spread his teachings. Thus the influence of Calvin was extended all over Europe.<sup>51</sup>

Luther, Zwingli and Calvin were the three great Protestant reformers. Their teachings were to remake the face of Europe. It is appropriate to consider the results of their work. The reforms of Luther were accepted in most of Germany and Scandinavia. His principal teaching of salvation by grace initially had the unfortunate connotation that any attempt to live a

God-fearing life was seen as a sinful effort to earn one's salvation. Consequently the morality in many areas of the Luthern reformation was lower than in the lands which had remained Catholic. The reformation church of Luther later also became very orthodox and doctrinal with an emphasis which was not unlike the sacramentalism of the Catholic church.

The teachings of Calvin took hold of England, Scotland, France and Holland. The church in Scotland was reformed by John Knox (1505-1572). Knox was born in Scotland but had lived in Geneva where he adopted the teachings of Calvin. He returned to Scotland in 1555 where he advocated reform through his powerful preaching. In 1560 the Scottish parliament decreed that Protestantism would become the state religion. The reformed church in Scotland became known as the Presbyterian church because of its Calvinistic organization which was based in the concept of elders or presbyters.

The reform of the church in England was accomplished in a less dramatic way. Henry the Eighth initiated reform when he made himself the supreme ruler of the Catholic church in England in place of the Roman pope. Many Catholics objected to this so that the human bonfires of the Protestant reformers also found their way to England. The fortunes of the Catholic and Protestant parties in the Church of England changed several times depending on the government in power. By the time of the Elizabethan Settlement of 1563 the Catholic party was in the minority. In the meantime many Protestants had been banished and had fled to Geneva where they adopted the teachings of Calvinism. Upon their return to England they insisted upon a more complete reform of the church and were known as Puritans. They demanded the abolition of clerical dress, kneeling at the Lord's Supper, the removal of the marriage ring and the sign of the cross at baptism. i.e. They insisted on the removal of the vestiges of Catholicism. The ministers were to be chosen by the people.

This amounted to a demand for the Calvinist form of church polity instead of Episcopalian.<sup>51</sup> The Puritans worked for reform from within the church. Another group thought that the ideal of reform from within was hopeless and decided to leave or separate from the church. They believed that all local churches should be independent. These separatists were known as Congregationalists. They were also referred to as Pilgrims. The English Baptists developed out of the separatist Congregational movement.<sup>52</sup> The Puritans gained the upper hand under Oliver Cromwell in 1649. John Milton the author of *Paradise Lost* was a Puritan. Catholicism was briefly restored under King James II. The religious wars in England were finally ended when William the Third of Holland ascended the English throne and established Protestantism.

The Reformation on the continent did not go unopposed by the Roman Catholic Church. The emperor Charles V fielded mighty armies to quell the upstart movement. However his effort to convert the Protestant reformers was unsuccessful and in 1555 he made peace with the Lutherans through the peace of Augsburg whereby the right of each secular ruler in Germany to chose the religion of his subjects was recognized. At the same time the reform movement was running out of steam. After the Peasant War of 1525 Luther no longer sympathized with the lower classes even though their protest was justified. Many of the radical reformers advocated the violent revolutionary overthrow of church and state. This caused more conservative individuals to choose to remain with the existing order. The Protestants were also sadly divided. The teachings of "salvation by faith alone" had also become a license for immorality in some areas so that this argument could be employed against those who were wavering.

The Protestant reform movement also stimulated a reform from within the Catholic church which was known as the Counter-reformation. Three weapons were created with which to combat Protestants and other heretics. The Index censored all books read by Catholics. The Spanish Inquisition was a program organized to ferret out dissenters and heretics through spies, informers and agents. Offenders were encouraged to recant through torture and intellectual persuasion and when this was impossible they were burned or otherwise disposed of. The third weapon was the Order of Jesuits organized by Loyola. The Jesuits were an elite, disciplined, para-military body who were determined to recapture ground lost against the Protestants. They were very successful and recovered Poland and Austria for Catholicism. Later they also evangelized South America.

The Calvinists or Huguenots in France bore the brunt of this counter attack. The Calvinists in France were a wealthy and powerful minority party. Many were members of the nobility and were well educated. The Huguenots fared quite well during a religious war with

the Catholics which commenced in 1562. A temporary truce in 1570 acknowledged their authority in certain areas. The leader of the Huguenots was Henry of Bourbon who was a possible successor to the French throne. This was very disturbing to many of the more fanatical Catholics who responded by developing a program to eradicate the French Calvinists. On St. Bartholomew's Day, 1572, a surprise massacre was launched. Over 10,000 Huguenots were butchered throughout France. This led to a renewed religious war until 1629 when La Rochelle the last Protestant stronghold in France was finally captured.

The Catholic counter attack reached its climax in the Low Countries. The Spanish Inquisition disposed of more than 18,000 martyrs in Holland alone where the persecution reached great intensity under King Philip II of Spain. As a result, opposition developed under William of Orange who threw off the Spanish yoke in 1568. Queen Elizabeth of England stood by Holland at this difficult time. King Philip countered with the Spanish Armada which was defeated resulting in a terrible blow to Spanish power. The Reform movement in Holland was quite diverse. The mystical Brethren of the Common Life had left considerable influence. The radical reformers, or sword bearing Anabaptists, were particularly strong. Nevertheless, the Calvinists supporters gained sufficient strength so that by 1571 the first synod was held. The Calvinist University of Leyden was established in 1575. The Calvinists in Holland adopted the presbyterian form of church polity and became known as the Dutch Reformed Church. The Dutch Protestants were far more tolerant of other Christians than their brethren elsewhere in Europe.<sup>53</sup>

The development of Arminianism within the Dutch Reformed Church should also be mentioned. Arminius (1560-1609) was a Dutch Reformed minister who departed from Calvinist teaching and asserted that even though certain individuals were predestined or chosen for salvation they must still choose to accept God's election. He taught that Christ had died for all men and that it was possible to fall from grace. His view became so popular that the Synod of Dort (1618) was held to resolve the resulting uproar. This synod included Calvinists from the Reformed churches in England, Germany and Switzerland. Here the teaching of Arminianism was soundly rejected. But a small group of Dutch churches (Remonstrant) continued to adhere to the teaching.

Arminianism also infiltrated the Anglican Church where it was adopted by John Wesley (1703-1791) who made it part of the Methodist creed.<sup>54</sup> Through Jakob Arminius a large part of the Protestant world had almost been brought to the evangelical truth which confessed the doctrine of the total fall and depravity of man as well as the free will of man. John Wesley and his Methodists, in turn, heralded the rise of the 19th century Protestant Evangelical Movement.

The political and social forces brought into motion by the Protestant Reformation were not resolved until the middle of the 17th century. The Peace of Augsburg in 1555 had established a relative peace between the Catholics and Protestants in Germany but the Lutheran Church in Germany was soon weakened by internal dissension and doctrinal disputation. Some persecution occurred between factions. The Formula of Concord in 1577 was intended to resolve these disputes but the result was a very technical and scholastic orthodoxy which rivaled the Catholicism of the Middle Ages. By 1566 Protestantism in Germany was declining in the face of a renewed Catholic thrust. The German princes reacted by forming a Protestant union. War started when the succession to the throne of a newly Protestant Bohemia fell into doubt.<sup>55</sup> The resulting religious war lasted for thirty years. The conflict was finally concluded with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 which again recognized that each ruler had the right to choose the religion of his subjects. This principle was now also extended to Calvinists. The thirty year religious war had a great social cost for Germany. Many parts of the country were completely destroyed by the continual savage fighting. Famine, diseases and plagues came in the wake. By 1648 Germany was weak and devastated and its population had been reduced from fifteen million to less than five million. The borders of Catholicism and Protestantism were now fairly well established and permanent. The Protestant Reformation was completed.

## 1.06 The Radical Reformers

The third wing of the Reformation has been referred to as the Anabaptist movement. This nebulous term was used to describe an assortment of spiritualists, chiliasts, Antitrinitarians, mystics, revolutionaries, non resistant Christians, and others. These radicals all believed that

the Protestant reformers had not completed the task of reforming the Catholic church. These elements had no common ground other than sharing the goal of the reformation of the existing church and state by radical means.<sup>56</sup> This included the peaceful Anabaptists with their vision of the restoration of the nonresistant New Testament church.

In his book *The Anabaptist View of the Church*, Franklin H. Littell has explained why the term Anabaptist came to be applied so tenaciously when it was neither descriptive of nor desired by these radicals themselves. The word Anabaptist is a derivative of the Greek word for rebaptism. The German word was *Wiedertauffer* meaning rebaptizer. Those who separated themselves from the church were frequently rebaptized. Hence the name was descriptive from the point of view of both the Protestant reformers and Catholics. The radicals replied that infant baptism was not actually a baptism and that therefore they did not rebaptize, but to no avail. Littell goes on to explain that eventually the name came to be applied to everyone who stood out against the authority of the church and state.

„Baptism became important only because it was the most obvious dividing line between the two patterns of church organization. “Anabaptist” was a popular term with the authorities because it offered them an excuse for forcibly suppressing the radicals. The enemies of the movement were insistent on the use of the term “Wiedertauffer” or “Anabaptist” because the radical groups thereby became subject to the death penalty. Under ancient Roman law against the rebaptizers (Donatists), those called “Anabaptist” could be suppressed by the sword, even though the extension of the law in this fashion was at best of doubtful legality. The campaign of propaganda and suppression succeeded. At Speyer in 1529 the emperor ruled against the “Anabaptists” in final fashion, and persecution by imprisonment and exile and death spread throughout the length and breadth of the Empire. But the radicals themselves did not admit the truth of the charge. And the movement itself cannot be classified properly in terms of the baptismal rite.”<sup>57</sup>

Littell also points out that even the peaceful or nonresistant Anabaptists had no formal ritualistic definition of baptism in their faith and practice such as was found among the later English Baptists. Consequently the reference to baptism is not generically descriptive from the standpoint of the nonresistant Anabaptists. The confusion with respect to the meaning of the term Anabaptist is highlighted by Cornelius Krahn who refers to one Reformation source listing forty different Anabaptist groups. These include the following: Muensterites, Muentzerites, Staebler, Austerlitzer, David Jorists, Mennonites, Silent Brethren, Hofmannites, Apostolical, Holy Brethren, Blood Thirsty, Barefooted Brethren, Priest Murderers, Adam Pastorites, Gabrielites, Swiss Brethren, Pilgrim Marbeckites, Epicureans, and Hutterites.<sup>58</sup>

It is evident that some consideration of the various distinctive types of Anabaptism would be helpful to an understanding of the reformation era. The main generic categories have been identified as Chiliasts (radical millennialists), spiritualists and mystics, Social Revolutionaries, Antitrinitarians, and Christian revolutionaries (nonresistant Anabaptists). The peaceful Anabaptists will be considered in the next section. It is noted that the foregoing categories are much oversimplified as many radicals were inspired by more than one influence while others simply defy categorization.

First, the Chiliast or radical millennialists. The most important figures in this category were Thomas Muentzer, Hans Hut, Melchoir Hofman, Jan Matthijsz, Jan van Leiden, Bernhard Rothman, and Jan van Batenburg. The most famous or infamous of the chiliasts was Thomas Muentzer (1490-1525). Muentzer was a Lutheran pastor who embarked on a crusade against the relics, sacraments, and authority of the church and state. He was a follower of the “inner light” which he held to supercede scripture. He believed himself to be a prophet and sought to restore the primitive church which he developed on the basis of certain Old Testament teachings. He also advocated revolutionary changes in society. Muentzer was possessed of a fiery mysticism. He formed the Allstedt League which was a secret society to promote the imminently expected Kingdom of God by means of wiping out all vestiges of Catholic superstition.<sup>59</sup> The chiliasm of Muentzer was based on his interpretation of the dream of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel chapter two. He believed that a transformation would be brought about by the spirit of God while the last empire consisting of church and state went to its doom. This would be fulfilled by the institution of the earthly kingdom of Christ.<sup>60</sup> Eventually Muentzer was one of the leaders of the peasant revolt in Germany and was executed in 1525 after being captured.<sup>61</sup>

Hans Hut was a lay preacher and bookseller. He was fascinated with the prophecies of

Daniel and the eschatology of Revelations. He shared Muentzer's belief in the imminent arrival of the earthly kingdom of Christ. Hut worked out the eschatological details very carefully. He believed himself to be the prophet in Daniel 12,6 whose duty it was to mark the forehead of the 144,000 with the sign of the cross. In the end times the godless would be destroyed by the true Christians. Likewise the priests, princes and knights if the Turk did not strike them down. Hut was very much influenced by spiritualism and mysticism.<sup>62</sup>

Melchior Hofmann (1495-1543) was a fiery lay preacher of Lutheran origins. He preached across Europe attracting a large following. He was very gifted at allegorical interpretation of scripture and could use every symbolism, especially the number seven, to good advantage. He preached that the kingdom of the elect would soon appear on earth. Through his own calculations based on Daniel and Revelation, he concluded that the earthly kingdom would be instituted in the year 1533. This would take place in Strassburg where the 144,000 saints foretold by prophecy would assemble to institute the New Jerusalem. Hofman believed that he was Elijah, one of the two reincarnated messengers who would make the final arrangements for the great event. Hofmann himself did not advocate violence but his spiritualism and mysticism would attract those who were so inclined.

The preaching of Hofmann was popular in Holland where converts by the thousands were converted to him. Jan Matthisz was converted by one of the followers of Hofmann. Matthisz became a militant preacher of chiliasm. In 1534 he traveled to Muenster where Bernhard Rothman had instituted a Luthern style Reformation. Matthisz believed that his was an entirely new movement and rebaptized Rothman and others who joined him. His apostles were sent abroad preaching and inviting the faithful to assemble in Muenster to await the kingdom. In the meantime the Catholic bishop gathered an army and laid seige to the city of Muenster. In 1534 Matthisz was killed during an attempt to break through the lines.

Jan of Leyden now replaced Matthisz as the leader of the Muensterites. Everyone who was unable to leave the city had to submit to rebaptism. Strict discipline was endorsed for Muenster was a city under seige. As the situation became more desperate, Jan of Leyden found new hope in biblical authority. He now established a dictatorial (Davidic) kingdom and took the name of King David. He also instituted polygamy. The missioners who had been sent forth achieved great success with the result that similar revolts also broke out elsewhere. In 1535 the city of Muenster was captured and its defenders executed.<sup>63</sup>

Bernhard Rothman the man who had initiated the church reform in Muenster joined the Davidic kingdom of Jan van Leyden in 1534. The eschatological expectations of Rothman now came to the fore. He interpreted world history as a series of restitutions and falls. The restitution through Christ had been followed by a serious decline. The recovery of the word made a new restitution possible. In the final days the unfulfilled promises of the Old Testament would come to pass. Hence the Old Testament provided models for polygamy and communism. With the continuing decline in the fortunes of Muenster Rothman asserted that the city was a crusading kingdom constituted to purify the world.<sup>64</sup> Jan van Batenburg (1495-1537) was another sword bearing Anabaptist. He was a spiritualist and chiliast who shared some of the beliefs of Jan van Leyden. In some ways he was even more radical. All who could not be converted to his party were executed. Polygamy was common and they practiced community of property. They awaited the eminent return of the Lord and Batenberg considered himself to be Elijah.<sup>65</sup>

David Joris (1501-1556) was a chiliast, spiritualist and mystic. He was deeply moved by the martyrdom of the Anabaptists in Holland and joined the movement. Initially he opposed the premillennial teachings of Jan van Leyden. Shortly after 1536 he was inspired by the fanatical teachings of Anneken Jans and by revelatory visions. Persecution confirmed his belief that he was a prophet and world reformer. Joris rejected the authority of the Bible and made a principle of mystical experience.

Nicholas Storch, Thomas Drechsel and Marcus Stuebner are generally referred to as the Zwickau Prophets. Their beliefs illustrate that it is not always possible to differentiate between spiritualism and radical chiliasm. The Zwickau prophets believed that infant baptism was not biblical, that a new kingdom would be instituted on earth in which Storch would be the most prominent personality, and that the Holy Spirit communicated directly with the elect.<sup>66</sup> The Zwickau prophets obtained a large following among the common people throughout middle Germany.

The second category of radical reformers are the mystics and spiritualists. These included Andreas Karlstadt, Hans Denck, Caspar Schwenckfeld and Sebastian Franck. Originally Karlstadt (1480-1541) was a prominent leader in the Luther reformation. He was somewhat more radical and turned against Luther after Luther denounced his reforms in Wittenberg in 1522. Karlstadt now gave up his position and took up the pastorate in Orlamuende. Here he instituted his reform program removing relics and images. He viewed the Eucharist as a symbol of the death of Christ and refused to baptize infants. Luther charged that Karlstadt had become a spiritualist and that he ignored the objective work of Christ. Several statements in the writings of Karlstadt confirm the view that he had spiritualistic tendencies. In his writings Karlstadt endeavored to develop a theology which emphasized discipleship and regeneration to a greater degree than was found in the teachings of Luther.

Hans Denck (1500-1527) was born in Bavaria. He later attended university in Basel. He was much influenced by medieval mysticism as well as the mysticism of Muentzer. i.e. Revelation would come from the spirit and not from scripture. He was at home within the humanist circles of his day. In 1525 he moved to Augsburg where his preaching was very popular. Two years later he returned to Basel where he died of the plague. His indifference to sound doctrine offended many nonresistant Anabaptists. Denck emphasized inner piety over external conformity. Divisions, ceremonies and sects were to be avoided and everyone should be free to pursue his own salvation as best he could. He asserted that he would rather stop baptizing than to give offence. He believed that the individual should not swear to anything which he could not keep. He spoke of the "inner word" which lead to spiritual consensus and not individualistic anarchy.<sup>67</sup>

Caspar von Schwenckfeld (1489-1561) was a Silesian noble who experienced a religious awakening. He quickly gained acceptance in the reformation movement and together with his associates tried to bring all of Silesia to the faith. He was disappointed that no religious awakening followed in the wake of the reformation. He became convinced that "by the communication of the Spirit, the sinner experienced a saving righteousness and progressively became a "new man", reflecting his new state in ethical behavior. This position was shaped, in addition to the undoubted role of Luther's thought, by humanistic and mystical influences".<sup>68</sup> Schwenckfeld's ministry took him to various parts of Europe. His spiritualist position lead him to assert that Christ had taken his flesh from Mary. His flesh was continually deified after his birth and completely glorified after his ascension. Hence the bread and wine in communion could be consumed in a spiritual-essential manner. The influence of his mystical spiritualism and pietism carried on after his death.

Sebastian Franck (1499-1542) was educated in Heidelberg and was active as a Catholic priest in Augsburg. He joined the Luther reformation which he rejected in 1529. He was disappointed with the Lutheran emphasis on salvation by faith alone and charged that Luther saw a Muensterite in anyone who boasted that they had the spirit of God within them. Franck openly associated with the Spanish Anti-trinitarian Servetus for which he was criticized. "According to Franck, God communicated directly with men and changed their lives by means of the "inner word", which was spoken directly without intermediaries into hearts, and not conveyed by simply reading the Holy Scripture or listening to the sermons of evangelical preachers." His theology combined the critical approach of humanism and the mystical-spiritualist belief in the direct revelation of God to every individual. "Not belief, but experience, not creeds, but deeds" was the byword.<sup>69</sup> The later Quakers and pietists were very much influenced by mysticism and spiritualism.

The social revolutionaries were a third category of radical reformers. This group included Balthasar Hubmaier, Michael Gaismaier, and Johannes Hergot. Balthasar Hubmaier (1480-1528) was an important Anabaptist leader in Moravia. He studied in the university and eventually became the preacher in Regensburg. Here he took up the fight against the Jews of the city. He also established two miracle working images of Mary. In 1520 he took up the preaching position in Waldhut. He was influenced by reform minded humanists and stated that "Christ was starting to sprout in me". Now he instituted his program for reform. Images were removed and the Mass celebrated in German. But the political situation was worsening so that volunteers from Zurich gathered to protect the town. In the uprising of 1525 the troops of the peasants and Waldhut were initially successful. A territorial Anabaptism was now instituted in Waldhut. In the same year this experiment in universal Anabaptism came to an end

when the town was recaptured by the Imperial soldiers. The teaching of Hubmaier was spiritualistic. His teaching was also unique in that he asserted that Christians had a responsibility to use the sword for the "protection of the devout and the fear of the wicked". The English Baptists have adopted Hubmaier as their great hero and father in the faith.

Michael Gaismair (1485-1532) was born in Tyrol where his father was a farmer entrepreneur. He became the secretary to the local prince but joined the peasant revolt as a leader in 1525. He was a fiery social reformer whose philosophy was based on the unequivocal biblical message for social justice. In spite of the tireless leadership of Gaismair the Peasant Revolt was betrayed and failed. Gaismair had envisaged a new order in which the godless exploiters including the clergy and nobility would be eliminated. Church property would be used for the common good and the support of the poor. A university would be established in which only the word of God would be taught. Godliness was equivalent to the seeking of social justice. He based his teaching and program for social revolution mainly on the Old Testament model of social justice.

Johannes Hergot was another representative of the social revolutionaries in Germany. Hergot was a printer and book peddler in Nuremberg where he was executed shortly after the peasant revolt of 1525. He printed and distributed pamphlets for the revolting peasants. In his writings he advocated a utopian society based on agrarian-communist ideals. His model government administration was elected and replaced all existing authority. He proposed communism of production and consumption. His program included care for the sick and provision for education. His utopia reveals a certain economic backwardness which is characteristic of European utopian models probably because German humanism was preoccupied with the ideal of the pastoral peasant and the idyllic agrarian life. Under humanist influence a rationally optimistic utopianism had emerged from biblical chiliasm.<sup>70</sup>

Fourth. A number of the radical reformers were heretical in the sense that they rejected doctrines such as the trinity which had been generally accepted in Western Christianity. One of these heretics was Michael Servetus (1509-1553) a Spanish physician. He believed that a cosmic battle was being fought between God and Satan. Throughout history God had revealed himself to man in various forms. Jesus Christ finally appeared as a perfect representative of God. Satan countered by sending forth the anti-Christ. The church founded by Christ now became the church at Rome and was soon perverted. The millennium would occur in 1585 when the archangel Michael would appear to battle Satan. God transmitted grace and life-giving substance through the air. Jesus was human in outward form only and not in substance. Baptism granted man an inner light and spiritual understanding which only adults could realize. Servetus rejected the teaching of the Trinity preferring to speak of various expressions of divinity. He believed that man required a divine ritual and celestial Christ and not atonement. "Servetus was an intellectual compendium, synthesizing much of the thought of his age".<sup>71</sup>

The foregoing represent various elements in the radical reformation. The radical reformers illustrate the diversity and complexity of the Reformation which threatened stability in a period of great social upheaval. Indeed, it was miraculous that the teaching of a peaceful Kingdom of Christ once more saw the light of day and flowered into brilliant bloom in the midst of such utter confusion and religious fantasy.

### 1.07 The Anabaptist-Mennonites

The hated name Anabaptist was also used with reference to another group of radical reformers. These were the nonresistant Christians whose vision was nothing less than the institution of the revolution of peace proclaimed by Jesus, and the restoration of the New Testament church. The fundamental premise of these radical revolutionaries was that Christ had come to earth to establish a kingdom of peace. Through the medium of the Gemeinden this spiritual kingdom would revolutionize everyone who accepted the invitation to take up the spiritual sword of truth. In the view of historians such as Harold Bender these peaceful revolutionaries were the true Anabaptists. They were the only ones to survive the purification of the fire of persecution. Nevertheless the term Anabaptist-Mennonite will be employed in this work so as to avoid confusion with the radical reformers discussed in the preceding section. It is noted that the problem is strictly one of terminology as the doctrine and practice of the peaceful Anabaptists allowed no mistake in identification of generic substance.



The three best known heroes of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith were Conrad Grebel, Jakob Hutter and Menno Simons. Each represented a distinct wing of the peaceful Anabaptist movement. Conrad Grebel (1498-1526) was the founder of the Swiss Brethren (Swiss-South German) wing of the movement. He came from a prominent Zurich family and was educated in the best universities of his day. Grebel had been a close friend and colleague of Zwingli the reformer of the church in Zurich. But Grebel together with his brethren became disillusioned with the Reformation of Zwingli and "now began to insist not only upon a complete break with the Catholic establishment, but upon a new fellowship of believers based on principles and doctrines so radical that a break with the Zwinglians too seemed inevitable".<sup>72</sup> These radicals insisted on a believers church founded on the New Testament model. They broke with Zwingli in 1525 and formed the first Anabaptist-Mennonite Gemeinde. In his short life Grebel had a vision of Christ's "covenant on the cross". He was realistic in his perception of the cost of discipleship. He died of the plague in 1526. His courageous departure from the reformation of Zwingli heralded the founding of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith.

Jakob Hutter was the most prominent leader of the peaceful Anabaptists in Moravia. He consolidated the nonresistant Christians in this area much as Menno Simons did in Holland. For this reason the Moravian nonresistant Anabaptists became known as Hutterites. The concept of a community of sharing was fundamental to the Anabaptist-Mennonite understanding of the New Testament Gemeinde. The Anabaptist-Hutterites were unique in that they also practiced community of property. Through his unselfish leadership Hutter insured that a remnant of nonresistant Christendom would survive the brutal persecution in Moravia. He himself died a martyr's death and was "burned at the stake in the early spring of 1536, stout-hearted and faithful to the very last".<sup>73</sup>

Menno Simons (1496-1561) is the best known of all the radical reformers. He was a Catholic priest who was converted to the kingdom of peace. His tireless preaching and writing on behalf of the brethren insured the survival of the nonresistant Christians in Holland and Northern Germany. The life and faith of Menno Simons will be dealt with in more detail in chapter three.

All three of these leaders had a vision of the restoration or restitution of apostolic Christianity. The practical manifestation of this vision was determined by their interpretation of the New Testament church. In their view, the Protestant reformers had only gone half way. They believed in the restitution of the apostolic church and not in the apostolic succession which was the foundation of Catholicism and Protestantism. The strict biblicalism of the nonresistant Christians eventually triumphed over the chiliasm of the mystics and spiritualists and became the dominant force of the Anabaptist movement. For them the ordinances of the evangelical gospel became a program for the radical reformation of the church and the individual sinner.

This vision of a peaceful earthly kingdom has found various expression over the centuries. Twentieth century historians have found a renewed interest in attempting a more objective appraisal of the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement and the radical reformation from which it was born. The most prominent of these interpretations is the statement of Dr. Harold S. Bender the venerable dean and scholar of the American Mennonite church. In 1943 Dr. Bender set forth his understanding of the Anabaptist-Mennonite vision in a paper which he presented to the American Society of Church History which he entitled simply "The Anabaptist Vision".<sup>74</sup>

In the words of scholar Ernest H. Correll "this presentation saw the essence of Anabaptism (sic) gathered in two foci. The first focus finds the essential nature of Christianity as discipleship. The second focus sees the church as a voluntary brotherhood of love and nonresistance, with nonconformity and suffering as corollary concepts". Correll goes on to state that Dr. Bender would have been one of the first to insist that "the interpretation of Anabaptism (sic) is an ever continuing process".<sup>75</sup> Certainly the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith would continually require renewed inspiration. Nevertheless it is clear that the view set forth by Bender has been widely regarded as a brilliant synthesis. Certainly "The Anabaptist Vision" is a classic statement of the faith.

In order to provide the reader with a contemporary summary of the essence of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith this essay by Dr. Harold Bender is included as Chapter Two of this work. It will serve as a comparison for the various interpretations and beliefs of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. This will allow the reader to make an independent assessment of the claim of Klaas Reimer and his co-reformers in 1812 that their renewal movement was an attempt to recapture

the teachings and faith of their Anabaptist-Mennonite forefathers. In Russian Mennonite historiography the Kleine Gemeinde has frequently been regarded as unique because it was founded on this fundamental premise. From the essay "The Anabaptist Vision" by Dr. Bender the reader will discover that the Kleine Gemeinde was not isolated or alone in many of the most important aspects of its theology. Certainly the interpretation of Dr. Bender will not agree with that of Heinrich Balzer and other Kleine Gemeinde leaders in every detail and perhaps not even in all the major points. Nevertheless, the fact that an eminent and prominent scholar of the Swiss-American branch of the Mennonite Church developed an interpretation of Anabaptist-Mennonite theology which is comparable with that of the farmer-philosophers of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia a century and a half earlier is in itself evidence of the veracity and truth of the Anabaptist-Mennonite vision.

The reader should note that in this work the terms "Anabaptist-Mennonite" and "Anabaptist-Mennonite Vision" are used to refer to what Dr. Harold Bender calls "Anabaptist" and "The Anabaptist Vision". The significance of the difference in terminology has been discussed in the foreword to the book. The essay "The Anabaptist Vision" is available in booklet form from Herald Press, Scottsdale, Pa., and Kitchener, Ontario. The essay is reprinted by permission of Herald Press.<sup>76</sup>

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# Chapter Two.

## The Anabaptist Vision —

by Harold S. Bender

“Judged by the reception it met at the hands of those in power, both in Church and State, equally in Roman Catholic and in Protestant countries, the Anabaptist movement was one of the most tragic in the history of Christianity; but, judged by the principles, which were put into play by the men who bore this reproachful nickname, it must be pronounced one of the most momentous and significant undertakings in man’s eventful religious struggle after the truth. It gathered up the gains of earlier movements, it is the spiritual soil out of which all nonconformist sects have sprung, and it is the first plain announcement in modern history of a programme for a new type of Christian society which the modern world, especially in America and England, has been slowly realizing—an absolutely free and independent religious society, and a State in which every man counts as a man, and has his share in shaping both Church and State.”

These words of Rufus M. Jones<sup>2</sup> constitute one of the best characterizations of Anabaptism and its contribution to our modern Christian culture to be found in the English language. They were brave words when they were written thirty-five years ago, but they have been abundantly verified by a generation of Anabaptist research since that time.<sup>3</sup> There can be no question but that the great principles of freedom of conscience, separation of church and state, and voluntarism in religion, so basic in American Protestantism and so essential to democracy, ultimately are derived from the Anabaptists of the Reformation period, who for the first time clearly enunciated them and challenged the Christian world to follow them in practice. The line of descent through the centuries since that time may not always be clear, and may have passed through other intermediate movements and groups, but the debt to original Anabaptism is unquestioned.

The sixteenth-century reformers understood the Anabaptist position on this point all too well, and deliberately rejected it. The best witness is Heinrich Bullinger, Zwingli’s successor in Zurich, whose active life-span covers the first fifty years of the history of the Swiss Anabaptists and who knew them so well that he published two extensive treatises against them in 1531 and 1561. According to Bullinger, the Swiss Brethren taught that:

“One cannot and should not use force to compel anyone to accept the faith, for faith is a free gift of God. It is wrong to compel anyone by force or coercion to embrace the faith, or to put to death anyone for the sake of his erring faith. It is an error that in the church any sword other than that of the divine Word should be used. The secular kingdom should be separated from the church, and no secular ruler should exercise authority in the church. The Lord has commanded simply to preach the Gospel, not to compel anyone by force to accept it. The true church of Christ has the characteristic that it suffers and endures persecution but does not inflict persecution upon anyone.”<sup>4</sup>

Bullinger reports these ideas, not in commendation but in condemnation urging the need of rigid suppression. He attempts a point by point refutation of the Anabaptist teaching, closing with the assertion that to put to death Anabaptists is a necessary and commendable service.

But great as is the Anabaptist contribution to the development of religious liberty, this concept not only does not exhaust but actually fails to define the true essence of Anabaptism. In the last analysis freedom of religion is a purely formal concept, barren of content; it says nothing about the faith or the way of life of those who advocate it, nor does it reveal their goals or program of action. And Anabaptism had not only clearly defined goals but also an action program of definiteness and power. In fact the more intimately one becomes acquainted with this group the more one becomes conscious of the great vision that shaped their course in history and for which they gladly gave their lives.

Before describing this vision it is well to note its attractiveness to the masses of Christians of the sixteenth century. Sebastian Franck, himself an opponent, wrote in 1531, scarcely seven years after the rise of the movement in Zurich: “The Anabaptists spread so rapidly that their teaching soon covered the land as it were. They soon gained a large following, and baptized thousands, drawing to themselves many sincere souls who had a zeal for God. . . . They increased so rapidly that the world feared an uprising by them though I have learned that this fear had no justification whatsoever.”<sup>5</sup> In the same year Bullinger wrote that “the people were running after them as though they were living saints.”<sup>6</sup> Another contemporary writer asserts that “Anabaptism spread with such speed that there was reason to fear that the majority of the common people would unite with this sect.”<sup>7</sup> Zwingli

was so frightened by the power of the movement that he complained that the struggle with the Catholic party was "but child's play" compared to the conflict with the Anabaptists.<sup>8</sup>

The dreadful severity of the persecution of the Anabaptist movement in the years 1527-60 not only in Switzerland, South Germany, and Thuringia, but in all the Austrian lands as well as in the Low Countries, testifies to the power of the movement and the desperate haste with which Catholic, Lutheran, and Zwinglian authorities alike strove to throttle it before it should be too late. The notorious decree issued in 1529 by the Diet of Spire (the same diet which protested the restriction of evangelical liberties) summarily passed the sentence of death upon all Anabaptists, ordering that "every Anabaptist and rebaptized person of either sex should be put to death by fire, sword, or some other way."<sup>9</sup> Repeatedly in subsequent sessions of the imperial diet this decree was reinvoiced and intensified; and as late as 1551 the Diet of Augsburg issued a decree ordering that judges and jurors who had scruples against pronouncing the death sentence on Anabaptists be removed from office and punished by heavy fines and imprisonment.

The authorities had great difficulty in executing their program of suppression, for they soon discovered that the Anabaptists feared neither torture nor death, and gladly sealed their faith with their blood. In fact the joyful testimony of the Anabaptist martyrs was a great stimulus to new recruits, for it stirred the imagination of the populace as nothing else could have done.

Finding, therefore, that the customary method of individual trials and sentences was proving totally inadequate to stem the tide, the authorities resorted to the desperate expedient of sending out through the land companies of armed executioners and mounted soldiers to hunt down the Anabaptists and kill them on the spot singly or *en masse* without trial or sentence. The most atrocious application of this policy was made in Swabia where the original 400 special police of 1528 sent against the Anabaptists proved too small a force and had to be increased to 1,000. An imperial provost marshal, Berthold Aichele, served as chief administrator of this bloody program in Swabia and other regions until he finally broke down in terror and dismay, and after an execution at Brixen lifted his hands to heaven and swore a solemn oath never again to put to death an Anabaptist, which vow he kept.<sup>10</sup> The Count of Alzey in the Palatinate, after 350 Anabaptists had been executed there, was heard to exclaim, "What shall I do, the more I kill, the greater becomes their number!"

The extensive persecution and martyrdom of the Anabaptists testify not only of the great extent of the movement but also of the power of the vision that burned within them. This is most effectively presented in a moving account written in 1542 and taken from the ancient Hutterian chronicle where it is found at the close of a report of 2,173 brethren and sisters who gave their lives for their faith.<sup>11</sup>

"No human being was able to take away out of their hearts what they had experienced, such zealous lovers of God were they. The fire of God burned within them. They would die the bitterest death, yea, they would die ten deaths rather than forsake the divine truth which they had espoused. . . .

"They had drunk of the waters which had flowed from God's sanctuary, yea, the water of life. They realized that God helped them to bear the cross and to overcome the bitterness of death. The fire of God burned within them. Their tent they had pitched not here upon earth, but in eternity, and of their faith they had a foundation and assurance. Their faith blossomed as a lily, their loyalty as a rose, their piety and sincerity as the flower of the garden of God. The angel of the Lord battled for them that they could not be deprived of the helmet of salvation. Therefore they bore all torture and agony without fear. The things of this world they counted in their holy mind only as shadows, having the assurance of greater things. They were so drawn unto God that they knew nothing, sought nothing, desired nothing, loved nothing but God alone. Therefore they had more patience in their suffering than their enemies in tormenting them.

" . . . The persecutors thought they could dampen and extinguish the fire of God. But the prisoners sang in their prisons and rejoiced so that the enemies outside became much more fearful than the prisoners and did not know what to do with them. . . .

"Many were talked to in wonderful ways, often day and night. They were argued with, with great cunning and cleverness, with many sweet and smooth words, by monks and priests, by doctors of theology, with much false testimony, with threats and scolding and mockery, yea, with lies and grievous slander against the brotherhood, but none of these things moved them or made them falter.

"From the shedding of such innocent blood arose Christians everywhere, brothers all, for all this persecution did not take place without fruit. . . ."

Perhaps this interpretation of the Anabaptist spirit should be discounted as too glowing, coming as it does from the group itself, but certainly it is nearer to the truth than the typical harsh nineteenth-century interpretation of the movement which is well represented by the opening sentence of *Ursula*, the notable historical novel on the Anabaptists published in 1878 by the Swiss Gottfried Keller, next

to Goethe perhaps the greatest of all writers in the German language: "Times of religious change are like times when the mountains open up; for then not only do all the marvelous creatures of the human spirit come forth, the great golden dragons, magic beings and crystal spirits, but there also come to light all the hateful vermin of humanity, the host of rats and mice and pestiferous creation, and so it was at the time of the Reformation in the northeast part of Switzerland."<sup>12</sup>

Before defining the Anabaptist vision, it is essential to state clearly who is meant by the term "Anabaptist," since the name has come to be used in modern historiography to cover a wide variety of Reformation groups, sometimes thought of as the whole "left wing of the Reformation" (Roland Bainton), "the Bolsheviks of the Reformation" (Preserved Smith). Although the definitive history of Anabaptism has not yet been written, we know enough today to draw a clear line of demarcation between original evangelical and constructive Anabaptism on the one hand, which was born in the bosom of Zwinglianism in Zurich, Switzerland, in 1525; and established in the Low Countries in 1533, and the various mystical, spiritualistic, revolutionary, or even antinomian related and unrelated groups on the other hand, which came and went like the flowers of the field in those days of the great renovation. The former, Anabaptism proper, maintained an unbroken course in Switzerland, South Germany, Austria, and Holland throughout the sixteenth century, and has continued until the present day in the Mennonite movement, now almost 500,000 baptized members strong in Europe and America.<sup>13</sup> There is no longer any excuse for permitting our understanding of the distinct character of this genuine Anabaptism to be obscured by Thomas Müntzer and the Peasants War, the Münsterites, or any other aberration of Protestantism in the sixteenth century.

There may be some excuse, however, for a failure on the part of the uninformed student to see clearly what the Anabaptist vision was, because of the varying interpretations placed upon the movement even by those who mean to appreciate and approve it. There are, for instance, the socialist writers, led by Kautsky, who would make Anabaptism either "the forerunner of the modern socialism" or the "culminating effort of medieval communism," and who in reality see it only as the external religious shell of a class movement.<sup>14</sup> There are the sociologists with their partial socio-economic determinism as reflected in Richard Niebuhr's approach to the social origin of religious denominations. There is Albert Ritschl, who sees in Anabaptism an ascetic semi-monastic continuation of the medieval Franciscan tertiaries, and locates the seventeenth-century Pietists in the same line;<sup>15</sup> and Ludwig Keller, who finds Anabaptists throughout the pre-Reformation period in the guise of Waldenses and other similar groups whom he chooses to call "the old-evangelical brotherhoods,"<sup>16</sup> and for whom he posits a continuity from earliest times. Related to Keller are the earlier Baptist historians (and certain Mennonites) who rejoice to find in the Anabaptists the missing link which keeps them in the apostolic succession of the true church back through the Waldenses, Bogomils, Cathari, Paulicians, and Donatists, to Pentecost. More recently there is Rufus M. Jones who is inclined to class the Anabaptists with the mystics, and Walter Koehler who finds an Erasmian humanist origin for them.

However, there is another line of interpretation, now almost 100 years old, which is being increasingly accepted and which is probably destined to dominate the field. It is the one which holds that Anabaptism is the culmination of the Reformation, the fulfillment of the original vision of Luther and Zwingli, and thus makes it a consistent evangelical Protestantism seeking to recreate without compromise the original New Testament church, the vision of Christ and the apostles. This line of interpretation begins in 1848 with Max Göbel's great **Geschichte des christlichen Lebens in der Rheinisch-Westfälischen Kirche**, continues with the epoch-making work of C.A. Cornelius, particularly in his **Geschichte des Münsterischen Aufruhrs** (1855-1860), follows in the work of men like Johann Loserth, Karl Rembert, and John Horsch, and is represented by such contemporaries as Ernst Correll of Washington and Fritz Blanke of Zurich. A quotation from Göbel may serve to illustrate this interpretation:

"The essential and distinguishing characteristic of this church is its great emphasis upon the actual personal conversion and regeneration of every Christian through the Holy Spirit. . . . They aimed with special emphasis at carrying out and realizing the Christian doctrine and faith in the heart and life of every Christian in the whole Christian church. Their aim was the bringing together of all the true believers out of the great degenerated national churches into a true Christian church. That which the Reformation was originally intended to accomplish they aimed to being into full immediate realization."<sup>17</sup>

And Johann Loserth says: "More radically than any other party for church reformation the Anabaptists strove to follow the footsteps of the church of the first century and to renew unadulterated original Christianity."<sup>18</sup>

The evidence in support of this interpretation is overwhelming, and can be taken from the statements

of the contemporary opponents of the Anabaptists as well as from the Anabaptists themselves. Conrad Grebel, the founder of the Swiss Brethren movement, states clearly this point of view in his letter to Thomas Müntzer of 1524, in words written on behalf of the entire group which constitute in effect the original Anabaptist pronouncement:

“Just as our forebears [the Roman Catholic Papal Church] fell away from the true God and the knowledge of Jesus Christ and of the right faith in him, and from the one true, common divine word, from the divine institutions, from Christian love and life, and lived without God’s law and gospel in human, useless, un-Christian customs and ceremonies, and expected to attain salvation therein, yet fell far short of it, as the evangelical preachers [Luther, Zwingli, etc.] have declared, and to some extent are still declaring; so today, too, every man wants to be saved by superficial faith, without fruits of faith, without the baptism of test and probation, without love and hope, without right Christian practices, and wants to persist in all the old fashion of personal vices, and in the common ritualistic and anti-Christian customs of baptism and of the Lord’s Supper, in disrespect for the divine word and in respect for the word of the pope and of the antipapal preachers, which yet is not equal to the divine word nor in harmony with it. In respecting persons and in manifold seduction there is grosser and more pernicious error now than ever has been since the beginning of the world. In the same error we, too, lingered as long as we heard and read only the evangelical preachers who are to blame for all this, in punishment for our sins. But after we took the Scriptures in hand, too, and consulted it on many points; we have been instructed somewhat and have discovered the great and hurtful error of the shepherds, of ours too, namely, that we do not daily beseech God earnestly with constant groanings to be brought out of this destruction of all godly life and out of human abominations, and to attain to true faith and divine instruction.”<sup>19</sup>

A similar statement was made in 1538, after fourteen years of persecution, by an Anabaptist leader who spoke on behalf of his group in the great colloquy at Berne with the leaders of the Reformed Church:

“While yet in the national church, we obtained much instruction from the writings of Luther, Zwingli, and others, concerning the mass and other papal ceremonies, that they are vain. Yet we recognized a great lack as regards repentance, conversion, and the true Christian life. Upon these things my mind was bent. I waited and hoped for a year or two, since the minister had much to say of amendment of life, of giving to the poor, loving one another, and abstaining from evil. But I could not close my eyes to the fact that the doctrine which was preached and which was based on the Word of God, was not carried out. No beginning was made toward true Christian living, and there was no unison in the teaching concerning the things that were necessary. And although the mass and the images were finally abolished, true repentance and Christian love were not in evidence. Changes were made only as concerned external things. This gave me occasion to inquire further into these matters. Then God sent His messengers, Conrad Grebel and others, with whom I conferred about the fundamental teachings of the apostles and the Christian life and practice. I found them men who had surrendered themselves to the doctrine of Christ by “Bussfertigkeit” [repentance evidenced by fruits]. With their assistance we established a congregation in which repentance was in evidence by newness of life in Christ.”<sup>20</sup>

It is evident from these statements that the Anabaptists were concerned most of all about “a true Christian life,” that is, a life patterned after the teaching and example of Christ. The reformers, they believed, whatever their profession may have been, did not secure among the people true repentance, regeneration, and Christian living as a result of their preaching. The Reformation emphasis on faith was good but inadequate, for without newness of life, they held, faith is hypocritical.

This Anabaptist critique of the Reformation was a sharp one, but it was not unfair. There is abundant evidence that although the original goal sought by Luther and Zwingli was “an earnest Christianity” for all, the actual outcome was far less, for the level of Christian living among the Protestant population was frequently lower than it had been before under Catholicism. Luther himself was keenly conscious of the deficiency. In April 1522 he expressed the hope that, “We who at the present are well nigh heathen under a Christian name, may yet organize a Christian assembly.”<sup>21</sup> In December 1535 he had an important conversation with Casper Schwenckfeld, concerning the establishment of the New Testament church. Schwenckfeld pointed out that the establishment of the new church had failed to result in spiritual and moral betterment of the people, a fact which Luther admitted, for Schwenckfeld states that “Luther regretted very much that no amendment of life was in evidence.”<sup>22</sup> Between 1522 and 1527 Luther repeatedly mentioned his concern to establish a true Christian church, and his desire to provide for earnest Christians (“*Die mit Ernst Christen sein wollen*”) who would confess the gospel with their lives as well as their tongues. He thought of entering the names of these “earnest Christians” in a special book and having them meet separately from the

mass of nominal Christians, but concluding that he would not have sufficient of such people, he dropped the plan.<sup>22a</sup> Zwingli faced the same problem; he was in fact specifically challenged by the Swiss Brethren to set up such a church; but he refused and followed Luther's course.<sup>23</sup> Both reformers decided that it was better to include the masses within the fold of the church than to form a fellowship of true Christians only. Both certainly expected the preaching of the Word and the ministration of the sacraments to bear fruit in an earnest Christian life, at least among some, but they reckoned with a permanently large and indifferent mass. In taking this course, said the Anabaptists, the reformers surrendered their original purpose, and abandoned the divine intention. Others may say that they were wise and statesmanlike leaders.<sup>24</sup>

The Anabaptists, however, retained the original vision of Luther and Zwingli, enlarged it, gave it body and form, and set out to achieve it in actual experience. They proceeded to organize a church composed solely of earnest Christians, and actually found the people for it. They did not believe in any case that the size of the response should determine whether or not the truth of God should be applied, and they refused to compromise. They preferred to make a radical break with 1,500 years of history and culture if necessary rather than to break with the New Testament.

May it not be said that the decision of Luther and Zwingli to surrender their original vision was the tragic turning point of the Reformation? Professor Karl Mueller, one of the keenest and fairest interpreters of the Reformation, evidently thinks so, for he says, "The aggressive, conquering power, which Lutheranism manifested in its first period, was lost everywhere at the moment when the governments took matters in hand and established the Lutheran Creed,"<sup>25</sup> that is to say, when Luther's mass church concept was put into practice. Luther in his later years expressed disappointment at the final outcome of the Reformation, stating that the people had become more and more indifferent toward religion and the moral outlook was more deplorable than ever. His last years were embittered by the consciousness of partial failure, and his expressions of dejection are well known. Contrast this sense of defeat at the end of Luther's outwardly successful career with the sense of victory in the hearts of the Anabaptist martyrs who laid down their lives in what the world would call defeat, conscious of having kept faith with their vision to the end.

Having defined genuine Anabaptism in its Reformation setting, we are ready to examine its central teachings. The Anabaptist vision included three major points of emphasis; first, a new conception of the essence of Christianity as discipleship; second, a new conception of the church as a brotherhood; and third, a new ethic of love and nonresistance. We turn now to an exposition of these points.

First and fundamental in the Anabaptist vision was the conception of the essence of Christianity as discipleship. It was a concept which meant the transformation of the entire way of life of the individual believer and of society so that it should be fashioned after the teachings and example of Christ.<sup>26</sup> The Anabaptists could not understand a Christianity which made regeneration, holiness, and love primarily a matter of intellect, of doctrinal belief, or of subjective "experience," rather than one of the transformation of life. They demanded an outward expression of the inner experience. Repentance must be "evidenced" by newness of behavior. "In evidence" is the keynote which rings through the testimonies and challenges of the early Swiss Brethren when they are called to give an account of themselves. The whole life was to be brought literally under the lordship of Christ in a covenant of discipleship, a covenant which the Anabaptist writers delighted to emphasize.<sup>27</sup> The focus of the Christian life was to be not so much the inward experience of the grace of God, as it was for Luther, but the outward application of that grace to all human conduct and the consequent Christianization of all human relationships. The true test of the Christian, they held, is discipleship. The great word of the Anabaptists was not "faith" as it was with the reformers, but "following" (*nachfolge Christi*). And baptism, the greatest of Christian symbols, was accordingly to be for them the "covenant of a good conscience toward God" (1 Peter 3:21),<sup>28</sup> the pledge of a complete commitment to obey Christ, and not primarily the symbol of a past experience. The Anabaptists had faith, indeed, but they used it to produce a life. Theology was for them a means, not an end.

That the Anabaptists not only proclaimed the ideal of full Christian discipleship but achieved, in the eyes of their contemporaries and even of their opponents, a measurably higher level of performance than the average, is fully witnessed by the sources. The early Swiss and South German reformers were keenly aware of this achievement and its attractive power. Zwingli knew it best of all, but Bullinger, Capito, Vadian, and many others confirm his judgment that the Anabaptist Brethren were unusually sincere, devoted, and effective Christians. However, since the Brethren refused to accept the state church system which the reformers were building, and in addition made "radical" demands which



might have changed the entire social order. the leaders of the Reformation were completely baffled in their understanding of the movement, and professed to believe that the Anabaptists were hypocrites of the darkest dye. Bullinger, for instance, calls them "devilish enemies and destroyers of the Church of God."<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless they had to admit the apparent superiority of their life. In Zwingli's last book against the Swiss Brethren (1527), for instance, the following is found: "If you investigate their life and conduct, it seems at first contact irreproachable, pious, unassuming, attractive, yea, above this world. Even those who are inclined to be critical will say that their lives are excellent."<sup>30</sup> Bullinger himself, who wrote bitter diatribes against them, was compelled to admit of the early Swiss Brethren that "Those who unite with them will by their ministers be received into their church by rebaptism and repentance and newness of life. They henceforth lead their lives under a semblance of a quite spiritual conduct. They denounce covetousness, pride, profanity, the lewd conversation and immorality of the world, drinking and gluttony. In short, their hypocrisy is great and manifold."<sup>31</sup> Bullinger's lament (1531) that "the people are running after them as though they were the living saints" has been reported earlier. Vadian, the reformer of St. Gall, testified, that "none were more favorably inclined toward Anabaptism and more easily entangled with it than those who were of pious and honorable disposition."<sup>32</sup> Capito, the reformer of Strassburg, wrote in 1527 concerning the Swiss Brethren: "I frankly confess that in most [Anabaptists] there is in evidence piety and consecration and indeed a zeal which is beyond any suspicion of insincerity. For what earthly advantage could they hope to win by enduring exile, torture, and unspeakable punishment of the flesh? I testify before God that I cannot say that on account of a lack of wisdom they are somewhat indifferent toward earthly things, but rather from divine motives."<sup>33</sup>

The preachers of the Canton of Berne admitted in a letter to the Council of Berne in 1532 that "The Anabaptists have the semblance of outward piety to a far greater degree than we and all the churches which unitedly with us confess Christ, and they avoid offensive sins which are very common among us."<sup>34</sup> Walter Klärer, the Reformed chronicler of Appenzell, Switzerland, wrote: "Most of the Anabaptists are people who at first had been the best with us in promulgating the word of God."<sup>35</sup> And the Roman Catholic theologian, Franz Agricola, in his book of 1582, **Against the Terrible Errors of the Anabaptists**, says: "Among the existing heretical sects there is none which in appearance leads a more modest or pious life than the Anabaptists. As concerns their outward public life they are irreproachable. No lying, deception, swearing, strife, harsh language, no intemperate eating and drinking, no outward personal display, is found among them but humility, patience, uprightness, neatness, honesty, temperance, straightforwardness in such measure that one would suppose that they had the Holy Spirit of God."<sup>36</sup> A mandate against the Swiss Brethren published in 1585 by the Council of Berne states that offensive sins and vices were common among the preachers and the membership of the Reformed Church, adding, "And this is the greatest reason that many pious, God-fearing people who seek Christ from their heart are offended and forsake our church [to unite with the Brethren]."<sup>37</sup>

One of the finest contemporary characterizations of the Anabaptists is that given in 1531 by Sebastian Franck, an objective and sympathetic witness, though an opponent of the Anabaptists, who wrote as follows: "The Anabaptists . . . soon gained a large following, . . . drawing many sincere souls who had a zeal for God, for they taught nothing but love, faith, and the cross. They showed themselves humble, patient under much suffering; they brake bread with one another as an evidence of unity and love. They helped each other faithfully, and called each other brothers. . . . They died as martyrs, patiently and humbly enduring all persecution."<sup>38</sup>

A further confirmation of the above evaluation of the achievement of the Anabaptists is found in the fact that in many places those who lived a consistent Christian life were in danger of falling under the suspicion of being guilty of Anabaptist heresy. Casper Schwenckfeld, for instance, declared, "I am being maligned, by both preachers and others, with the charge of being Anabaptist, even as all others who lead a true, pious Christian life are now almost everywhere given this name."<sup>39</sup> Bullinger himself complained that ". . . there are those who in reality are not Anabaptists but have a pronounced averseness to the sensuality and frivolity of the world and therefore reprove sin and vice and are consequently called or misnamed Anabaptists by petulant persons."<sup>40</sup>

The great collection of Anabaptist source materials, commonly called the *Täufer-Akten*, now in its third volume, contains a number of specific illustrations of this. In 1562 a certain Caspar Zacher of Waiblingen in Württemberg was accused of being an Anabaptist, but the court record reports that since he was an envious man who could not get along with others, and who often started quarrels, as well as being guilty of swearing and cursing and carrying a weapon, he was not considered

to be an Anabaptist.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand in 1570 a certain Hans Jäger of Vöhringen in Württemberg was brought before the court on suspicion of being an Anabaptist primarily because he did not curse but lived an irreproachable life.<sup>42</sup>

As a second major element in the Anabaptist vision, a new concept of the church was created by the central principle of newness of life and applied Christianity. Voluntary church membership based upon true conversion and involving a commitment to holy living and discipleship was the absolutely essential heart of this concept. This vision stands in sharp contrast to the church concept of the reformers who retained the medieval ideal of a mass church with membership of the entire population from birth to the grave compulsory by law and force.

It is from the standpoint of this new conception of the church that the Anabaptist opposition to infant baptism must be interpreted. Infant baptism was not the cause of their disavowal of the state church; it was only a symbol of the cause. How could infants give a commitment based upon a knowledge of what true Christianity means? They might conceivably passively experience the grace of God (though Anabaptists would question this), but they could not respond in pledging their lives to Christ. Such infant baptism would not only be meaningless, but would in fact become a serious obstacle to a true understanding of the nature of Christianity and membership in the church. Only adult baptism could signify an intelligent life commitment.

An inevitable corollary of the concept of the church as a body of committed and practicing Christians pledged to the highest standard of New Testament living was the insistence on the separation of the church from the world, that is, nonconformity of the Christian to the worldly way of life. The world would not tolerate the practice of true Christian principles in society, and the church could not tolerate the practice of worldly ways among its membership. Hence, the only way out was separation (*“Absonderung”*), the gathering of true Christians into their own Christian society where Christ's way could and would be practiced. On this principle of separation Menno Simons says: “All the evangelical scriptures teach us that the church of Christ was and is, in doctrine, life, and worship, a people separated from the world.”<sup>43</sup> In the great debate of 1528 at Zofingen, spokesmen of the Swiss Brethren said: “The true church is separated from the world and is conformed to the nature of Christ. If a church is yet at one with the world we cannot recognize it is a true church.”<sup>44</sup> In a sense, this principle of nonconformity to the world is merely a negative expression of the positive requirement of discipleship, but it goes further in the sense that it represents a judgment on the contemporary social order, which the Anabaptists called “the world,” as non-Christian, and sets up a line of demarcation between the Christian community and worldly society.

A logical outcome of the concept of nonconformity to the world was the concept of the suffering church. Conflict with the world was inevitable for those who endeavored to live an earnest Christian life. The Anabaptists expected opposition; they took literally the words of Jesus when He said, “In the world ye shall have tribulation,” but they also took literally His words of encouragement, “But be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” Conrad Grebel said in 1524: “True Christian believers are sheep among wolves, sheep for the slaughter; they must be baptized in anguish and affliction, tribulation, persecution, suffering, and death; they must be tried with fire and must reach the fatherland of eternal rest not by killing their bodily, but by mortifying their spiritual, enemies.”<sup>45</sup> Professor Ernest Staehelin of Basel, Switzerland, says: “Anabaptism by its earnest determination to follow in life and practice the primitive Christian Church has kept alive the conviction that he who is in Christ is a new creature and that those who are identified with his cause will necessarily encounter the opposition of the world.”<sup>46</sup>

Perhaps it was persecution that made the Anabaptists so acutely aware of the conflict between the church and the world, but this persecution was due to the fact that they refused to accept what they considered the sub-Christian way of life practiced in European Christendom. They could have avoided the persecution had they but conformed, or they could have suspended the practice of their faith to a more convenient time and sailed under false colors as did David Joris, but they chose with dauntless courage and simple honesty to live their faith, to defy the existing world order, and to suffer the consequences.

Basic to the Anabaptist vision of the church was the insistence on the practice of true brotherhood and love among the members of the church.<sup>47</sup> This principle was understood to mean not merely the expression of pious sentiments, but the actual practice of sharing possessions to meet the needs of others in the spirit of true mutual aid. Hans Leopold, a Swiss Brethren martyr of 1528, said of the Brethren: “If they know of any one who is in need, whether or not he is a member of their church, they believe it their duty, out of love to God, to render help and aid.”<sup>48</sup> Heinrich Seiler, a Swiss

Brethren martyr of 1535, said: "I do not believe it wrong that a Christian has property of his own, but yet he is nothing more than a steward."<sup>49</sup> An early Hutterian book states that one of the questions addressed by the Swiss Brethren to applicants for baptism was: "Whether they would consecrate themselves with all their temporal possessions to the service of God and His people."<sup>50</sup> A Protestant of Strassburg, visitor at a Swiss Brethren baptismal service in that city in 1557, reports that a question addressed to all applicants for baptism was: "Whether they, if necessity require it, would devote all their possessions to the service of the brotherhood, and would not fail any member that is in need, if they were able to render aid."<sup>51</sup> Heinrich Bullinger, the bitter enemy of the Brethren, states: "They teach that every Christian is under duty before God from motives of love, to use, if need be, all his possessions to supply the necessities of life to any of the brethren who are in need."<sup>52</sup> This principle of full brotherhood and stewardship was actually practiced, and not merely speculatively considered. In its absolute form of Christian communism, with the complete repudiation of private property, it became the way of life of the Hutterian Brotherhood in 1528 and has remained so to this day, for the Hutterites held that private property is the greatest enemy of Christian love. One of the inspiring stories of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is the successful practice of the full communal way of life by this group.<sup>53</sup>

The third great element in the Anabaptist vision was the ethic of love and nonresistance as applied to all human relationships. The Brethren understood this to mean complete abandonment of all warfare, strife, and violence, and of the taking of human life.<sup>54</sup> Conrad Gebel, the Swiss, said in 1524: "True Christians use neither worldly sword nor engage in war, since among them taking human life has ceased entirely, for we are no longer under the Old Covenant. . . . The Gospel and those who accept it are not to be protected with the sword, neither should they thus protect themselves."<sup>55</sup> Pilgram Marpeck, the South German leader, in 1544, speaking of Matthew 5, said: "All bodily, worldly, carnal, earthly fightings, conflicts, and wars are annulled and abolished among them through such law . . . which law of love Christ . . . Himself observed and thereby gave His followers a pattern to follow after."<sup>56</sup> Peter Riedemann, the Hutterian leader, wrote in 1545: "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. Therefore a Christian has no part in war nor does he wield the sword to execute vengeance."<sup>57</sup> Menno Simons, of Holland wrote in 1550: "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. . . . Spears and swords of iron we leave to those who, alas, consider human blood and swine's blood of well-nigh equal value."<sup>58</sup> In this principle of nonresistance, or biblical pacifism, which was thoroughly believed and resolutely practiced by all the original Anabaptist Brethren and their descendants throughout Europe from the beginning until the last century,<sup>59</sup> the Anabaptists were again creative leaders, far ahead of their times, in this antedating the Quakers by over a century and a quarter. It should also be remembered that they held this principle in a day when both Catholic and Protestant churches not only endorsed war as an instrument of state policy, but employed it in religious conflicts. It is true, of course, that occasional earlier prophets, like Peter Chelcicky, had advocated similar views, but they left no continuing practice of the principle behind them.

As we review the vision of the Anabaptists, it becomes clear that there are two foci in this vision. The first focus relates to the essential nature of Christianity. Is Christianity primarily a matter of the reception of divine grace through a sacramental-sacerdotal institution (Roman Catholicism), is it chiefly enjoyment of the inner experience of the grace of God through faith in Christ (Lutheranism), or is it most of all the transformation of life through discipleship (Anabaptism)? The Anabaptists were neither institutionalists, mystics, nor pietists, for they laid the weight of their emphasis upon following Christ in life. To them it was unthinkable for one truly to be a Christian without creating a new life on divine principles both for himself and for all men who commit themselves to the Christian way.

The second focus relates to the church. For the Anabaptist, the church was neither an institution (Catholicism), nor the instrument of God for the proclamation of the divine Word (Lutheranism), nor a resource group for individual piety (Pietism). It was a brotherhood of love in which the fullness of the Christian life ideal is to be expressed.

The Anabaptist vision may be further clarified by comparison of the social ethics of the four main Christian groups of the Reformation period, Catholic, Calvinist, Lutheran, and Anabaptist. Catholic and Calvinist alike were optimistic about the world, agreeing that the world can be redeemed; they held that the entire social order can be brought under the sovereignty of God and Chris-

tianized, although they used different means to attain this goal. Lutheran and Anabaptist were pessimistic about the world, denying the possibility of Christianizing the entire social order; but the consequent attitudes of these two groups toward the social order were diametrically opposed. Lutheranism said that since the Christian must live in a world order that remains sinful, he must make a compromise with it. As a citizen he cannot avoid participation in the evil of the world, for instance in making war, and for this his only recourse is to seek forgiveness by the grace of God; only within his personal private experience can the Christian truly Christianize his life. The Anabaptist rejected this view completely. Since for him no compromise dare be made with evil, the Christian way in no circumstance participate in any conduct in the existing social order which is contrary to the spirit and teaching of Christ and the apostolic practice. He must consequently withdraw from the worldly system and create a Christian social order within the fellowship of the church brotherhood. Extension of this Christian order by the conversion of individuals and their transfer out of the world into the church is the only way by which progress can be made in Christianizing the social order.

However, the Anabaptist was realistic. Down the long perspective of the future he saw little chance that the mass of humankind would enter such a brotherhood with its high ideals. Hence he anticipated a long and grievous conflict between the church and the world. Neither did he anticipate the time when the church would rule the world; the church would always be a suffering church. He agreed with the words of Jesus when He said that those who would be His disciples must deny themselves, take up their cross daily and follow Him, and that there would be few who would enter the strait gate and travel the narrow way of life. If this prospect should seem too discouraging, the Anabaptist would reply that the life within the Christian brotherhood is satisfyingly full of love and joy.

The Anabaptist vision was not a detailed blueprint for the reconstruction of human society, but the Brethren did believe that Jesus intended that the kingdom of God should be set up in the midst of earth, here and now, and this they proposed to do forthwith. We shall not believe, they said, that the Sermon on the Mount or any other vision that He had is only a heavenly vision meant but to keep His followers in tension until the last great day, but we shall practice what He taught, believing that where He walked we can by His grace follow in His steps.

## FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER TWO. THE ANABAPTIST VISION

1. Reprinted from *Church History* (March 1944) XIII, 3-24, with slight revisions.
2. Rufus M. Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion* (London, 1909) 369.  
Professor Walter Köhler of Heidelberg has recently expressed a similar evaluation, asserting that the historical significance of the Anabaptists "erschöpft sich nicht in dem Duldermut, der Arbeitsreue, dem kulturellen Fleiss. . . . Nein, die Mennoniten dürfen ohne Ueberhebung einen Platz in der Weltgeschichte beanspruchen als Bahnbrecher der modernen Weltanschauung mit ihrer Glaubens- und Gewissensfreiheit."
3. The results of this research are best found in: *Mennonitisches Lexikon*, edited by Christian Hege and Christian Neff (Frankfurt a. M. and Weierhof [Pfalz], Germany, 1913 ff.), now at the letter "N"; Ernst Correll, *Das Schweizerische Täufermennonitentum: Ein Soziologischer Bericht* (Tübingen, 1925); *Mennonite Quarterly Review* (published at Goshen, Indiana, since 1927); *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter* (published at Weierhof [Palatinate] since 1936); R.J. Smithson, *The Anabaptists, Their Contribution to Our Protestant Heritage* (London, 1935); John Horsch, *Mennonites in Europe* (Scottsdale, Pa., 1942); C. Henry Smith, *The Story of the Mennonites* (Berne, Indiana, 1941); L. von Murali, *Glaube und Lehre der Schweizerischen Wiedertäufer in der Reformationszeit* (Zurich, 1938). Cf. also: Wilhelm Pauck "The Historiography of the German Reformation During the Past Twenty Years; IV. Research in the History of the Anabaptists," *Church History* (December 1940) IX, 335-364; Harold S. Bender, "Recent Progress in Research in Anabaptist History," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* (January 1934) VIII, 3-17. Only three volumes of the great source publication, *Quellen zur Geschichte der Wiedertäufer* (Leipzig, 1930 ff.), published by the *Verein für Reformationsgeschichte*, have yet appeared.
4. Quoted in translation by John Horsch, *Mennonites in Europe*, 325, from Bullinger's *Der Wiedertäufers Ursprung*, etc., Zurich, 1560.
5. Horsch, 293, from Sebastian Frank's *Chronica, Zeitbuch und Geschichtsbibel* (Strassburg, 1531).
6. Heinrich Bullinger, *Von dem unverschampten frafel . . . der selvs-gesandten Wiedertouffern* (Zurich, 1531), folio 2v.
7. F. Roth, *Augsburgs Reformationsgeschichte* (Munich, 1901), I, 230.
8. Letter of Zwingli to Vadian, May 28, 1525, *Huldreich Zwinglis Sämtliche Werke* ed. Egli, Finsler, Köhler, et al. (Leipzig, 1914) VII, 332.
9. The full official text of the decree may be found in *Aller des Heiligen Roemischen Reichs gehaltene Reichstage, Abschiede und Satzungen* (Mainz, 1666), 210, 211. It is also edited by Ludwig Keller in *Monatshefte der Comenius Gesellschaft* (Berlin, 1900), IX, 55-57, and by Bossert in "Die Reichsgesetze über die Wiedertäufer" in *Quellen zur Geschichte der Wiedertäufer, I. Band Herzogtum Württemberg* (Leipzig, 1930). 1°-10°. See the excellent discussion of Anabaptist persecution by John Horsch in "The Persecution of the Evangelical Anabaptists," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* (January 1938), XII, 3-26.
10. *Geschicht-Buch der Hutterischen Bruder*, edited by Rudolf Wolkan (MacLeod [Alberta] and Vienna, 1923), 142, 181.

11. **Ibid.**, 182-187. The following quotation is composed of extracts selected from this account without regard to the original order, chiefly from 186, 187.
12. **Gottfried Keller's Werke**. ed. by Max Nussberger (Leipzig, n. d.)VI, 309. See Elizabeth Horsch Bender, "The Portrayal of the Swiss Anabaptists in Gottfried Keller's *Ursula*," **Mennonite Quarterly Review** [July, 1943] XVII, 136-150.
13. In Switzerland, this group was called "Swiss Brethren," in Austria "Hutterites," in Holland and North Germany, "Menists." All these groups seriously objected to the name "Anabaptists" which was a term used to designate a punishable heresy and which after the tragic Münster episode (1534-35) was a name of odious opprobrium. I use the term here only for custom's sake. The term "Mennonite" came into wider use in the seventeenth century and was ultimately applied to all the groups except the Hutterites.
14. Ernst H. Correll, **Das Schweizerische Täufermennonitentum** (Tübingen, 1925). "Allgemeine historisch-soziologische Kennzeichnung," 3-10, gives an excellent concise survey. See particularly 6, footnote 1. See also Karl Kautsky, **Communism in Central Europe in the Time of the Reformation** (1897). Troeltsch rejected the theory of the socio-economic origin of the Anabaptists.
15. Albrecht Ritschl, **Geschichte des Pietismus** (Bonn, 1880). Cf. R. Friedmann, "Conception of the Anabaptist," **Church History** (December 1940) IX, 351.
16. Ludwig Keller, **Die Reformation und die älteren Reformparteien** (Leipzig, 1885). Cf. also Friedmann, *op.cit.*, 352.
17. Max Göbel, **Geschichte des Christlichen Lebens**, etc. (Coblenz, 1848), I, 134. Ritschl, *op.cit.*, 22, characterizes Göbel's views as follows: "Die Wiedertäuerei also soll nach Göbel die gründlichere, entschiedener, vollständigere Reformation sein, welche als 'Kind der Reformation' Luthers und Zwinglis zu erkennen aber von Luther seit 1522, von Zwingli seit 1524 aufgegeben worden wäre." Ritschl (*op.cit.*, 7) himself states the Anabaptist position as follows: "Nicht minder haben die Wiedertäufer sich dafür angesehen, dass sie das von Luther und Zwingli begonnene Werk der Wiederherstellung der Kirche zu seinem rechten Ziel führen."
18. Horsch, *op.cit.*, 289.
19. Letter of Conrad Grebel to Thomas Müntzer, Sept. 5, 1524. **Thomal Müntzers Briefwechsel**, ed. H. Bohmer, and P. Kirm (Leipzig, 1931), 92; English translation, Walter Rauschenbusch, "The Zurich Anabaptists and Thomas Müntzer," **American Journal of Theology** (January 1905) IX, 92.
20. Taken from an unpublished manuscript in the **Staatsarchiv des Kantons Bern**. (*Unnütze Papiere*, Bd. 80), entitled **Acta des Gesprächs zwischenn predicantten und Touffbrüderenn** (1538). Copy in the Goshen College Library.
21. Karl Holl, **Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte** (2nd and 3rd ed.) Tübingen, 1923), 359.
22. **Corpus Schwencfeldianorum** (Leipzig, 1911), II, 280 f. See also K. Ecke, **Schwencfeld, Luther und der Gedanke einer apostolischen Reformation** (Berlin, 1911), 101 f. See also the discussion on this topic in J. Horsch, "The Rise of State Church Protestantism," **Mennonite Quarterly Review** (July 1932), VI, 189-191.
- 22a. See Luther's **Deutsche Messe**, translated in **Works of Martin Luther** (ed. C. M. Jacobs et al.) Vol. VI (Philadelphia, 1932), 172, 173.
23. "Drei Zeugenaussagen Zwinglis im Täuferprozess" in **Huldreich Zwinglis Sämtliche Werke** (Leipzig, 1927), IV, 169.
24. Against this interpretation of Luther (and Zwingli) it may be argued that Luther never completely and consistently adopted the concept of a church of "earnest Christians only" which is here attributed to him, but that along with it he also retained the contradictory concept of the church functioning as a "corpus regens," that is, as an institution of social control. It may be agreed that Luther held the two concepts for a time and that he finally abandoned the former in favor of the latter, but the fact nevertheless remains that the former was for a time dominant, and that it is the implicit meaning of his whole basic theological position. The retention and eventual dominance of the second concept is an evidence of the carry-over of medievalism in Luther's thought. In regard to Zwingli, Wilhelm Hadorn says: "It must be admitted that not only Zwingli but also other Swiss and South German Reformers, e.g., Oecolampad and Capito, originally held views similar to the Anabaptists" (*Die Reformation in der Deutschen Schweiz*, [Leipzig, 1928], 104). Walter Kohler, the best living authority on Zwingli, says: "Es ist, wie bei Luther auch, die Kapitulation der autonomen Kirchengemeinschaft vor der Obrigkeit eingetreten." (**Zwinglis Werke** [Leipzig, 1927], IV, 29).
25. Karl Müller, **Kirchengeschichte**, II, I, 476. Müller describes the essential goal of the Anabaptists as follows: "Es bedeutete inmitten der Auflösung aller Verhältnisse genug, dass hier eine Gemeinschaft stand, die die Heiligung des Lebens allem anderen voranstellte und zugleich in dem unteren Volksschichten wirklich Fuss gefasst, sie mit selbständiger Religiosität gefüllt hat." (*Kirchengeschichte*, II, I, 330.)
26. Johannes Kühn, **Toleranz und Offenbarung** (Leipzig, 1923), 224 says: "With the Anabaptists everything was based on a central idea. This central idea was concretely religious. It was Jesus' command to follow Him in a holy life of fellowship." Professor Alfred Hegler of Tübingen describes the Anabaptist ideal as "liberty of conscience, rejection of all state-made Christianity, the demand for personal holiness, and a vital personal acceptance of Christian truth." Professor Paul Wernle says, "Their vital characteristic was the earnestness with which they undertook the practical fulfillment of New Testament requirements both for the individual and for the church." These and other similar quotations are to be found in Horsch, "The Character of the Evangelical Anabaptists as Reported by Contemporary Reformation Writers," **Mennonite Quarterly Review** (July 1934), VIII, 135.
27. Pilgrim Marpeck, the outstanding writer of the Swiss and South German Brethren, is an example. See J.C. Wenger, "The Theology of Pilgrim Marpeck," **Mennonite Quarterly Review** (October 1938), XII, 247.
28. The German (Luther) translation of 1 Peter 3:21 calls baptism "Der Bund eines guten Gewissens mit Gott."
29. Bullinger, **Von dem unverschämten frefel** (1531), fol. 75 r.
30. S.M. Jackson, **Selected Works of Huldreich Zwingli** (Philadelphia, 1901), 127.
31. Bullinger, **Der Wiedertäufferen Ursprung**, fol. 15 v.
32. Joachim von Wau, **Deutsche Historische Schriften**, ed. Ernst Göttinger (St. Gall, 1879), II, 408.
33. C.A. Cornelius, **Geschichte des Münsterschen Aufruhrs** (Leipzig, 1860), II, 52.
34. W.J. McGlothlin, **Die Berner Täufer bis 1532** (Berlin, 1902), 36.
35. J.J. Simler, **Sammlung alter und neuer Urkunden** (Zurich, 1757), I, 824.

36. Karl Rembert, *Die Wiedertäufer im Herzogtum Jülich* (Berlin, 1899), 564.
37. Ernst Müller, *Geschichte der Bernischen Täufer* (Frauenfeld, 1895), 88. Müller speaks (p. 89) of the mandate of 1585 as conceiving of "das Täuferwesen" as a just judgment of God on the church and the people of Berne.
38. Sebastian Franck, *Chronica, Zeitbuch und Geschichtsbibel* (Strassburg, 1531), folio 444v.
39. Schwenckfeld's *Epistolar* (1564), I, 203.
40. Bullinger, *Der Wiedertäufferen Ursprung* (1561), fol. 170r.
41. *Quellen zur Geschichte der Wiedertäufer, I. Band Herzogtum Württemberg*, ed. Gustav Bossert (Leipzig, 1930), 216 f.
42. *Ibid.*, 259 ff.
43. *Complete Works of Menno Simons* (Elkhart, Indiana, 1871), II, 37b.
44. *Handlung oder Acta der Disputation gehalten zu Zofingen* (Zurich, 1532).
45. Bohmer-Kirn, *op.cit.*, 97.
46. Horsch, *op.cit.*, 386.
47. P. Tschackert, *Die Entstehung der Lutherischen und reformierten Kirchenlehre* (Göttingen, 1910), 133, says of the Anabaptists that they were "a voluntary Christian fellowship, striving to conform to the Christian spirit for the practice of brotherly love."
48. Johannes Kühn, *op.cit.*, 231. fol. 22v.
49. Ernst Müller, *op.cit.*, 44. See Ernst Correll, *op.cit.*, 15 f. on the attitude of the various Anabaptist groups on community of goods.
50. Horsch, *op.cit.*, 317.
51. A. Hulshof *Geschiedenis van de Doopsgezinden te Straatsburg van 1525 tot 1557* (Amsterdam, 1905), 216.
52. Bullinger, *Der Wiedertäufferen Ursprung*, fol. 129v.
53. John Horsch, *The Hutterian Brethren 1528-1931* (Goshen, Indiana, 1931), gives the only adequate account in English of the Hutterian Brethren. It is of interest to note that Erasmus, Melancthon, and Zwingli condemned private ownership of property as a sin. See Paul Wernle, *Renaissance und Reformation* (Tübingen, 1912), 54, 55, for the citations of Erasmus and Melancthon, and Horsch, *Hutterian Brethren*, 132, footnote 126, for the citation of Zwingli. Wilhelm Pauck says that Bucer's ideal state was that of Christian communism, "Martin Bucer's Conception of a Christian State," in *Princeton Theological Review* (January 1928), XXVI, 88.
54. Not all the Anabaptists were completely nonresistant. Balthasar Hubmaier for instance for a brief period (1526-28) led a group of Anabaptists at Nikolsburg in Moravia who agreed to carry the sword against the Turk and pay special war taxes for this purpose. This group, which became extinct in a short time, was known as the "Schwertler" in distinction from other Moravian Anabaptists called the "Stäbler," who later became the Hutterites and have continued to the present. It is obvious that Hubmaier and the "Schwertler" represent a transient aberration from original and authentic Anabaptism. Bullinger (*Von dem unverschampten frafel* [1531] fol. 139v.) testifies that the Swiss Brethren considered war to be "das ergist uebel das man erdencken mag." and (*Der Wiedertäufferen Ursprung* [1561] fol. 16 r.) says "they do not defend themselves, therefore they do not go to war and are not obedient to the government on this point." See also, extensive compilation of evidence by John Horsch in his booklet, *The Principle of Nonresistance as Held by the Mennonite Church, A Historical Survey* (Scottsdale, Pa., 1927), 60 pages.
55. Letter of Grebel to Müntzer, Bohmer-Kirn, *op.cit.*, 97.
56. (Pilgrim Marpeck), *Testamentalerleütterung* (n.d., n.p., ca. 1544), fol. 313r.
57. (Peter Riedemann), *Rechenschaft unserer Religion, Lehre und Glaubens von den Bruedern die Man die Hutterischen nennt* (Berne, Indiana, 1902), 105.
58. *The Complete Works of Menno Simons* (Elkhart, Indiana, 1871), I, 170b and 81b. The quotations were revised by comparison with the Dutch editions of 1664 and 1681.
59. Mennonites of Holland, Germany, France, and Switzerland gradually abandoned nonresistance in the course of the nineteenth century. The emigrant Mennonites in Russia and North America have maintained it. The Mennonites of the United States furnish 40 percent of all conscientious objectors in Civilian Public Service in the present war, and the Mennonites of Canada a still higher percent of the conscientious objectors in that country.

# Chapter Three.

## Disciples and Doctrine

### 3.01 Introduction.

The history of the early Anabaptist-Mennonite church was one of heroic struggle and perseverance in the face of often bloody persecution. Thousands of men and women, disciples of the cross, gave their lives for the sake of their faith. The zeal and earnestness of this period was manifested by a rich legacy of spiritual writings which flowered and flourished in the heat of battle. This literature developed and expounded the teachings of evangelical Christianity and served as the devotional reading material of generations of believers. This chapter will focus on the teachings and doctrines of four leading Anabaptist-Mennonite disciples: Thielmann J. van Braght, Menno Simons, Dirk Philips and George Hansen.

### 3.02 Thielmann van Braght and the "Martyrs Mirror".

Numerous accounts of the faith, suffering and death of the Anabaptist-Mennonite martyrs of the 16th century were written and published. Thielmann J. van Braght (1626-1664) was the Aeltester of the Flemish Mennonite Gemeinde at Dortrecht, Holland, who assembled and edited many of these accounts<sup>1</sup>. He also added considerable material from the archival records of the inquisitors and civil courts of execution. Much of this new information came from Switzerland and Germany. "Hence he was able not only to verify and to add to previous information and to insert a large number of official documents with authentic court sentences, but also to give accounts of many martyrs hitherto unknown"<sup>2</sup>. The result of van Braght's devoted work was the renown and authoritative **The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians**, generally referred to simply as the **Martyrs Mirror**.

The final work first published in 1659 contained the three major Dutch confessions of faith, numerous theological writings, the history of nonresistant Christian martyrs from the time of Christ to 1500, and finally the tragic accounts of 808 named Anabaptist-Mennonite martyrs. The writings of the martyrs were not only of interest for their obvious inherent inspirational and devotional value but also for the numerous statements of faith which they contained. These records were often written by the martyrs just prior to their death, or were portions of presentations made to the court of execution. These statements also consisted of letters written to loved ones or to various Gemeinden while the martyrs were languishing in prison in expectation of their death, etc. Thielmann van Braght collected and edited these writings which then made up the most crucial portion of his work. The **Martyrs Mirror** also became famous for its beautiful drawings which so poignantly portrayed the tragedy of the so-called evangelical inquisition and program to eradicate the nonresistant Christians.

The **Martyrs Mirror** consisting of some 1500 large format pages was a major reference work and source of theological and doctrinal inspiration for the Anabaptist-Mennonites. The first German edition of this work was published by the American Mennonites in 1814. Because of the influence of pietism there was seemingly insufficient interest among the Prussian-Russian Mennonite churches so that a reprint of the complete German edition of the **Martyrs Mirror** was not warranted. However, in 1787, Isaac van Duehren (1725-1800) a Frisian Mennonite from Danzig, compiled and published a much smaller abridged **Martyrs Mirror**.<sup>3</sup> This work was re-published by the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia in 1863. Nevertheless, the **Martyrs Mirror**<sup>4</sup> was one of the most popular writings of the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement. Here follow a few of the shorter Martyr accounts contained in the large unabridged edition:

### 3.03 Leopold Schneider, A.D. 1528.

"This Leopold Schneider was beheaded as a pious witness of the suffering of Christ, for the truth, at Augsburg, A.D. 1528. He left the following admonition for the comfort and instruction of others:"

"My God, I will praise Thee in my last hour; Thee who art high above in heaven, I will praise Thee with heart and mouth, for Thou art worthy of it; strengthen my faith (Luke 17:5), now that I must go on this pilgrimage of suffering; remember me in mercy in the severe conflict. I commend my spirit into Thy hands (Luke 23:46); in Thee I rejoice. Christ, help me to stand in my sufferings. Heavenly Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Because I cannot forsake Thy Word, I am hated, and they seek to separate my body from the soul. Therefore I call upon Thee, O God, for gracious help; I trust in Thee, for I have no other comforter. That which is so clearly written, Mark 16:16; 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,' can certainly not be contradicted

by any one; hence it is to be heeded. O ye blind, why are you troubled and grieved because the command of Christ is observed? acquaint yourselves with the holy Scriptures, and you will find what Christ the Son of God has commanded us to do. I beseech you all, beloved brethren and sisters, that you would firmly trust in God, and let not my bitter death grieve you; for God will richly reward it; we must once take our leave of this vale of sorrow. The Scripture clearly declares, that he who would have laughing and joy here, shall hereafter mourn and weep. Luke 6:25; we must suffer here with patience; the Lord grant that it be done innocently. He that would here bring his gift to the altar, and remembers that his brother has aught against him, must leave his gift at the altar, and first go and be reconciled to his brother, and then come and offer his gift. Matt. 5:23, 24. Therefore, I beseech Thee, O God, graciously to forgive those who put me to death. I commend my spirit and soul into Thy hand, O God; deliver me out of all my distresses, and never turn away from me; deprive my flesh of all its power, that I may overcome and be victorious in Thee. Amen." Rev. 2:11.<sup>5</sup>

### 3.04 Anna of Freiburg, A.D. 1529.

"This Anna of Freiburg was zealous in the fear of the Lord and as she believed in Christ, and was baptized upon faith in Him, and thus sought to arise with Christ; and walk in newness of life, the adversary could not endure it; therefore Anna was envied, accused, apprehended by his ministers, and after steadfastly suffering many torments, sentenced to death, and drowned in the water, and afterwards burned with fire. This happened at Freiburg, in the year 1529. When she was about to die, she spoke the following prayer to God, and left these admonitions to all descendants."

"Dear, eternal heavenly Father, I call upon Thee, from the depths of my heart; do not let me turn from Thee, but keep me in Thy truth unto my end. O God, keep my heart and mouth; guard me, that I may never separate from Thee, on account of impending sorrow and anguish, or any manner of distress; keep me cheerful and glad in my sufferings. Eternal God, my dear Father instruct and teach me, Thy poor, unworthy child, that I may heed Thy ways and paths. O Father, this is my sincere desire, that through Thy power I may press even unto death, through all sorrows, sufferings, anguish and pain, and in this let me persevere, O God, that I may not be separated from Thy love. There are many who now walk in this way; but the cup of suffering is given them to drink. We are also accused of false doctrine, in order to draw us from Christ our Lord. But O God, I lift up my soul unto Thee and trust in Thee in every adversity; do not let me be confounded, lest my enemy exalt himself over me in this earth. I am now imprisoned here by him, but, O God, I sincerely wait for Thee with great desire, until Thou wilt awaken, and deliver Thy prisoners. O dear heavenly Father, make us prepared with the five wise virgins (Matt. 25:2), that we may prudently wait for the bridegroom with His heavenly host. O heavenly King, feed and refresh us according to the spirit with Thy heavenly meats, which never perish but abide in life eternal; for if Thou shouldst withdraw Thy food from us, all that we do, would with ourselves be in vain and perish. But, through Thy grace, we trust in Thee, that we shall not fail. I do not doubt in the least, the power of God; for His judgments are honored. He will forsake no one who firmly holds to Him in faith, and seeks to walk in His true ways. Heb. 13:5; Matt. 7:14. O ye Christians, rejoice (Phil. 3:1), and always be of good cheer in the Lord Jesus Christ; may He increase love and faith in us. God comfort us by His holy word, in which we may firmly trust. I commend myself to God and His church; may He be my Protector today, for His holy name's sake. O my Father, let it be done through Jesus Christ, Amen."

"Thereupon she voluntarily submitted to death, and was drowned in the water, as mentioned above."<sup>6</sup>

### 3.05 George Friesen, A.D. 1562.

"This George Friesen, a cabinetmaker, and William van Keppel, formerly a mass priest, were both apprehended at Cologne, A.D. 1562, for the evangelical truth. When William was sought and found he willingly went with his captors, who first took him into a tower of the city, where, however, he did not remain long, since they removed him into the count's dungeon, whither those were taken who were condemned to death. In this dungeon he found said George Friesen, who was his brother in the Lord, and also a prisoner, and whose company was a great comfort to him."

"Manifold were the nets spread and the snares laid, to catch their souls; but the principal ado and clamor was about infant baptism, which their adversaries claimed to be right; but as they could not prove it by the Word of God, they employed human wisdom, but to God be the praise, with this they could not move these men. Now the lords entreated them, now they severely threatened them with torture and death; but the prisoners rejoiced in it. The others said things sweet and things bitter, but this could not move the prisoners, for through the help of the Lord their hearts stood firm as a wall.

"The count offered to give George money, and his servant maid to wife, if he would renounce his faith. But George would adhere to the truth and said to the count: 'Your servant maid, riches, or money cannot take me to God, but I have chosen something better, for which I hope to strive.' There also came to William a subtle individual, who made him fair promises and said that he would take him to England, who would soon have drawn the net of delusion over his head if the Lord had not succored and preserved him.

"When the last hour arrived that they were to be prepared for the offering, for which they greatly longed, they were both brought out of prison—the count's dungeon—to the house of the count,



into a hall, at one o'clock in the night. There much arrogant and scornful language was used against them, and they were much tormented, to which George said nothing. William, also, answering but little. This continued half the night, till break of day or twilight, when the two prisoners were hurriedly taken to the Rhine, where they were to be drowned.

"When George saw how hurriedly they were taken to the Rhine in the early morning, he called to the count, saying: 'Sir count, what becomes of the promise you made us? for you said that you should put us to death in broad daylight.' But no one paid attention to these words, but they were hurried to the place where they were to be put to death, namely the Rhine. And thus were fulfilled the words of David, where he says: 'They have privily slain the upright.' Ps. 11:2. May the Lord forgive them, for they know not what they do.

"When they were taken out on the water, in a boat, William divested himself of his clothes, and laid his hands upon his feet, to be bound thus; for he thought that he was to be drowned and get home first. But this was not to be his fate, they made him put his clothes on again, and told him that he should wait.

"And thus George was compelled to be the first one, to be made ready for an offering. When he was ready for death he took brotherly leave from William, and they kissed each other with a holy kiss of love. Then George was thrown over-board, and drowned in the Rhine, thus testifying with his death that he was a partaker of Christ's sufferings to receive at His hands, through grace, the crown upon mount Zion, and rejoice forever with Him. II Esd. 2:43.

"After George was drowned, the executioner said to William: 'Put on your clothes; I will take you to the shore, and there behead you.' William, through the grace of God, was willing and ready for it, and said: 'You may do with me whatever God wills and permits.'

"When they came on shore, they set William at liberty. The executioner said to him: 'Go your way.' Whether they did this because William had been a priest, and they would have had to desecrate him, before putting him to death, and whether they therefore rather released him, than go to such trouble is not known."

### 3.06 Menno Simons (1496-1561), A Brief Biography.

Menno Simons was the outstanding Aeltester of the early Anabaptist-Mennonite period. His leadership and writings eventually achieved such authority that the entire movement came to be called "Mennists" and eventually Mennonites in his honour. Menno Simons was ordained as a Roman Catholic priest at Utrecht in 1524. He had studied Latin and Greek and also the writings of the church fathers. After a prolonged period of soul searching and prayerful study of the Scripture the historic teachings of evangelical Christianity became manifest to Menno Simons.

In 1536, Menno Simons openly joined the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement. Shortly thereafter a delegation of believers came to him and requested that he become the Aeltester of their little flock. After concern respecting his weakness and his limited talents and a period of prayer and meditation Menno finally agreed to accept the invitation. He quickly became one of the foremost Aeltesten of the non-resistant Christians. He travelled all over northern Europe where he inspired, organized, and guided the numerous small scattered groups of the movement.

Menno Simons was a prolific writer with an aggressive writing style. Because of the radical tone of some of these writings it is easy to understand why merely a century or two later many of those who bore his name as Mennonites were scared and ashamed to have these writings again made available for fear of repercussions from their non-Mennonite neighbours and friends. But Menno Simons was a fearless and aggressive leader who was not deterred by either the physical threat of death by the inquisitors on the one hand, or the fierce debates and theological duels with the scholars of the Reformation on the other.

The teachings of Menno Simons were unique in the reformation era for they were Christ centered in every respect. Every book and every pamphlet he wrote had on the front page the motto, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ". Christ was the foundation and cornerstone of his faith and all other scriptural authority was understood as being subject and subservient to the words and teachings of Jesus Christ. From this view the writings of Paul could never be interpreted as solely a teaching of grace. Consequently there was no need to regard the writing of James as an "epistle of straw", as Luther and the other Protestants did. For in this spirit it perfectly complemented and supplemented the teachings found in the gospels. The end result of these hermeneutics was the dual principle of discipleship and the fulfillment of individual salvation through the Gemeinde as a part of the Church of Christ.<sup>8</sup>

Dr. Cornelius Krahn has concluded that through his writings, debates and evangelical journeys to counsel and assist sister Gemeinden, Menno Simons was able to prevent the complete collapse of the northern European wing of the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement. Particularly through his writings he "did much to restore the original Anabaptist (sic) concepts and principles, which were in grave

danger of being lost.”<sup>9</sup> The fact that the movement in northern Europe eventually came to bear his name symbolizes the tremendous influence which Menno Simons had in consolidating the scattered flocks of nonresistant Christians in this area.

Surprisingly Menno Simons survived the bounty on his head to die of natural causes on a sick-bed. He was buried in his own garden in Wuestenfelde in a spot which can no longer be exactly determined. On a small nearby plot a modest monument currently marks the location “in memory of Menno’s labours in the service of God and the church he loved.”<sup>10</sup> The following extracts from his writings will demonstrate the deep insight and commitment of one of the greatest leaders of Christendom.

### 3.07 Menno Simons. The Blasphemy of John of Leiden, 1535.

Discipleship was a fundamental tenet of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. This meant that the believer was to follow the example and teachings of Jesus Christ. Matthew 7:21 and 24; Mark 3:35; Mark 8:34-38; Luke 6:46-49; Luke 11:28; John 8:51; John 11:24; John 14:6; John 14:23. The paramount teaching of Jesus Christ was love. Love of God and love of fellowman. Matthew 19:19; Matthew 22:37-39; Mark 12:29-34; Luke 10:27; John 15:12-17. The most necessary component and corollary of love was the Biblical teaching of nonresistance as it was practiced by Christ and his disciples. Nonresistance as an integral component of Christian love had little in common with pacifism which was merely an intellectual aversion to war.

**The Blasphemy of John of Leiden** was written in response to the tragedy of Muenster in 1534. Under John of Leiden fanatical rebaptizers or Anabaptists had seized control of the city of Muenster by force of arms. These radical premillennial spiritualists believed that they must establish the Kingdom of God on earth by force in anticipation of the imminent return of Christ. The Muensterites were quickly eradicated by the armies of the Roman Catholic Bishop.<sup>13</sup> The State Church and authorities now used the stigma of the hated name Anabaptist as a reason to launch an all out attack against all rebaptizers. This included the nonresistant Christians who otherwise had nothing in common with the chiliast Anabaptists of Muenster.

**The Blasphemy of John of Leiden** was written by Menno Simons in order to rebut unequivocally the charges that the nonresistant Christians were in anyway related with the fanatical Muensterites or other rebaptizers who disregarded the evangelical teachings of the apostolic church. In fact Menno Simons calls the teachings of John of Leiden a blasphemy against Christ and the gospel. In this booklet Menno set forth the fundamental Anabaptist-Mennonite principle that the Kingdom of Christ on earth is a spiritual kingdom. Menno Simons also explains that this spiritual kingdom is a kingdom of love and peace where only spiritual weapons are wielded. In the following extract Menno Simons discusses various aspects of the principle of nonresistance.

“By the grace of God we will also write a little about warfare, that Christians are not allowed to fight with the sword, that we may all of us leave the armor of David to the physical Israelites and the sword of Zerubbabel to those who build the temple of Zerubbabel in Jerusalem, which was a figure of them and a shadow of things to come. For the body itself is in Christ, as Paul says.

“Now we should not imagine that the figure of the Old Testament is so applied to the truth of the New Testament that flesh is understood as referring to flesh; for the figure must reflect the reality; the image, the being, and the letter, the Spirit.

“If we take this view of it we shall easily understand with what kind of arms Christians should fight, namely, with the Word of God which is a two-edged sword, of which we will by the assistance of God say a few things.

“The eternal God has raised His son Christ a Prophet unto us whom we shall hear; and since Christ testifies of Himself that He is our only Master, therefore it is incontrovertible that we dare not accept any other doctrine but the doctrine of Christ. No strange doctrine which is contrary to the doctrine of Christ and that which the apostles by the Holy Ghost have written and taught us, dare we, I say, accept. For there may be no strange fire offered before God. Christ will not tolerate the leaven of the Pharisees. . . .

“If Christ fights His enemies with the sword of His mouth, if He smites the earth with the rod of His mouth, and slays the wicked with the breath of His lips; and if we are to be conformed unto His image, how can we, then, oppose our enemies with any other sword? Does not the Apostle Peter say: For even hereto 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; when he suffered he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously? This agrees with the words of John who says: He that abides in Christ walks as Christ walked. Christ Himself says, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. Again, My sheep hear my voice and they follow me. And this is the voice of Christ: 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: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn

to him the other also.

"Again, Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven, for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do you more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. . . .

"Not the leaves of the tree but the fruit is the thing that matters. And which the right kind of fruit is, Paul clearly testifies, saying: The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. Not a word is said about taking up the carnal sword or repaying evil with evil. But rather as Paul says of another place: Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves; but rather give place to wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. How can Christians fight with the implements of war? Paul plainly said, Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. Now Christ Jesus was minded to suffer; and in the same way all Christians must be minded.

"Christ did not want to be defended with Peter's sword. How can a Christian then defend himself with it? Christ wanted to drink the cup which the Father had given Him; how then can a Christian avoid it?

"Or does any person expect to be saved by other means than those which Christ has taught us? Is not Christ the way, the truth, and the life? Is He not the door to the fold, so that none can enter into the fold but by Him?

"Is not He the Shepherd of His sheep, whom the sheep should follow? Is not He our Lord and Master? And who is it that would be above his Lord? Is it not he that would not suffer as Christ suffered? Who is it that would be above his Master but he that is not satisfied with his Master's doctrine? Let everyone take heed. It is forbidden to us to fight with physical weapons.

"And if we are to take prophets as an example to suffer persecution, then we must put on the apostolic armor, and the armor of David must be laid aside. How can it be harmonized with the Word of God that one who boasts of being a Christian could lay aside the spiritual weapons and take up the carnal ones, for Paul says: The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient; in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth. And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.

"All of you who would fight with the sword of David; and also be the servants of the Lord, consider these words, which show how a servant should be minded. If he is not to strive, and quarrel, how then can he fight? If he is to be gentle to all men, how can he then hate and harm them? If he is to be ready to learn, how can he lay aside the apostolic weapons? He will need them. If he is to instruct in meekness those that oppose, how can he destroy them?

"If he is to instruct in meekness those that oppose truth, how can he angrily punish them that do not as yet acknowledge the truth? Paul says: if God peradventure will give them repentance. But some do not want to wait for that, and even if they do it with good intentions, they nevertheless with Uzzah lay their hands to the ark of God. Therefore I fear that it will not go unpunished. And even if with Saul they save the best beasts of the Amalekites for sacrifices unto God, yet it will not please the Lord; for it is contrary to His Word. He has pleasure in obedience and not in sacrifice. . . .

"Christ has not taken His kingdom with the sword, but He entered it through much suffering. Yet they think to take it by the sword! Oh, blindness of man! But thus it must be, that those who will not confess Christ their only Shepherd so that they may be pastured by Him, will have to eat of the pastures which are trampled upon; and that those who will not draw the clear crystal water from the fount of the Saviour, will have to drink the impure water which the false shepherds have stirred up with their feet. And that for the reason that they have done double evil to the children of Israel. They have forsaken the Lord, the living fountain, and have made fountains of their own which appear beautiful but they afford no water.

"Therefore I admonish all beloved brethren, yea, I pray you by the mercy of God our Lord Jesus Christ, to give heed to the Word of God, and not to forsake it; for you have seen your master Christ, with the eye of faith, and you have heard His voice, saying, This is the true way, walk upon it, go neither to the right hand nor to the left.

"Let every one of you guard against all strange doctrine of swords and resistance and other like things which is nothing short of a fair flower under which lies hidden an evil serpent which has shot his venom into many. Let every one beware."<sup>14</sup>

### 3.08 Menno Simons, The New Birth, 1537.

The essay "The New Birth" compares the life and behavior of those who are reborn and of those who remain unregenerate. In the words of J.C. Wenger the message is, "Repent without delay!

For nothing avails before God except the new creature, a faith which worketh by love, and the keeping of God's commandments."<sup>11</sup> As usual, Menno Simons does not make any pretense nor does he dilute the evangelical message. He lashes out at those who believe that they can kill and oppress each other and still be part of the true Church of Christ. Similarly Menno Simons warns those who construct their theology on the grace of God that the promise of grace is not for those who remain unregenerate and unpenitent. Menno Simons concludes his views regarding the new birth with a summary of the consequence of regeneration and a loving admonition for all to seek the way of the cross.

"The holy Scriptures and our common faith teach us that the holy, Christian church is an assembly of the righteous and a communion of saints. He that can see with but half an eye in the Scriptures must confess that your church and assembly are a church and assembly of the unrighteous, the immoral, the impenitent, the sensual, and perverts, yes, of the bloodthirsty wolves, lions, bears, basilisks, serpents, and fiery flying dragons.

"Ah, friends, lift your heads and open your eyes! Oh, ye people, look through the whole world what life they lead, they who have received the same baptism with you, who partake of the same sacraments and worship, who indulge in the same boasting of the death and blood of the Lord and say that they are Christ's church and people. For it is clearer than midday that many of you are so foolish, so driven by the spirit of the devil that you hate, envy, bite, and devour one another, so that you ruin provinces, cities, castles, and citadels with your accursed wars and turmoil. You shed human blood like water. The poor citizen and peasant, men of the same faith, you deprive of life and possessions. You burn, rob, plunder, capture, tax, and torture even those who have never harmed you, or given you an evil word. In truth, I know not how the Behemoth of hell could rant in a more devilish and cruel fashion than you or your members who pose as the church of Christ. God preserve us! You violate matrons and maidens; you persecute the pious and God-fearing. You tolerate public brothels, drunken saloons, fencing schools, gambling dens, and the like disgraces. Of idol houses and images there is no end with all false service. I make no mention of your intolerable, blasphemous cursing and swearing, your lying, cheating, drunkenness, harlotry, pomp, splendor, etc. Why talk at length?

"I quit, for it seems to me that nobody can be found under the whole heaven who can relate in detail the gross abominations, wicked acts, abuses, and scandals of those who share your faith and baptism. An honest man must be astounded at these great sins. Dear Lord, help us, yes, whosoever does not yet understand that you are not born from above, that you were not baptized properly but contrary to all Scripture, and that all your boasting of the pardon of sins and the mercy of Christ, His grace, merit, flesh, blood, cross, death, church, kingdom, and eternal promise is vain, and without the Scriptures: he must be, I say, a dull and foolish man.

"Ah, reader, how little you ponder the Word of the Lord, so highly recommended to you; how little you regard your poor soul, bought with such a precious price, which must either live with God in heaven or perish forever with the devil in hell. Do you think, my friend, that the Lord is a dreamer of dreams, or His Word a fable? Ah, no, not a letter will fall to the ground of all that He spoke. It is high time for you to reflect that God's promise of grace is not given to the unregenerate and impenitent, but to the regenerate and penitent.

"Let every one take warning and trust no longer in lies; for instance, that he is a baptized and regenerated Christian, nor trust to long ancient usages, nor in papistic decretals, nor imperial mandates, nor upon the wisdom and glosses of the learned ones, nor upon the invention, council, institution, and wisdom of any man. My counsel, says God through the power of the prophet, shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure. The Word of God is eternal. Neither princes, nor power, nor men's commands with all their imperial edicts, counsels, and decrees determine faith so as to save a man. It is impossible. We must hear and follow that which Christ Jesus, God's first and only begotten Son Himself, brought from heaven and taught from the mouth of His Father, and confirmed by signs and wonders, and finally sealed with His crimson blood. The decretal stands; stands, I say, and can never be demolished or altered by any gates of hell.

"By this counsel we are all taught that we must hear Christ, believe in Christ, follow His footsteps, repent, be born from above; become as little children, not in understanding, but in malice; be of the same mind as Christ, walk as He did, deny ourselves, take up His cross and follow Him; and that if we love father, mother, children, or life more than Him, we are not worthy of Him, nor are we His disciples. We are taught in it that adulterers, whoremongers, murderers, drunkards, idolaters, and the like sinners shall not inherit the kingdom of God; that we must not love the world and the things therein, nor conform to the world; that we through faith must die to our evil flesh and conquer the devil, lead an upright, irrefragable, pious life through faith, and in all things act according to the will of the Lord. Also, we are to baptize upon faith and not without it, and celebrate the Lord's Supper in a sincerely penitent congregation, I mean so far as man can judge. We must practice exclusion or the ban, according to the Scriptures. We are to fear, serve, and love the Lord with all the heart and walk in His commandments, and we are to assist our neighbor, comfort and serve him as much as in us is, and the like doctrine and instruction.

"You see, worthy reader, here you have in part the immutable, eternal decretal of God, which was sealed in the wise council chamber of His Majesty; and proof that He recognizes no other. Blessed are they who receive this with a firm faith and conform thereto according to their abilities in all

weakness, that is, live according to the divine decretal, ordinance, command, and prohibition, according to Christ's Word, and according to the unblamable example of Christ. On the contrary, cursed are they who despise, reject, curse, hate, defame, mock, persecute, and cast it into fire and water, and comfort themselves with human power, institutions, and fables. For they deny the Lord who bought them and reject the Gospel of peace; nor do they believe that Jesus Christ is their Messiah, Saviour, High Priest, and Prophet. Ah, how good it were if these poor people had never been born. May the Lord mercifully grant them converted and renewed hearts so that they may repent and be eternally saved, if possible."<sup>12</sup>

### 3.09 Menno Simons. Education and Learning, 1541.

One of the most divisive issues for the Russian Mennonites was the question of education and learning. Through all the cultural battles of the reactionary Grosze Gemeinde and the pietist Orloff Gemeinde the teachings of Menno Simons in this respect were seemingly forgotten. These teachings were probably progressive for their time. It was his view that it was the evangelical obligation of parents to provide for the proper education of their children. This teaching is abundantly evident in the following quotation from the book entitled "The True Christian Faith" which Menno wrote in about the year 1541 and enlarged in the year 1556.

"Behold, worthy reader, thus the literal Israel was obliged to teach the children from youth and to acquaint them with all the blessings and miracles of the Lord which had happened to them and their fathers, so that they might fear, love, and serve the Lord all their days, and so receive the blessings and escape the curse, which was contained in the Law.

"In like manner we must also do, if we rightly confess Christ, believe His Word, and with our children desire to obtain the worthy and pleasant land, and eternally to inherit it in grace, the things which He has promised His children. Therefore, let us not neglect it, but observe it well, teach our children rightly in the Word, and point out His righteous judgments—awful judgment—so that they may learn to fear the Lord with all their heart and turn from evil.

"Let us also keep before them God's unfathomably great mercy, love, and the services of His grace, so that they may love Him for it and walk in His statutes. Let us imprint on their hearts Jesus Christ, our only and eternal Saviour, with His Holy Spirit, Word, and example, so that they may rightly know Him and follow in His footsteps. And let us set them an example in all wisdom, righteousness, and truth, with a pious and virtuous life, so that they may through the careful admonition and unblamable example of their pious parents be instructed in the kingdom of God, and furnished to all manner of good works. . . .

"Behold, worthy readers, thus it behooves true Christians to teach, to admonish, to reprove, and to chasten their children; to set them an example in all righteousness, to rear them in the fear of the Lord, and to care for their poor souls lest through their negligence they depart from the true path, die in their sins, and so perish at last in their unbelief.

"The Lord testifies concerning Abraham saying, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment. Gen. 18:17-19.

"The good Tobit taught his son and said, My son, obey thy father, serve the Lord in truth and be upright; keep His commandments, and teach thy children to do likewise, that they give alms, fear God always, and love Him and trust Him with all their heart. And when they attain the age of maturity and have not the power of continence (but him that has it, him I would advise with Paul to use it unto the Lord) do not let them keep company with those outside of Christ and His church, be they noble, rich or handsome, as do the proud, avaricious, and unchaste of this world; but let them keep company with those who fear the Lord, love, seek, honor, and follow, thank and serve Him with the whole heart, be they noble or common, rich or poor, beautiful or plain, for they are holy and children of saints; and therefore it should and must be done in the Lord."<sup>15</sup>

### 3.10 Higher Education.

It was so-called higher education which most frequently was the cause of division among the Russian Mennonites. How did Menno Simons regard those who obtained a more extensive formal education? The answer is simple. As a learned man himself Menno Simons clearly recognized that the pursuit of education in itself was certainly not evil. However, Menno Simons points out that the pursuit of higher learning can detract from evangelical humility and simplicity. i.e. That higher learning must always remain subject to the supremacy of Godly wisdom which is the only wisdom of any worth. One of the accusations made against Menno Simons and the Anabaptist-Mennonites was that they despised learning and that their humility and simplicity was nothing more than ignorance. In the booklet **The Incarnation of our Lord** Menno Simons defends himself against these accusations.

“In the seventh place he accuses me saying that I have ridiculed the two Latin syllogisms which he handed me when I went away; that I despised learning and proficiency in language, disdainfully called them philosophies; referred to myself as a humble theologian, a matter with which I ensnare the untutored and simple folk, and make myself a reputation; but that my simplicity is not simplicity but rather ignorance, etc. Yes, he has portrayed me in such a way that the memory of me will probably continue with men for all time—although, alas, not much to my honor.”

Reply. “That he has called me by these latter nicknames came about because I had written to him and his collaborators saying, Let us not treat of these things in subtly invented syllogisms nor with any clever human sophistries, for we do not have any of these things. But let us use in our debates only the plain and unequivocal Word that cannot be twisted with glosses, nor broken with human wisdom. These are my words of 1543, written in my *Confession* sent to him and his fellow preachers.

“If you are of pious heart, then judge whether I have hereby deserved such an ugly and bitter attack. But I discern that I have earned this beautiful bouquet, not by quoted words, but by the poor and despised truth. Understand correctly, dear reader. Learnedness and proficiency in languages I have never disdained, but have honored and coveted them from my youth; although I have, alas, never attained to them. Praise God, I am not so bereft of my sense that I should disdain and despise the knowledge of languages whereby the precious Word of divine grace has come to us. I could wish that I and all pious hearts were at home in them if only we would employ them in genuine humility and to the glory of our God and the service of our fellows.

“As to my unlearnedness, the thing which he so bitterly hurls at me, I am not only ignorant, but altogether unlearned; and not, or only slightly, proficient in languages. Yes, reader, I say with Socrates, very freely, that as far as human wisdom is concerned, I know but one thing, and that is that I do not know. But as to the heavenly wisdom, I am by God’s grace in so far taught of God that I confess from the heart that my Saviour and Redeemer, Christ Jesus, is God’s only begotten and first-born Son and that he who believes in Him has everlasting life (John 3:18); that a liar is of the devil (John 8:45); that he who hates his brother is a murderer (1 John 3:15); that he who does not repent, must die in his sins (Luke 13:4); that the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). And out of this unsung wisdom (eternal thanks to the Lord) I have derived such reverent fear in my poor soul that my earthly mind is converted to a better frame, and I am heartily sorry that I fail to walk in Christ with all my strength according to God’s will and be a righteous and blameless Christian; and that I am unable to beget the whole world out of its proud and godless life, unto a new and penitent Christian life, with the Lord’s Spirit, power, and Word. For my only joy and my heart’s desire is that we might rightly preach Christ, according to His holy Word, magnify His holy name, seek Him, fear Him, love Him, and serve Him; yes, that we might be the city of the living God, the glorious kingdom of His honor, and the temple of His Holy Spirit, etc.

“Now this wisdom which effects such power and yields such fruits, I consider to be the very finest that can be named, even if it is taught and recovered by an ignorant teamster to hod carrier; yes, it is the only oil of gladness for my perturbed heart, the only cure for my heavy care; and by God’s grace, it will finally also be the glorious adornment and the crown of my glory. Read about this noble, highly learned wisdom and philosophy in the proverbs of Solomon, also Sirach and the Book of Wisdom, and you will discover what is its proper excellence and power.

“You see, dear reader, for the sake of the sweetness of this philosophy, its nobility, its virtue, its fruit, its delightfulness, and its beauty, which I have not learned from any famous doctors nor in any institution of higher learning, and in order to delight my poor soul with its living power, I have preferred to be the fool of the world’s learned ones, in order that I might be found of God to be wise, rather than to be one of the most famous of the worldly wise, and at the last be a fool in God’s sight. And so this is my apology and brief reply to his caustic invective.

“Once more I say that I put down those words, *subtle syllogisms*, and, *clever sophisms*, without the least disdain for learning and in the simplicity of my heart. And I have neither despised nor wronged anybody by so doing. I honor learnedness whenever it is properly and reverently employed. But above all things do I praise the simple and virtuous wisdom that is from above; for it will never perish but abide in glorious honor with all the pious in eternal life.”<sup>16</sup>

### 3.11 Menno Simons. The True Christian Faith, 1541.

In this booklet, **The True Christian Faith**, Menno Simons discusses various kinds of faith and also portrays the true piety which flows from evangelical Christian faith. In a section entitled “Ten Studies of Persons of True Faith” Menno Simons also considers some of the socio-economic implications which should flow from such a faith. Here follows an extract from his discussions of “The Faith of the Centurion of Capernaum”;

“You see, faithful reader, here you have the centurion as a living example by which you may learn how a true Christian faith humbles itself before God, and doubts not His power. Also, how kindly and graciously faith deals with poor servants, be they menservants or maidservants. The centurion was moved with compassion toward his poor servant, and was so concerned for him that he spared no pains to trouble the elders of the Jews to send to Christ and entreat Him to come and heal his sick servant. This is to the disgrace and shame of all false Christians and especially to many rich, some of whom are more merciless and cruel toward poor servants and hirelings than they are to their dogs and animals (pardon the expression). For as soon as they get so ill that they cannot perform mule’s labor, then they are unmercifully turned out of doors, and sent to this or that institution, or to their parents and friends who sometimes have scarcely a bite of bread or an old cot in their houses. Again others with great damage to their little earnings have to get a substitute while they are sick. And even if they do serve their time in health with hard and severe labor, some of these unmerciful, cruel, bloody folk put forth efforts to deprive these poor lambs, who have to watch when they sleep, labor when they rest, run when they command, and stand when they sit, of a goodly portion of their grievous toil. Now they complain that a spoon is lost; then it is a dish that is broken; always they have ruined this or that. Yes, some of them would feed them with water and straw, and pay them with the whip and chaff, as they do their laboring oxen and horses, if they were not ashamed before men. They would not be ashamed of such things before God whom alas they know not. Oh, woe upon such heathenish tyranny and unmerciful cruelty!

“The centurion called his servant his child, by which he manifested his fatherly love and humility toward his poor servant. Although he was lord and held in high honor, nevertheless he did not exalt himself above his humble servant, knowing well that they were created both of them by one and the same God, that they were born of one stock. But what virtue and love some heathen Christians often manifest toward their miserable servants, their actions, alas, openly show.

“How mightily some of the poor children are despised by some of them! How many are the abusive words some of them have to hear, how many a blow they have to endure! Cursed quarreling and evil speaking continue from morning till night; some of their servant girls they make into prostitutes. Yes, what shall I say more? These poor children are regarded by them, and especially by the rich, as the poor, despised donkey is regarded by the well-kept horse, and the filthy pebbles by the beautiful pearls. Ah, reader, it is much worse than I can describe; it is high time for them to consider and to reflect more deeply upon love.

“The centurion humbled himself before the Lord with all his heart, esteeming himself not worthy that He should come under his roof. But our haughty, proud heathens strut about with puffed-up hearts and extended necks, proud and haughty; one boasts of his family, another of his wealth, a third of his wisdom, a fourth of his skill and beauty, etc. But the innocent and humble Christ who says, Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; whose name, Word, death, and blood they boast, Him they do not know.

“The centurion believed that Christ was able by His Word to do all that he desired, but these miserable, deluded people pay no more attention to it than they do to a fable by Lucian or Aesop. From which it follows that they lead such an impenitent, carnal life, and use such idolatrous sacraments and false worship, and have departed far from the King’s highway. Yet they pose as the true apostolic church, and the believing flock of Christ. But just as Christ testifies of the centurion that He had not found such faith in Israel, so we might say of this people, such reckless, cruel, haughty, proud, and, unmerciful unbelief is unknown among the unconverted heathen who have never heard the Word of Christ! Behold, the righteous Lord lets them err, and fall into blindness of heart, make light of His most holy Word, and hate and reject His fatherly grace, goodness, Spirit, knowledge, and faith.

“But let it be not so with you, dearly beloved. Take this faithful, pious centurion as an example so that you may resemble him in his faith, love, humility, and virtue. Be as solicitous for your servants as he was for his servant. Teach them, admonish and reprove them with a fatherly spirit as often as they do wrong. Set them an unblamable example in all righteousness and piety. Sympathize with them a bit in their severe and heavy labor. Comfort them in their poverty, comfort them I say, and grieve them not. Give them decent support and their earned pay and do not dock them in their wages. Protect them in all honorable things. Do not chide them without cause lest they become discouraged; do not discharge them before the agreed time but let them serve out without loss their time as agreed, lest the name of the Lord be blasphemed. Be friendly toward them at all times. And if they are weak and sick, assist and serve them. Get someone else to serve in their place without loss to them until the Lord takes them or restores them to health. Be sympathetic and compassionate toward them. Assist them in their need. Do not exalt yourselves above them, nor despise them in their humbleness, for they are your brethren according to the flesh. In short, take the attitude toward them that Christ Jesus takes toward us. Always remember that we also have a Lord in heaven before whose judgment seat we must all appear and render an account of all our works.

“But if they are willful and obstinate and refuse to hear your word and command, if they do not follow your admonition and counsel, if they want to rule rather than serve, if they waste their time and labor in laziness, if they are unfaithful, rebellious, and troublesome, wickedly corrupting your family and children, etc., then come to an agreement with them as to wages earned, before two or three witnesses, so that the fault may not be on your side, and the Word of the Lord be not disgraced. In this way let them move on, that your conscience be not troubled on their account and

your house and children be not ruined. Yes, my brethren, do to your poor servants even as you desire that it should be done to you, if you were called as they are. This is the law and the prophets.”<sup>17</sup>

### 3.12 Dirk Philips (1504-1568) A Brief Biography.

Dirk Philips was one of the most important early Anabaptist-Mennonite leaders and contemporaries of Menno Simons. He was the son of a Dutch priest and became a Franciscan. He had a good education and was fluent in Latin and Greek. He also knew some Hebrew. Dirk Philips joined the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement in 1533 or three years earlier than Menno Simons. The following year he was ordained as an elder by his brother Obed Philips and by 1537 he was considered to be one of the foremost Anabaptist-Mennonite leaders. Philips worked mainly in the Netherlands, North Germany, and Prussia. By 1550 Dirk Philips was resident in Danzig where he became the first Aeltester of the Danzig Flemish Mennonite Gemeinde.<sup>18</sup>

Dirk Philips was the leading theologian and dogmatician among the Dutch and North German Mennonites.<sup>19</sup> He placed great emphasis on the visible church which was to be without spot and wrinkle. For this reason he also stressed the application of the ban to open sinners in the Gemeinde and the shunning of the same until they showed genuine repentance. “The bride of Christ dare not forsake her Bridegroom and yield herself to the world and the flesh.”<sup>20</sup> Those who had separated themselves from God by their disobedience and sin were to be separated from the church by means of evangelical excommunication.

Dirk Philips spread his views with numerous writings which he collected and published as several major works towards the end of his life. These included the “**Enchiridion**” or “**Handbook of the Christian Doctrine**”. This work went through numerous Dutch editions but when the Dutch and North German (Hamburg, etc.) Mennonite churches rejected Anabaptist-Mennonite teachings, such as evangelical discipline and discipleship, during the 17th century, the popularity of his writings also diminished. German editions of the **Handbook** were published in 1715 and in Basel in 1802. Apparently these were not available to the Kleine Gemeinde in Russia as they refer to the Dutch editions of Dirk Philips. However, the Swiss-American Mennonites maintained a high interest in the **Handbook** with a German edition published in 1811 in Lancaster, in 1872 in Elkhart and in 1917 at Scottsdale. An English edition was also published by John F. Funk in 1910.<sup>20a</sup> Dirk Philips authored several other works which did not achieve the popularity and wide distribution of his **Handbook**.

In the view of N. van der Zijpp, Dirk Philips surpassed the other Aeltesten in knowledge and as a sound systematic writer. He was an eloquent and influential man. N. van der Zijpp felt that Philips was too strict and severe siding with the Flemish at the time of the major division in 1566. Van der Zijpp also felt that in his later years Dirk Philips over-emphasized the teachings of a severe ban at the expense of other equally valid Anabaptist-Mennonite teachings and that on the balance Dirk Philips was inferior to Menno Simons.<sup>21</sup>

From the Anabaptist-Mennonite viewpoint Dirk Philips was the sound theologian and evangelical expositor whose doctrinal writings gave vivid expression to the teachings of nonresistant Christianity.<sup>21a</sup> His treatise **The Church of God** is a brilliant exposition of the progressive unfolding of God’s plan for mankind. The Church of God had existed throughout history. The covenant of God was renewed in Abraham and descended upon the nation of Israel and all Godfearing people among the Gentiles. Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ through whom the Church of God was made more glorious. The word of God consists of law and the gospel. The law reveals sin and teaches man to humble himself and to accept Jesus Christ with penitent heart. The gospel is regenerative grace restoring the sun of righteousness into the hearts of believers.

In the same treatise Philips sets forth seven evangelical ordinances of the Church of Christ: One, pure doctrine and true ministers. Two, the scriptural use of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Three, footwashing. Four, evangelical separation. Five, the commandment to love one another which included the teachings of nonresistance and community of sharing. Six, discipleship and keeping of the commandments. Seven, that Christians must suffer and be persecuted as foretold by Christ. Philips concludes his treatise with a description of the Church of God after the first advent of Christ as “the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” Revelation 21. In other essays, such as “The Tabernacle of Moses” and “Spiritual Restitution”, he described how the various rites and ceremonies of the people of Israel foreshadowed the coming of Christ and the reign of peace which he would institute in the Church of God.

The Anabaptist-Mennonites regarded both Menno Simons and Dirk Philips as blessed men of God who had each made crucial contributions to the evangelical church during a time of bloody persecution. Menno Simons was the courageous evangelist whose rapier sharp polemics defended a church



against the armies of the emperor, pope and reformers. Dirk Philips was the valiant missionary whose doctrinal teachings provided spiritual backbone to a church under siege. Menno Simons was also the powerful and tender expositor of the love, mercy and grace of God, as can be seen in essays such as "The Cross of the Saints" and his "Meditation on the Twenty-fifth Psalm". Dirk Philips was a brilliant master of allegorical exposition and used his gift to portray the beautiful symbolism of the Old Testament which prefigured the birth and reign of the Prince of Peace. The writings of Menno were more extensive in the range of human conduct which they addressed. In contrast, Dirk emphasized the proper operation and polity of the Church of God. The contributions of Menno Simons and Dirk Philips complemented each other and provided the sound inspirational and theological foundation by virtue of which the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement would survive through the centuries to come.

### 3.13 Dirk Philips. Grace, Redemption and Regeneration.

In the Confession of Faith contained in the **Enchiridion** or **Handbook** Dirk Philips has included a concise statement of the Anabaptist-Mennonite view of grace, redemption and regeneration. The end result of this continuing experience was a discipleship of love. In the view of Aeltester Philips the opponents of the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement seemingly failed to comprehend this understanding of an inward rebirth through the working and inspiration of the Spirit of God. Because these opponents considered the matter in terms of human reason they could only perceive that the Anabaptist-Mennonite rejection and denunciation of the pleasures of the world was a terrible sacrifice, burden, and curse which these people had to bear and which they could only achieve by a legalistic following of the dead letter of The Law.

Aeltester Philips explains that in fact quite the contrary is the case. The working of the Spirit of God on the inward man results in submission to the Lord and Master. Love is kindled in the heart so that the individual is converted to a discipleship of love. As this spiritual love increases the love of temporal matters naturally decreases and fades. Consequently no sacrifice, burden nor hardship is involved. This concept is fundamental to the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith.

"All this the apostle comprehends and declares in brief words to the Ephesians saying: 'God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sin, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace we are saved); and hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus; that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them' (Eph. 2:4-10).

"From these words it is clear that faith is a work and a gift of God. But from such faith springs love, even as Paul declares: 'The end of the commandment is love out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned' (1 Tim. 1:5; Rom. 13:8). But out of this love follow good works, as the apostle shows in the following words: 'In Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love' (Gal. 5:16). Hence those who claim to have faith without love and good works, make a false claim, their faith is vain, and they are the people of whom the Lord declares in the gospel (Matt. 7:22, 23): 'Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity.' Paul agrees with this and says: 'Unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure: but even their mind and conscience is defiled. They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him, being abominable and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate (or void of judgment)' (Tit. 1:15, 16). The apostle James likewise rebukes all those who claim to have faith, but who do not show their faith by their works (Jas. 2:14-26). Nevertheless faith is not dependent on works or sacraments, but upon Jesus Christ alone, trusting in his mercy and his merits (Rom. 3:24; 4:1-6).

"In conclusion, then, we confess and believe that we are saved by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8). But we obtain this salvation by that faith which God worketh in us by his Holy Spirit. Moreover by faith we acknowledge the love of God our heavenly Father and of our Lord Jesus Christ by what he has done for our salvation (1 John 4:19). From this knowledge of the love of God and the kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ love is engendered in our hearts, so that God becomes precious to us, and we love him because of the overwhelming love which he has shown us in Jesus Christ (Isa. 53:8). Moreover from the love thus kindled in our hearts through the Holy Spirit comes the desire to obey in our weakness the commandments of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 John 4:19), even as he

said to his disciples: 'If ye love me, keep my commandments' (John 14:15). Hence 'If a man love me, he will keep my words.' 'He that loveth me not, keepeth not my sayings' (John 14:23, 24)."<sup>22</sup>

### 3.14 Dirk Philips. False Preachers.

The Anabaptist-Mennonites believed that it was a part of the human condition and experience that there would always be false preachers who would attempt to divert and detract those with a sincere desire to follow the teachings of Christ. In their view this was an essential aspect of the Apostolic Church which they emulated. It was perceived that on the one hand the Scribes and Pharisees had constructed a theological and doctrinal edifice based on nothing more than human tradition and reason. On the other hand there were groups in the Apostolic Church, such as in the Gemeinde at Corinth, who sought to defeat the essence of the gospel of Christ by rejecting his call for a complete rebirth and regeneration of the believer.

The early Anabaptist-Mennonite leaders and writers observed that these same elements were still present some 1500 years later and that they were often represented by the Inquisitors and Reformers as well as the later pietists. In his booklet **On The Sending of Preachers or Teachers** Aeltester Philips discusses the calling and choosing of the true preachers of the Christian Gemeinde. He also advises as to how the false teachers may be known. In the following quotation Dirk Philips provides an excellent example of the Anabaptist-Mennonite view in this regard.

"To sum it up: How all true prophets and righteous teachers were persecuted from the beginning, and will be persecuted to the end of the world: yea, how the mightiest of all prophets and masters, Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, had to suffer, and thus enter into his glory (Luke 24:26), is shown in both Old and New Testament scriptures so fully that it is needless to further discuss or write about it. Hence those are not the servants of Christ who are so greatly and highly esteemed by the world, who sit in the highest places and persecute others; for, it is foreign to Christ Jesus and his meek nature, and it is also foreign to all Christians who have the mind and Spirit of Christ; for it is not Christlike, but tyrannical, to persecute and scatter and kill the people for the sake of the Christian faith and of religion (Matt. 13:28; Luke 9:22), and those who do so are certainly the survivors of the Pharisaic generation, to whom Stephen said: 'Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it' (Acts 7:51-53).

"Oh, how many boast at this time that they have received the gospel by the grace of God, and yet do so little, yea, nothing, in accord with it! They want to pose as great masters in the scriptures, and be called evangelical preachers, but they do not know Jesus Christ, the crucified One (1 Cor. 2:2), for Christ himself was poor, and chose poor disciples, who had to deny themselves for the sake of the Lord, and forsake all things for the sake of the gospel (Matt. 8:19; Luke 9:58; 1 Cor. 8:13; Matt. 10:9; 16:24; 4:18-22; 19:21, 27, etc.), to become a spectacle unto the world, the world's refuse and offscouring (1 Cor. 4:9-13). But these are rich and powerful; therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment (Psa. 73:6). Christ said to his disciples: 'Be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ. He that is greatest among you shall be your servant. For whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased: and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted' (Matt. 23:8-12). But these, on account of the gospel and of their ministerial office, allow themselves to be called Masters, Doctors, Reverend Fathers and Lords in Christ. How beautifully (?) this accords with the above-quoted words of Christ! However, these words are of no significance to them; they do not regard them, but they are puffed-up bodies, as the prophet says: 'They have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth' (Psa. 73:7-9). 'What they say must be understood as having been spoken from heaven, and what they ordain and institute must be authority on earth; for they think and also say: 'With our tongue we will prevail; our lips are our own: who is lord over us?' (Psa. 12:4). But let them take heed of that which shall follow such presumption and pride, and what shall come upon them. The scripture shows clearly that Jezebel, though ruling for a time (Rev. 2:20), feeding her prophets with lavish luxuries and keeping them in great splendor, must at last be brought to shame together with all her followers. And although the whore of Babylon has made all the heathen drunk with the wine of her fornication, and is therefore proud, and says in her heart: 'I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow' (Rev. 18:7), yet therefore shall her plague come in one day.

"We have now briefly shown which teachers are sent of God; that is those who are sent according to scriptural teaching, who teach God's word aright, who are conformed to the image of Christ and his saints, and that what they yet lack they seek with all zeal at the fount of all grace, Jesus Christ. All such are without doubt sent of God.

"On the other hand, those who are differently disposed, whose words and actions are different from what is seen in the aforementioned and delineated picture of the prophets, and of Christ and his apostles, are not sent of God, neither can they teach good things, nor preach God's word rightly,

for that must be spoken by the Holy Spirit, as Christ says to his disciples: "It is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you" (Matt. 10:20). And Peter says: "The prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Pet. 1:21). Hence all that these Spiritless men preach has no power and brings forth no fruit; yea, and though they could speak with the tongues of angels, it still would be nothing but sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal (1 Cor. 13:1).

"We beseech and admonish every one, whether he be preacher or hearer, to take due heed of this. The preacher may readily see whose servant he is, by what spirit he is moved, whether Christ dwells and works in him, whether he presents and portrays to the people the living word of God in open testimony of the holy scripture, causes fruit to grow thereby and walks in accordance therewith. Let the hearer take due heed unto himself, that he believe not every spirit, but that he at all times know the teacher by his doctrine and his fruits (1 John 4:1), and prove the doctrine by the plummet of the divine word; likewise note, prove and judge the fruits, not by outward appearance and splendid show, but by the spirit and the real life, and when he recognizes and finds a teacher to be false, let him beware of him and not listen to him, but shun him, as God has commanded through Jeremiah (Jer. 23:16), namely: 'Hearken not unto the words of the (false) prophets that prophesy unto you,' and as Christ commanded in the gospel (Matt. 7:15; John 10:4), viz, that his sheep know his voice, and a stranger they will not follow, but will flee from him; yea, that all who enter not by the door into the sheepfold, but climb up some other way, the same are thieves and robbers, who come for no other purpose than to rob, to kill, and to destroy; therefore Christ's sheep fear such thieves, murderers and destroyers."<sup>23</sup>

### 3.15 George Hansen. A Brief Biography.

Another prominent leader arose in the Danzig Flemish Mennonite Gemeinde almost a century after the death of Dirk Philips and Menno Simons. This was George Hansen who became a deacon of the Danzig Flemish Mennonite Gemeinde in 1655.<sup>24</sup> He became a minister later in the same year and in 1690 he became the Aeltester of this prominent and influential congregation. He served in this office until his death in 1703. Aeltester George Hansen was a cobbler by trade and did not have the benefit of a formal education as did his illustrious predecessors Menno Simons and Dirk Philips. However, he was very widely read and also an eloquent speaker and gifted writer.<sup>25</sup>

Aeltester George Hansen also maintained important historical records of the Danzig Gemeinde so that a complete record of all the ministers of this Gemeinde since the time of Dirk Philips has thereby been maintained. In addition George Hansen continued in the spiritual tradition of his predecessors through his study and development of the teachings of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. Of vital importance were his resulting literary efforts. He wrote and published several major works as well as a Confession of Faith. His **Foundation** book was approved and agreed upon by all the Prussian Mennonite Aeltesten in 1690. This work was translated into German by Isaac Peters and published in Elkhart, Indiana in 1896.<sup>26</sup> But except for brief extracts no English translations of his work are available.

Through his historical work and theological writings. George Hansen renewed and maintained the spirit of study, learning and enlightenment which was so crucial to the Anabaptist-Mennonite heritage. As such he was one of the most important spiritual ancestors of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia.

### 3.16 George Hansen. Evangelical Baptism.

One of the fundamental teachings of the Anabaptist-Mennonites was the personal faith of every believer in Jesus Christ. From this principle it also followed that only a baptism upon a personal confession of faith and regeneration was of any significance. Hence the Anabaptist-Mennonite rejection of infant baptism and consequent rebaptism of those who had not previously been baptized as adult believers.

To the Anabaptist-Mennonite baptism upon confession of faith was only the symbol of the rebirth of the believer, his covenant to follow the teachings and example of the Savior, and his commitment to the body of Christ as experienced through the local Gemeinde. It was contrary to the teachings of the faith to make a sacrament out of the mode of baptism. i.e. To insist as did the Baptists that only a certain mode of baptism, usually a particular form of immersion, was valid in the eyes of God and that all other forms of baptism were unbiblical. The Anabaptist-Mennonites generally practiced baptism by pouring which they believed to be the most evangelical mode.

In 1676 an inquisition was instituted against the Anabaptist-Mennonites in Danzig where they were accused of spiritual association with the Socinians. George Hansen was cross-examined on behalf of the Anabaptist-Mennonites. The Inquisitors were Bishop Sarnowski and other spiritual dignitaries. One of the charges was that the Anabaptist-Mennonites denied the baptism of other Christian confes-

sions. In his answer Aeltester Hansen completely denies this accusation. In the course of his explanation he also provides the reader with a good insight into the evangelical teaching respecting baptism.

**“Question on page 207:** With what do you administer baptism? **Answer.** With natural water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

**“Explanation.** When I was asked this question, I was somewhat hesitant to answer, so then Mr. Paters explained why he asked this. He said that there are some people who baptize with milk, and wondered how we believed. He also inquired how we baptize, whether we immerse, as they were informed that certain Mennonites did immerse. Upon this I answered that we did not believe in immersion. Even though we read that John the Baptist baptized in Eanon near to Salim, because there was much water there, and that he baptized in the water of Jordan, as we also see of Philip that he descended with the eunuch from the wagon into the water and the eunuch was baptized by Philip, yet we find that John administered baptism with water in Jordan, as he himself said, ‘I baptize you with water unto repentance.’ (John 3:23; Matt. 3:6; Mark 1:5; Acts 8:37; Matt. 3:11).

“See my dearest friends, he does not say, ‘I baptize you in water.’ O no, he says, ‘I baptize you with water’ (Mark 1:8; Luke 3:15). Christ also spoke of the baptism of John as follows: ‘John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.’

“See my dear friends, as the Holy Spirit was poured out through Christ upon the apostles, it was called a baptism of the Holy Spirit, so we also believe and confess that baptism has to be administered in the church of God, but not to immerse in water as Christ dipped in the dish the bite which he gave to Judas Iscariot. O no, but as the Holy Ghost was poured out upon the disciples, so that they were baptized with the Holy Spirit; likewise, shall the water be poured upon those who are baptized in the name of Christ and this out pouring shall be in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, as we see that three thousand were baptized on Pentecost, and also with the house of Cornelius, as some translations say, ‘Can any one forbid that these should not be baptized with water’; other translations say, ‘Can any man forbid that these should not be baptized’ (Isa. 44:3; Zech. 12:10; Joel 3:1; Matt. 3:11; Acts 11:16; John 13:16; Acts 2:38; 19:5; Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:41; 10:47).

“There is this difference, when some forbid, so that the person cannot come to the water this would be evidence that the person should be baptized in the water, but when man forbids water upon the person, then it is evident that water is brought to be poured upon the person. We can not argue over clear scriptures as these, for when a baptism shall be administered in the water as was done in Jordan, and when a person shall be baptized in the water, with water, there is no other way than to pour or sprinkle it upon the person. We are thoroughly convinced that it was done this way when Lydia and her house were baptized, and the baptism of the prison keeper and all his, together with all those who were baptized in Acts, and what we read of in the letters of Paul and Peter—note what I say—with water, as it is said. All these baptisms we confess to have been administered with water, (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:15; Acts 16:15; 16:33; 8:11; 9:15; 18:8; 19:5) and upon these grounds is our answer.

**“Question on page 231.** Whether we baptize two times. This is if someone has been baptized by other groups and desires to join your church, do you rebaptize him?

**“Answer.** We confess no more than one baptism, and that each one must enter through the door of our baptism to join us. Yet we condemn the baptism of no one, but leave them at their worth. Since such a baptism is termed as rebaptism, when we baptize those who had been baptized before, by others, and we know that rebaptism is prohibited in this kingdom of Danzig, we therefore abstain from it here, even if it is a heavy burden for our conscience. But we do confess that those who wish to join us, travel over the border to Holland, and are baptized there by our church.

**“Explanation.** This question could have been answered in shorter terms: namely, I could have just answered that we believe in no more than one baptism, and every person who wishes to join our church has to be received through baptism. As Paul says, as there is one body, and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling, so there is but one Lord, one faith, and one baptism (Eph. 4:4, 5), and through this baptism the members of Christ are baptized by one Spirit into one body (1 Cor. 12:13). We can see of the three thousand souls on Pentecost (Acts 2:41) as with all others whom the Lord added to his church and were saved, they were all received into the church by baptism, and by doing so were obedient sheep which heard their master’s voice, who is the true door of the sheepfold, just the same as it must be with us today yet (John 10:7).

“Of those who have been baptized once in the church of God, and again turn away from the Word of God given them, and by doing so are again entangled with the filth of the world, who had at one time been cleansed through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, but again have fallen back to the world and it has become worse with them than before (2 Peters 2:20), if such repent, they are not baptized again. O no, such faith and doctrine we do not have, that the members of our church are baptized two times, because we confess no more than one baptism (Eph. 4:5). Upon this, my answer, Mr. Paters investigated and explained further, what he meant to inquire of rebaptism. Namely, about this baptism: when someone is baptized a Lutheran or Catholic, or for example if Mr. Paters himself of the Jesuits, desired to personally become a member of our church would he first have to be rebaptized?

“Upon this I answered that this would have to be so, upon which Mr. Paters concluded that we condemn all other baptisms. I insisted that this is not the case, and that it shall not be falsely

presented in my examination, for I showed them that it is not becoming for a Christian to despise others, because despising and judging usually goes together (Rom. 14:10), and the Lord Jesus said, 'Judge not, that ye be not judged' (Matt. 7:1; Luke 6:37). Paul says, 'Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?' (Rom. 14:4), and he earnestly forbids with these words (1 Cor. 5:12, 13), 'For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth.' James says (4:12,) 'There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy who are thou that judgest another?' Therefore we seek to abstain from despising and judging others who are not with us. We do not want to mock or argue with anyone, but be gentle and meek toward all men (Tit. 3:2).

"Even though the world and those who want to be Christians do mock us, and in our worship they judge and despise us, as the learned and so called spiritual do from their pulpit, we must not do likewise in return; not to despise or mock them in their worship, baptism or communion, and other spiritual practices which they observe, because this would be against the teachings of Christ and His apostles. Paul says, 'Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run that ye may obtain (1 Cor. 9:24).' With this the apostle teaches us how we shall deal with those who are not with us, even the same as the race runners treat each other when they seek to win the prize. They are equally friendly one toward the other, yet they prove with their running the race, their great desire and hope of the prize, which each one desires that he may obtain before the other, yet they do not despise each other before the time, but each one does his best in running in hope of receiving the prize before all others who run besides him. Likewise we wish to be zealous in our running toward the prize of the high calling and do not despise the worship of others besides us, but to let everyone at his worth (Phil. 3:14), and leave the judgment to the Lawgiver who can save and condemn (James 4:12). We are consoled with Paul that we do not run in uncertainty, or fight as one who beats the air (1 Cor. 9:26)'<sup>127</sup>

### 3.17 George Hansen. The Judging of Other Confessions.

One of the frequent charges made against the Anabaptist-Mennonites was that they judged and condemned all other faiths to be invalid. This is a rather interesting accusation as during the 16th century both the Catholics and Protestants revealed their own compassionate non-judgmental nature by simply killing their opponents and especially the nonresistant Christians. In subsequent centuries the opponents of the Anabaptist-Mennonites demonstrated that they did not judge other confessions by imposing all manner of occupational and ownership restrictions upon the Anabaptist-Mennonites, by denying them citizenship status, by confiscation of their property, by imposing various punitive levies and taxes, and by imprisonment and harassment. In addition the pietist, or free church wing of the Protestant reformation, demonstrated that they were not judgmental with respect to other Christian confessions by proselytizing among the Anabaptist-Mennonites and frequently by denouncing their faith as invalid and devil inspired.

The accusation of condemning other confessions was also leveled against the Anabaptist-Mennonites during the 1676 inquisition in Danzig. Here George Hansen was called upon to defend his Gemeinde against this charge. In the resulting cross-examination Aeltester Hansen discusses the Anabaptist-Mennonite view of the apostolic succession of the Roman Catholic Church. From his reply the reader will see that the Anabaptist-Mennonites did not believe in one physical unbroken chain of succession since the time of the apostolic church but rather that here and there the remnants of the apostolic church could be recognized by the fruits of their faith. Throughout his explanation Aeltester Hansen insists that the Anabaptist-Mennonites do not judge other confessions which must all render their own account to the Creator. The same applies to those who believe in the evangelical teachings of Christ, for they too will be called into account for their stewardship. In the following discussion Aeltester Hansen explains and expands on these points.

**"Question on Page 307.** Whether we esteem our church as Catholic and for all people? **Answer.** No but as we here confess.

**"Explanation.** In this question I noticed that with the word 'church' they did not mean the meeting house. If they had meant the meeting house, my answer would have been yes, because anyone is welcome to come there; but with the word 'church' they referred to the fellowship and we confess that our fellowship or church is for all men as Peter said, 'Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him' (Acts 10:34, 35). 'Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith' (Rom. 3:30).

"For this reason we confess that our church is for all people who are born in her (Ps. 87:5), be they 'Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, and Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians' (Acts 2:9, 11). See for all such; we do confess that the church of God is for all people, no Jew or Greek, servant or freeman, man or wife is rejected (Gal. 3:28). For there is but one God who justifies circumcision and uncir-

cumcision by faith, as the Lord God has shown us, for He has not only called the Jews, but also the heathens, as he said through Hosea 2:23 and Rom. 9:25. 'I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved.' Where it is said, 'Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God.' (Hosea 1:10).

"At the examination which was at two or three different times, I tried to explain this, upon which Mr. Paters seemed to be very much surprised that we believe to be a remnant of the apostolic church, and for this reason they wished that I would prove to them in which countries our church existed through the years. I thought of the woman who fled into the wilderness where she, the church, has a place prepared of God, that she should feed there a thousand two hundred and threescore days (Rev. 12:6); which place the Spirit of God has not manifested to us, and therefore I could not explain where that place has been at all times. But I thought of Paul's words where he said, 'The Lord knoweth them that are his' (2 Tim. 2:19), and with this we are satisfied. Therefore I answered Mr. Paters that I can not trace our succession as the Catholics do, and we do not esteem such a succession. Yet I tried to show him with the place where we were here in Prussia in the city of Danzig of which we can show letters which prove that we have been here over a hundred years, but exactly how and in what way the first leaders came here we do not know. We can prove that we have been here over a hundred years unchanged in faith as can be seen in this examination as we have found evidence of sermons and writings. I mentioned to them that of late years there was a book printed by the highly educated Mr. Bosack. In this book many different kinds of Mennonites and Anabaptist of many different beliefs were mentioned, and most people consider us to be those referred to in this book; but we would not accept these Mennonites because we have not been such a confused Babylon, and when such heretics were found among us who were teaching falsehood and bringing in damnable heresies (2 Pet. 2:1) and did not consent to the wholesome words of our Lord Jesus Christ and to the doctrine which is according to the teaching of Christ; namely, we admonished them once or twice (Tit. 3:10) and if this did not help they were found as such who condemn themselves, and through this the church remained pure (2 Cor. 7:11).

"I gave them this to consider, whether it is just and right to search our succession through the books of the learned men of the world, as we can not find such a people and doctrine, as is in this examination, by reading the books of the worldly-wise, even if their books try to prove that before this examination we did not exist in this country, circumstances prove quite differently and therefore I stressed (note) from God's word is the only means to prove that the church of God was continued from Christ's time until now, and will remain to the end of the world (Matt. 28:20).

"Mr. Paters agreed with this, but it seemed strange to them, who hold to be a remnant of the apostolic church (1 Cor. 11:25), because we have been only such a poor, discarded and small church and people (Zeph. 3:12; Luke 12:32). Upon this Mr. Paters asked by what signs I would know the church of Christ, upon which I answered with the words of Christ, where He said, 'Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you' (John 15:14), and 'If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed' (John 8:31). Mr. Pater listened to this with patience, but told me boldly that they were the right, old apostolic and Catholic church and that they can prove their succession over 1500 years. They were zealous to take away our faith and admonished us to not be stubborn but to come to the apostolic church which they said was the Catholics. They talked so much it is not possible for me to mention it all. I again presented myself with love and patience as they criticized us, but I did ask them this question: since there are so many different kinds of Mennonites with many different ideas, whether it had to be proven for Mr. Paters, who really were the old and true Mennonites, whether we would not be credited to be the old, first and true ones who had remained unchanged from Menno's confession and teachings? With this I tried to tell him that this is an assurance in our hearts, minds and souls, and those who kept the teachings of the apostles' words are the apostolic Christians (2 Thes. 2:15). Concerning this point there was very much discussed, but not on the day of examination.

"Dear brethren, from this they wanted to conclude as many people do that with our confession we despise and condemn all others who are not with our church, upon which I powerfully expounded myself and explained that our grounds are such that we leave the judgment to God: 'Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned' (Luke 6:37). Paul said, 'What have I to do to judge them also that are without' (1 Cor. 5:12) and: 'Who are thou that judgest another man's servant' (Rom. 14:4)?

"But Mr. Paters sternly insisted that with such a confession of one church, all those who are without are damned, but I remained steadfast to what was explained, that we damned no one, and gave them this example: we can see daily with those who seek to win a prize, at times they are many in number; for example, here in Danzig the magistrates have a yearly contest where they go out to see who can shoot a certain bird, but there is only one who gets the prize, that is the one who shot the bird. The one who shot the bird had this intention before he even started out, knowing only one will receive the prize, and he put forth his best efforts that he alone may receive the prize. With this I wished to explain to them how they would judge the one who went out with all efforts and desires and tried his utmost to win. If he did win, would he have despised and condemned the others who had gone out with him? No, never could the winner be accused that he alone thought to win and despise the others for not winning. Likewise, no one should criticize us with out confession that we read in the Scriptures of only one Head which is Christ, and of only one body belonging to the Head which is Christ's church. (Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 12:12; Eph. 1:23; 4:15).

“Paul said, ‘Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize?’ (1 Cor. 9:24) I have tried especially hard with this example to answer that we do not condemn others. Upon this Mr. Paters has earnestly questioned me, that I should openly confess what I held of their Father, the Pope in Rome, upon which I answered that I would include him in my explanation, and I would let him completely in his worth as he stands before God. Mr. Paters did not say much on this.”<sup>28</sup>

### 3.18 The Great Commission.

The foregoing will establish that the gospel was the doctrinal foundation of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. Time and time again the Anabaptist-Mennonite writers return to the principle enunciated by the apostle Paul that “other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” 1 Corinthians 3:11. Accordingly the Anabaptist-Mennonites sought to practice and follow all the teachings of Christ and not merely those which did not overly interfere with the day to day life and routine of the believer. Any attempt to interpret the gospels pietistically or symbolically or to dispense with the teachings of Christ during the present age was seen as a great danger to the Church of God.

One of the central teachings of Christ was his instruction to his disciples that “ye shall receive power . . . and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth”. Acts 1:8. In his essay entitled **The Theological Triumph of the Early Anabaptist-Mennonites** Donovan Smucker concludes that the early Anabaptist-Mennonites also had a passionate missionary calling and sets out the following quotation from Menno Simons to support his view: “I seek and desire from my heart nothing . . . but that the glorious name, the divine will and the praise of our Lord Jesus Christ may be made known throughout the world. To this end we preach as much as opportunity and possibility affords, both in daytime and by night, in houses and in fields, in forest and wildernesses, in this land and abroad, in prison and in bonds, in water, fire and the scaffold, on the gallows, and upon the wheel, before lords and princes, orally and by writing at the risk of possessions and life, as we have done these many years without ceasing.”<sup>29</sup> Mr. Smucker has noted that one would have to look far and wide to find a more eloquent and fearless missionary testimony than this.<sup>30</sup>

The Anabaptist-Mennonite understanding of spreading the gospel must be distinguished from the views of some Christian confessions. Because of the principle of nonresistance the use of force was rejected even if the very purpose of the use of force was the saving of souls. Thus the evangelization programs of the Crusaders and the Inquisitors were considered unevangelical by the Anabaptist-Mennonites. Similarly the Anabaptist-Mennonites would not have considered it Christlike to use food or other resources as weapons to entice new converts into the fold.

To the Anabaptist-Mennonite the fulfillment of the Great Commission was only one aspect of the teachings of Christ. The believer was to follow all these teachings as well as the example of Christ and in so doing the Great Commission would be fulfilled. But never was the prescription to evangelize to become the be all and end all of the Christian faith for this could occur only at the detriment and expense of the other commandments of Christ. Indeed, Christ himself had instructed his disciples to teach all nations “to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you”. Matthew 28:20. The last instruction of Jesus Christ to his followers was “follow thou me”. St. John 21, 22. Accordingly the Anabaptist-Mennonites were not surprised when wars, poverty, greed, and hatred, continued unabated in areas which had supposedly been evangelized by Christian confessions which did not believe in the full gospel of nonresistance and the Sermon on the Mount or who believed that the Kingdom of Peace of Christ was postponed to a future time and age.

In his essay entitled **Why I DO Not Cease Teaching and Writing**, Menno Simons expands on this point as follows:

“Therefore I will not cease while I live, both verbally and by writing, as far as God the merciful Father, by His boundless kindness, gives me knowledge, spirit, grace, and wisdom, to teach and admonish all those that seek the truth, that they may rouse themselves while it is time and seek the Lord while He may be found, and call upon Him while He is near, that their righteousness may go forth as a light, and their salvation burn like a torch. This consists of nothing but to cast off the works of darkness and to put on the armor of light, to renounce all false doctrine, sacraments, false religion, and the unbecoming, dishonest, carnal life, and again to enter into the divine doctrine, the evangelical sacraments, the services and works of love and the sincere Christian life as it was taught, instituted, and practiced by Christ Jesus, our only Deliverer and Shepherd Himself, according to the will of the Father.

“Thus I labor and strive, according to the small talent given me of God, after nothing, God is my witness, than that the Day-star, the blessed Christ Jesus, the ever-shining Light,

may arise in your hearts and enlighten you in all divine truth, knowledge, spiritual understanding, and wisdom, unto life eternal. Amen. 2 Peter 1:19.”<sup>3</sup>

From the foregoing it is evident that the Anabaptist-Mennonites were very conscious of the urgent need to spread the evangelical teachings of nonresistant Christianity.

### 3.19 Conclusion.

This concludes a short review of Anabaptist-Mennonite disciples and doctrine<sup>32</sup>. From the extracts presented, the reader will perceive that the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement was not necessarily a homogeneous one. Quite frequently there were considerable differences of view and philosophy between different Anabaptist-Mennonite writers as well as between various branches of the movement. It seems that the groups which have been the most successful in maintaining the original Anabaptist-Mennonite vision over the years have been the Gemeinden which recognized this diversity of gifts and enlightenment.

In consequence such groups have stressed and been cognizant of the authority of the entire range of Anabaptist-Mennonite writers. But precedence was always given to those writers such as Menno Simons and Dirk Philips who represented the sound theological centre of the faith. The spiritual authority of their teachings had been established during the time of the martyrs' baptism of blood in the 16th century. Through their spirit-filled ministry Dirk Philips and Menno Simons had gathered and consolidated the scattered flocks of nonresistant Christians into a vibrant and inspired Church.

It seems that in order to be effective the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement had to avoid the extremes and excesses. On the one extreme were groups like the Dutch Doopsgezinde who eventually rejected the evangelical teachings of nonresistant Christianity so that within a century or two the vision of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith in Holland had almost died away. On the other extreme were certain elements of the Flemish Grosze Gemeinde in the Molotschna Mennonite Colony in Russia who in their desire to practice a "cultural Mennonitism" eventually and perhaps unwittingly, made this the centre of their faith. The consequences of such aberrations in the understanding of the Anabaptist-Mennonite vision will be painfully obvious in the subsequent chapters of this book.

### FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER THREE. DISCIPLES AND DOCTRINE.

1. H. Westra, "Thielmann Janz van Braght", ME 3, 400-401.
2. N. Van der Zijpp, "Martyrs Mirror", ME 3, 527
3. R. Friedmann, *Mennonite Piety Through the Centuries*, (Sugar Creek, Ohio, Schlabach Printers; 1980), 138
4. Thielemann J. Van Braght, *The Bloody Theater of Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians*, (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, Herald Press, 1977)
5. *Ibid*, 426-427.
6. *Ibid*, 434-435.
7. *Ibid*, 661-662.
8. C. Krahn, "Menno Simons", ME 3, 582.
9. *Ibid*.
10. J.C. Wenger, editor; *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, (Herald Press, Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1956), 28. See also Menno Simons, *The Complete Works*, (John F. Funk & Brother, Elkhart, Indiana, 1871), 454 pp, which was republished in 1983 by PrairieView Press, Rosenort, Manitoba, ROG 1W0
11. *Ibid*, 88.
12. *Ibid*, 99-101.
13. N. Van der Zijpp, "Münster", ME 3, 777-783.
14. J.C. Wenger, 42-50.
15. *Ibid*, 388-390.
16. *Ibid*, 790-792.
17. *Ibid*, 364-366.
18. H.G. Mannhardt, *Die Danziger Mennonitengemeinde*, (1919, Danzig, Selbstverlag), 41-44.
19. N. van der Zijpp, "Dirk Philips", ME 2, 65-66.
20. *Ibid*, 65.
- 20a. This english translation by A.B. Kolb was republished in 1978, by Pathway Publishers, LaGrange, Indiana.
21. *Ibid*, 66.
- 21a. John Horsch, *Menno Simons, His Life, Labors, and Teachings*, (Mennonite Publishing House, Scottsdale, PA, 1916), 222.
22. Dietrich Philips, *Enchiridion or Handbook of the Christian Doctrine and Religion*, (Pathway Publishing, Alymer, Ontario, 1978), 14-17.
23. *Ibid*, 193-197.
24. H. Mannhardt, *Ibid*, 73.
25. N. Van der Zijpp, "George Hansen", ME 2, 654.
26. *Ibid*, 21.



27. George Hansen, "A Foundation Book", as quoted by T.B. Hoover, translator; **The United Undivided Church of God**, (Port Trenton, Penn., 1978) 161-167.
28. **Ibid**, 167-173.
29. J.C. Wenger, **ibid**, 633.
30. D.E. Smucker, **The Theological Triumph of the Early Anabaptist-Mennonites**, reprint from the Mennonite Quarterly Review, January 1945.
31. J.C. Wenger, **op.cit.**, 319.
32. For an extensive review of Anabaptist-Mennonite literature see Robert Friedman, **Mennonite Piety Through the Centuries**, **op.cit.**.

# Chapter Four.

## Of Such Is The Kingdom

### 4.01 Introduction.

The fundamental theme of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith was the theology of the Kingdom which consolidated the individual evangelical teachings into a unified and coherent whole. This chapter will consider various aspects of this theology<sup>1a</sup>. First, an examination of the theology of the Kingdom through a comparison with Pietism and Chiliasm. Two, the twin principles of discipleship and grace considered in light of the divergent historical views of the Anabaptist-Mennonites and Pietists. Three, the chapter will conclude with a look at the joy of discipleship.

### 4.02 The Theology Of The Kingdom.

The theology of the Kingdom was the key through which the Anabaptist-Mennonites understood biblical revelation and the history of the Christian Church as well as that of the individual believer. From the standpoint of biblical revelation the Anabaptist-Mennonites believed that the one and only historical period or dispensation of grace had been instituted with the birth of Jesus Christ. This fulfilled the prophecy of the Old Testament or covenant of the Law with the New Testament or covenant of grace. During the time of the Old Testament the Kingdom of Israel had been the chosen people of God. During the New Testament period instituted by the birth of Christ the chosen people of God were those who accepted his offer of free grace. Luke 16:16.

The physical nation of Israel was replaced with the spiritual Kingdom of Christ. This was a Kingdom of peace as is explained by Menno Simons in his **Exhortation to a Gemeinde in Prussia of 1549**.

“In the first place, I admonish and pray you as my precious brethren and companions in Christ Jesus with faithful hearts to observe and realize how that Christ Jesus, blessed forever, in whose Word we believe, and to whom we have, with body and soul, voluntarily committed ourselves, is by the prophet Isaiah called, a Prince of Peace, and by Paul, a Lord of peace. 2 Thess. 3:16. Yes, such a Lord and Prince who has left and taught to His own an abundant peace, as He says, My peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you. John 14:27. Peace be with you. John 20:19. In like manner Paul, his faithful messenger and servant: And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts to which also ye were called. Col. 3:15. Follow after peace and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. Heb. 12:14. As much as in you lieth, be at peace with all men. Rom. 12:18. Seek peace and pursue it. Psalm 34:14; 1 Peter 3:11. But God hath called us to peace. 1 Cor. 7:15.

“Nor was the entire life of Christ aught but love and peace. For although He came unto His own and His own received Him not, but thrust Him forth from the vineyard and desired Him not; and although (ah, the shame of it) He was reviled and blasphemed by them because of the lovely fruits and services of His divine love bestowed on them, was pursued to the death, and at last was reviled by them and blasphemously called an evildoer; and although He was finally as a malefactor nailed by them to the cross, yet His holy peace remained unbroken, His blessed heart did not become bitter nor cruel, but He prayed the rather for His enemies to His Father in pity for their blindness, for they knew not what they did. Luke 23. Moreover, His bitter death is become to us poor sinners a certain peace and life, even as Paul says, By his cross he has reconciled him that is in heaven and those that are on earth. Col. 1:20.

“Seeing then that Christ Jesus is the Prince and the Lord of eternal peace, and since His entire doctrine and life, as also His death has represented, portrayed, and implied naught but peace, as was said, therefore none can be the recipient of His honor and good will, or be given a place in His kingdom save those who have the holy peace of God in their hearts. For His kingdom is the Kingdom of peace; it knows no strife, even as it is written in the prophets that in the kingdom of Christ and in His church they beat their swords into plowshares and sit under their fig tree and vine, and no more raise up their hands unto warfare. Isa. 2; Mic. 4.

“Since no one can be in the kingdom and church of Christ who does not dwell there through love and peace, as the Scriptures testify, therefore all those who are so quarrelsome, tumultuous, slanderous, defaming, bitter, wrathful, and cruel of heart may well rouse themselves, be sorry, and repent, for they show in deeds that they do not possess peace. do not heed Christ Jesus the true Prince of Peace, nor are in His kingdom, even though they do carry the external appearance of being Christians, and are greeted as brethren. Brother, let each man beware, for the Lord Christ does not judge according to externals as do men, but according to the hidden reality of the heart, which is altogether naked and open before His blessed eyes.”<sup>1</sup>

Through conversion to the peaceful way of Christ the individual believer becomes a part of this spiritual kingdom. In his book **The Third Way**, Paul M. Lederach explains this concept as follows: "At conversion the believer moves from the domain of darkness into the Kingdom of Christ. Every life that is redeemed, every body that is healed, every believer that experiences ongoing liberation from sin's bondage demonstrates that the power of the eventual glorious, universal Kingdom had entered the world now! The rule of God is even now undermining the authority of Satan and his kingdom, which is being replaced by the rule of God! Believers are experiencing now what will be".<sup>2</sup> In his **Exhortation to a Gemeinde in Prussia**, Menno Simons explains the effect which conversion to the peaceful Kingdom of Christ will have on the believer:

"In the second place, I admonish you as my fellow soldiers in the struggle and in the patience of Christ that if you desire to live this afore-mentioned peace with faithful hearts, even as I do not doubt, then promote the genuine Christian love among yourselves, for undoubtedly you know how it behaves itself in all things and what is its nature and disposition. Yes, if you would bend your shoulders to its scepter, and voluntarily join its administration and government, then the holy peace of God would surely constantly abide with you, and grow and increase in you from day to day. For love conducts and behaves itself without reproach, and is careful of its words and works lest it sin against God and give offense to a brother, trouble or sadden him. It is always diligent and eager to go before its neighbor in all righteousness, to teach and instruct him. It gives to no one an incentive to evil, being of a divine nature and hating all unrighteousness, willfulness, and trickery. If it is wronged, whether in words or deeds, it bears it with patience and knows no vengeance. It is gracious and loves the truth; and therefore none can be wronged nor cheated by it. It is kind and gentle, and therefore it treats others in humility and reasonableness, also those who are its enemies and foes so as by such readiness to lead and attract many to the truth, and in that way to win the hearts of the hostile to it and to reconcile them in Christ Jesus. Nor does it think any evil. Therefore it conducts itself before all, privately as well as publicly, with pious and honest heart without any subtlety or deceit, even as before God in Christ Jesus.

"Moreover, this love is not bitter; therefore it does not reproach a poor brother for his fault, neither does it talk behind his back nor defame him, for it covers a multitude of his sins, even as James and Peter teach and instruct the pious. This love is of God and therefore at all times it behaves according to its divine nature and disposition. It admonishes its neighbor in pure love, comforts those of little faith, raises the weak, teaches the foolish, rebukes the delinquent, bears all that may properly be borne; it receives the destitute, clothes the naked, feeds the hungry and gives the thirsty drink, visits the sick; in a word, its resources are ready to serve all men. If by chance it happens, as happen it does, that a pious Christian impelled by this love errs in human fashion, then this selfsame love is prepared at all times to receive fraternal rebuke and instruction; and it does not puff itself up, but receives it with much thanksgiving, even as it becomes the wise, as Solomon says, Rebuke the wise, and he will love you. For he acknowledges in what spirit and with what intention it is done, and that in it nothing is sought and desired but the praise of God and their own salvation.

"Holy and beloved brethren in the Lord, this I would ask of you at this time and admonish you, with deeply serious hearts: Do consider how you together with all Christians are received and called by the God of peace, under the Prince of Peace, by the messengers of peace, to the body of peace, with the Word of peace, unto the kingdom of peace, out of mere love and grace. Therefore walk in that same peace, so that in that day you may in His grace be able to stand before your God with a confident and happy conscience when body and soul must part. Ah, my brethren and sisters, fear your God with all your heart, and purify yourselves in one another's presence as before God in Christ Jesus, in order that just as many brethren and congregations may have been saddened because of your contentions they may now once more be refreshed and gladdened in Christ Jesus by your lovely reconciliation and Christian peace."<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Robert Friedmann discusses the Anabaptist-Mennonite theology of the Kingdom in terms of "the doctrine of two worlds". The peaceable Kingdom of Christ on earth was established by Jesus Christ some two thousand years ago. Through conversion the believer immediately becomes a foot-soldier and humble day-labourer in this Kingdom. This Kingdom was separate from and opposed by the evil kingdom of the world. In his essay "The Doctrine of Two Worlds", Dr. Friedmann explains how the respective hermeneutics of the Anabaptist-Mennonites and the Protestants resulted in completely different theologies in this respect.

"The main line of Protestant theology is a kind of onesided interpretation of the Pauline teaching on justification by faith. Although including this doctrine in its foundation, sixteenth-century Anabaptism shows definitely a different orientation, emphasizing above all the commandment of discipleship. As Roland H. Bainton so appropriately put it: 'The Anabap-

tists went back further than any of the other groups [of the age of the Reformation]. They tended even to neglect Paul and to push back to Jesus. That is why the ideal of Restoration (common to all groups of that age) tends to coincide now with the ideal of the imitation of Christ.' Certainly, Luther himself did not overlook Christ's teaching concerning discipleship, but unfortunately there was no organic place for it in his differently slanted system of Pauline-Augustinian theology. Thus, even though both the Reformers and Anabaptists alike claim to be strict Biblicists, a noticeable tension prevails in their way of reading the Holy Scriptures. The Anabaptists paid more attention to Christ's commandment concerning *Nachfolge*, being certain that if it was commanded it can also be carried out under proper conditions, while the Reformers focused nearly all of their attention upon man's sinful nature which makes him utterly helpless in the pursuit of the good. Consequently they come to rely almost exclusively upon the Pauline teachings regarding salvation of the individual sinner by faith, disclaiming even James's admonition to be doers of the Word as well as hearers.

"In connection with Anabaptism, Harold S. Bender has introduced the term 'theology of discipleship.' The idea of discipleship or *Nachfolge*, however, does not yet constitute a theology in the proper sense of the word. It is rather an element of that implied theological system which enabled the Anabaptists to carry on so forcefully, and in which discipleship assumes but a constitutive character. The numerous confessions of faith and confessional tracts of the different Anabaptist groups do not give much help in the further elucidation of the question since, as stated above, they simply affirm their formal orthodoxy in the acceptance of the doctrine of the Trinity and of the Apostolic Creed, plus the call to unconditional obedience to the divine commandments: 'Christ said so, . . . hence we have to do it.'

"It is certainly true that in the New Testament a theology in the more formal sense of the word is most explicit in the writings of Paul; but that does not mean that the teachings of Christ Himself as recorded in the Synoptic Gospels are lacking in theological foundations. It has been only in recent decades that we have come to recognize this "implied" theology of the Synoptics, so long bypassed and overlooked, as exactly the one which became so central for the Anabaptists in the sixteenth century. The teachings of Paul are essentially not different from those of Christ, but the emphasis and the categories applied are different, or at least could be so interpreted. In any case it is possible to speak of a Pauline tradition, elaborated later by Augustine, and of a Synoptic tradition, preserved in the main by those groups which Ludwig Keller once called old evangelical brotherhoods.

"As we now study this Synoptic tradition or emphasis, we find that central for it is the teaching of the two kingdoms, together with the message of what the kingdom of God actually means and implies. I think it is justified to call these doctrines a genuine theology in the proper sense of the word, even though its forms of expression are different from the above-mentioned more sophisticated Pauline-Augustinian tradition. It is proposed to call this teaching 'kingdom theology.' In a certain sense it is a continuation of the teachings of the Old Testament prophets, in the main of Isaiah, where this basic dualism of the two realms already appears. Most important in this connection is the idea that the 'other kingdom' is not merely something transcendental, something of another aeon, or something to be experienced only after death, but a reality to be expected and experienced in this life, even though in a sort of metahistorical situation.

"As a matter of fact, the kingdom theology (as we see it, the very center of Christ's message and witnessing) is to be distinguished from a theology whose primary concern is personal salvation (the Protestant interpretation of Paulinism). These two theologies are complementary to each other and of equal importance. The Reformers knew this fact very well. In fact their outlook on history was decidedly kingdom-oriented but they had their reasons for underemphasizing this two-facet content of the New Testament theology. The Pietists a century and a half later revived the kingdom idea, but being themselves the offspring of traditional Protestantism, they interpreted it in a non-Synoptic way. The real representatives of the Synoptic kingdom theology have always been the old evangelical brotherhoods, but none were more outspokenly kingdom-oriented, hence none more true to the spirit of the Master Himself, than the Anabaptists."<sup>14</sup>

Naturally such a teaching of an immediate Kingdom of Christ which "is already present in or among those who have been born again or who are united in the name of the Master"<sup>15</sup> will have many crucial implications for the faith and practice of believers. Dr. Robert Friedmann has explained that this Kingdom theology includes three essential characteristics. Firstly, it implies that consequential to conversion the believer will acquire a new value system of which the Sermon on the Mount is the best illustration. These values are unobtainable except through rebirth and the regeneration of the inward man through the Spirit and Grace of God. As a result the believer loses interest in the affairs of the world and acquires interest in the matters of the earthly peaceable Kingdom of Christ. Because of this change in mind the believer embarks on a discipleship of love which is no burden or legalistic following of rules.

Secondly, Kingdom theology has its own philosophy of history. The earthly Kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness are locked in a titanic battle in which each person must choose and take a side. In the end the Kingdom of God will triumph. This is the eschatological expectation of the Anabaptist-Mennonite. Dr. Friedmann expands on this point as follows: "Hence the sectarian feels a high sense of responsibility in this cosmic-historic process, and therefore accepts suffering and martyrdom without flinching. Only by witnessing to the Kingdom of Light can the latter ever become a full reality. That this outlook, although prominent in the New Testament, especially in the Gospels, recedes with the Reformers' interpretation of Paul hardly needs further elaboration".<sup>6</sup>

Thirdly, Kingdom theology implies a social ethic; that is to say some form of belief in socio-economic justice within the Kingdom of God on earth. Here Dr. Friedmann refers to the idea of brotherhood or *Gemeinde*. A close knit fellowship of believers and disciples on the model of the apostolic church or *Gemeinden*. "In fact the belief prevails that one cannot come to God (that is, attain salvation) except as one comes to Him together with one's brother. The brethren, the body of believers constitutes the realm; hence brotherly love, agape, is more than mere ethics. It is one of the basic qualifications of the Kingdom in the here and now".<sup>7</sup> Because of the new set of values and brotherly sharing in the *Gemeinde* the believer had little interest in the affairs of the world such as the pursuit of fame and fortune or other secular achievement. Rather, the question asked was how the interests of the Kingdom of God were to be advanced in the here and now with the limited resources available.

#### 4.03 Pietism.

During the 16th century the main experience of the Anabaptist-Mennonites with other Christian confessions was through the swords of the Inquisitors (Catholic) and the pogroms of the Reformers (Protestant). But in subsequent centuries the most frequent and significant Anabaptist-Mennonite interaction with other Christian confessions would be with Pietism. The eminent historian, Dr. Cornelius Krahn, has stated that "no other single religious movement has had such an impact on the Mennonites in all countries with the exception of the Netherlands as Pietism".<sup>8</sup> In fact the history of the Russian and Prussian Mennonites can only be understood in light of the historical development of pietism. Therefore it is helpful to give careful consideration to this particular branch of the Protestant faith.

Such a review is particularly necessary in view of the fact that the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith and pietism had a number of characteristics in common. Dr. Robert Friedmann has noted that "both groups desire the new birth, the inner transformation of the entire man, and therefore unite in two fundamental rejections: (1) The general state church, (the "allgemeine volkskirche") and (2) Confessional dogmatism (as a system of thought remote from life)".<sup>9</sup> Entirely different consequences flow from these concepts for the two groups. Dr. Robert Friedmann notes that pietism has been referred to as a "grandchild of Anabaptism"<sup>10</sup>, but he concludes that in substance, pietism was an entirely different Christian confession of faith. Although radical or separatist pietism rejected the state or general peoples church of Luther in favour of the free or congregational style church of the Anabaptist-Mennonites it remained essentially Protestant in its grace centered antinomian character.

Therefore it is necessary to consider the essential characteristics of pietism. Dr. Cornelius Krahn describes pietism as follows:

"Pietism as a movement came into being at the end of the 17th century in the midst of Reformed and Lutheran Orthodoxy in which adherence to the doctrinal and confessional heritage was strongly emphasized. In opposition or as a supplement pietism emphasized a 'heartful' religion accompanied by a self-analysis based on a personal emotionally experienced conversion resulting in the application of this experience in daily life in doing good works and in certain forms of non-conformity, abstaining from such entertainment as the dance, card playing, the theater, worldly literature, and at times alcoholic beverages. Pietism also emphasized the second coming of Christ. Its adherents met frequently for private devotional exercises."<sup>11</sup>

In his description, Dr. Krahn also notes that many parallels with pietism are to be found in Methodism, Revivalism, and Fundamentalism in England and America.

Perhaps the most significant characteristic of pietism was its central emphasis on an "individual, emotionally experienced conversion" and the subsequent "enjoyment of the new found realization of salvation". It should be noted that the word "pietism" used to describe this movement must be distinguished from the words "piety" or "pious" in their common and general meaning of "reverence for God" or simply "Godlike" and "Christlike". Although some of the literally thousands of branches of the pietist movement also attained high levels of piety in the general sense of the word as

“Christlike”, this was not an essential characteristic of the movement. Therefore the reader should carefully note the distinction in the meaning of the word “pietism” to describe a particular sectarian movement or faith, and the word “piety” to describe a life and conduct which is Christlike or Godly.

It is also important to note that the pietist movement was not one unified and monolithic organization. The Roman Catholic and Protestant state churches were able to use force and the legal system of the state in order to ensure uniformity of membership and doctrine in a particular geographic area. However, such instruments were generally not available to the pietists. At the same time it was considered essential that each individual pietist would have a personal relationship with his God which in turn was based on his own revelatory understanding of the Holy Scripture. Therefore it is not surprising that the adherents of pietism would tend to splinter and divide as charismatic leaders and theologians arose each with their somewhat different interpretation and emphasis. Consequently an almost infinite variation of the basic premises of pietism would evolve over the centuries.

Pietism began as an often wholesome emphasis on inward warmth and spiritual life within the context of the Lutheran and Reformed churches which had become very dogmatic and orthodox. The movement started during the latter part of the 17th century and gained a great following in Germany and elsewhere during the 18th century. The father of pietism within the Lutheran church was Philipp Spener (1635-1705).<sup>12</sup> The University of Halle founded in 1694 became the focal point of the movement, serving as an intellectual centre and disseminating the teachings of Spener to its students who were training as ministers and teachers. Through group Bible studies, prayer meetings, and special meetings for children, Spener introduced institutions which were later accepted by Protestant churches generally.<sup>13</sup> The teachings of Spener and Halle included the concept of basic truth which referred to experientially verified Biblical truth. There was an insistence that all true Christians would experience religious truth the same way. i.e. The Halle way.<sup>14</sup> Spener believed that the Lutheran church would be cleansed and that there would be a special dispensation for the Jews in the end times. Spener’s millennialism was quite mild. The pietism of Spener and Halle was greatly strengthened by its alliance with the Hohenzollern ruling house in Prussia.

August Francke (1663-1727) was the second leading proponent of pietism within the Lutheran church. Francke was accused of insisting on a conversion methodology which was very legalistic and insufferable, with a rigid sequence of “Buskampf” and acceptance of grace with a fixing of the day and hour.<sup>15</sup> In accordance with Lutheran tradition Francke viewed baptism as a means to salvation.<sup>16</sup> Francke was the theologian who developed Spener’s teaching into a clearcut body of ideas. Where Spener attempted to reform the church through the pastorate, Francke attempted to achieve the same goal through education. The Halle University trained college teachers who trained seminary teachers, etc. He instituted schools for poor children and was known for his works of faith.

From the foregoing it is evident that Spener and Francke adopted many of the techniques originally innovated by the Anabaptist-Mennonites. e.g. Prayer meetings, group Bible studies, worship in small devotional groups, etc.<sup>17</sup> Francke’s educational ideas were of vital significance for Germany and beyond her borders. Both Francke and Spener were mainly interested in the reform of the rigid dogma of the Lutheran church of their day.<sup>18</sup> The pietism of Spener and Francke was generally quite mild and the brand of pietism which they represented will be referred to as such in this work.

Wuerttemberg pietism was related to that of Spener and Halle but had its own characteristic features and was often separatist in nature. Many of the Wuerttemberg pietists advocated separation from the Lutheran church on the grounds that it was fallen and no longer qualified as the true church. The most prominent of the Wuerttemberg pietists was Johann Bengel (1687-1752) who followed the Halle tradition but was less legalistic. Bengel assumed that there was an objective system of divinely revealed truth embodied in the original manuscripts of the Bible. This truth would be revealed to those who were regenerated and who engaged in proper and careful research. Bengel’s critical exegetical works were lauded for years to come. John Wesley called him “that great light of the Christian world”.<sup>19</sup> Bengel placed great emphasis on eschatology which was the subject of many of his writings. He pinpointed the date for the Parousia or second coming of Christ as 1836. Many of his “eschatological” predictions were correct so that Bengel eventually commanded great respect within the church of his day and among fellow pietists.

Wuerttemberg pietism was also known for the “Stunden” which were conventicles of worship developed within the structure of the local church. Through the “Stunden” the local pastor could foster a second level of spiritual experience for those in his congregation who were pietistically inclined. Eventually these conventicles became separatist in character and in 1704 a law was enacted to curb the resulting excesses. Another Wuerttemberg pietist of note was Pregizer (1751-1821) who

insisted that the newness of life of conversion must express itself primarily in religiously motivated, almost uninterrupted joy.<sup>20</sup> Ludwig Hofacker (1798-1848) was another important pietist of the Wuerttemberg tradition who was influenced by the writings of Bengel and Jung-Stilling.<sup>21</sup>

Another major form of pietism was found in the Moravian church which had roots in the followers of John Huss (1369-1415). Count von Zinzendorf (1700-1760) became the great leader of the Moravian church. He received the remnant of the Moravian Brethren on his estate in Silesia where they founded the village of Herrnhut. A battle between Swiss Reformed and Lutheran theology was settled in favour of the Lutheran faith. All members now had to sign a document of Manorial Injunctions. Spener's conventicles now became a communal settlement nominally Lutheran but in 1756 this tie was broken. Zinzendorf believed that religion was based on the total experience of the individual. He stated that "if truth becomes a system one does not possess it". Zinzendorf placed great emphasis on the continued experience where others had insisted on a once for all experience.<sup>22</sup>

Zinzendorf had a startling concept of Christology and believed that the being of Christ represented the total revelation of God which could become known to man.<sup>23</sup> He conceptualized the Trinity as father, mother, son. His theology had definite mystical roots. Zinzendorf believed that the new life with joys and blessedness represented God's instant gift and rejected the "Buskampf" process of Halle. His emphasis on the suffering Savior and the blood wounds cult became a serious divider between Herrnhut and other Christians. Zinzendorf believed in a joyous relationship in Jesus Christ but his sexual symbolism would have offended the modern ear. The Moravians also had a special emphasis on joyful dying. Zinzendorf believed that anyone who was experientially and affectively united with Christ belonged to the Church.<sup>24</sup> He considered the true church to be somewhat more fully configured in the Moravian church. He also felt that the Lutheran confession was the most authentic. The Moravians became known for their fervent missionary work. Eventually some of the antinomian nature and theologian aberrations such as the excesses of "sifting time" within the Zinzendorf movement were moderated.<sup>25</sup>

Another pietist tradition of note had strong roots in the mysticism of Boehm (1575-1624), Arndt, and Quietism. One of these pietist writers was Tersteegen (1697-1769) who was accused of being a pagan mystic. But he differed from pure mystics by preaching a radical conversion experience instead of an aesthetic search for mystical insight.<sup>26</sup> His mysticism had Calvinistic roots in its emphasis on the progressive identification of the individual with the will and purpose of God and Creation. Tersteegen's piety was essentially passive. A perfection of surrender and not perfection of deed.<sup>27</sup> Tersteegen and Voetius were major representatives of pietism within the Reformed (Calvinist) Confession.<sup>28</sup>

Another important movement was German Philadelphianism which had originated with Jane Leade (1623-1704) in England. Leade had experienced visions and dreams as a child. She combined puritan apocalypticism with the mysticism of Boehm. The result was the Philadelphic understanding of Christian history which identified seven historical stages or dispensations. Leade believed that the world was in the sixth or Sardic stage and that it would be destroyed by Satan. Out of this would come the Philadelphia Church which would consist of reborn Christians who would spread the Christian message to all the world. This would result in a universal restoration. This group of radical pietists regarded itself as the true church and organized conventicles known as Philadelphia communities which became centres of religious fanaticism. i.e. "What begins in the spirit ends in the flesh".<sup>29</sup> Many of such groups held to some peculiar religious insight on the basis of a revelation from God Himself.<sup>30</sup> These groups often believed that the Lutheran and Reformed churches as well as the older milder pietist groups were ruled by the devil. The Dunkers or German Baptists were also related to Philadelphianism.

One of the best known of the radical pietists was Heinrich Jung-Stilling (1740-1817). He had a very spiritualistic, legalistic and deprived childhood. He was greatly influenced by the Philadelphianism of his stern father and also by the Sturm und Drang movement which subordinated reason to emotion. Sturm und Drang also placed great emphasis on personal friendships. Jung-Stilling had a success attitude and was very sensitive to failure.<sup>31</sup> He was open to culture and had sophisticated tastes. He was conversant in the literary set, enjoyed the theatre and wore a wig. The Enlightenment and the Sturm und Drang movement of his day emphasized happiness as the ultimate goal of man but he redirected this from a hedonistic pursuit to the self-denial of spreading happiness among others.

The essence of the personal religion of Jung-Stilling was summed up in the concept of "Gelassenheit" which he inherited from the German mystical pietist tradition and as such he believed in a complete surrender to God and His will.<sup>32</sup> The corollary of this obsession was his sense of mission and he believed that he was directed by God to write each and every one of his books.

**Heimweh** or "Homesickness" was his best known work. It was motivated by his longing for perfection and the feeling that earthly joy was only a foretaste of future fulfillment. The basic theme was that he was only a wanderer here in transit even though he enjoyed what the world had to offer. It seems that Jung-Stilling wrote **Heimweh** in a novel form in order to present his own religious experience to as many people as possible. The novel pictures the progress of the individual soul as well as the progress of God's people as a whole. The work was based on the eschatological assumption that he was living in the worst of the present age which was drawing to a close so that every effort must be made to be true to the will of God in all situations. This can only be achieved by the Christian who was truly homesick. God's people would eventually be gathered in the east (Russia) to escape the wrath which would be unleashed upon the west because of the evil influences of the enlightenment.<sup>33</sup>

**The Victory of Christian Religion** was another important book by Jung-Stilling. This book was based on his eschatological speculations and was published in 1835. Jung-Stilling believed that Bengel was basically correct in his prediction of the second coming of Christ in 1836. However he felt that Bengel had been too timid in his approach and that his prophecy needed some finetuning. As a result he predicted that the second coming of Christ would take place thirty-eight years later, in 1874. There would be a time of tribulation, followed by the first resurrection, followed by the millenium. In the book **Realm of the Spirits**, Jung-Stilling discourses about the intermediate state of the spirit or soul of man between the time of death and the general resurrection. He set out his view that during this intermediate state the soul would continue in the course set by choices made during the lifetime.

Many critics of Jung-Stilling denounced his work as sheer superstition. Others have questioned some of the fundamental assumptions upon which his revelatory and experiential theology was constructed. Within the context of a scholarly examination of **Heimweh** as representative of popular "Christian fiction", Professor Victor G. Doerksen comments regarding Jung-Stilling's legalistic insistence on religious certitude and the mechanical fixing of man's relationship with God.

"There is something intriguing about the novel **Heimweh** which is not necessarily connected to the idea of a journey, which derives from Bunyan, nor to the implication of the title, namely that *feelings* will play a major role. Rather, there is a sense that pervades the whole book that the Kingdom of Heaven may be likened unto a secret society and that a convert must go through an apprenticeship of rituals much like that of the freemasons in order to find salvation. Apart from all the trappings of such a world, there is a fundamentally new description here of what it means to be a Christian. One is either a member of the society, initiated into its deepest secrets or one stands outside. The insiders *know*; the outsiders are ignorant. Naturally the analogy is to those who are converted and those who are not, but there are several things about this analogy which are disturbing. First, the comparison is in terms of knowledge and not faith, a reflection of the preoccupation of Jung-Stilling with religious certitude (*Heilsgewissheit*). Secondly, and, for this paper more importantly, the fundamental line is not drawn between God, infinite and inscrutable, on the one hand, and finite man on the other. Rather, God is assumed as part of the workings of the spiritual apparatus whose machinery is mysterious only to the outsider. The theology from which this derives can truly be called sectarian because of its particular emphases. These include a particular interpretation of the history of God's intervention in the affairs of man (*Heilsgeschichte*) along with foreknowledge of the future culmination of God's plan in all its details. Indeed, Jung-Stilling was one of the great popularizers of the teaching which directed the "awakened" to flee to eastern Europe in order to prepare themselves for the Second Coming, of which both time and place seemed to be known.

"Taken together, these two factors make for a very limited and one-sided view of the Kingdom of God on earth, reflecting at best the rationalistic preoccupations of the eighteenth century and at worst Jung-Stilling's own personal weaknesses."<sup>34</sup>

Professor Doerksen also notes that the theological limitations represented by **Heimweh** have remained in place in the writing of "Christian fiction" during the 19th century and 20th century and therefore are deserving of a more serious examination.

The voluminous works of Jung-Stilling were certainly widely read and very influential. His literary efforts also contributed to the emigration of many Germans to Russia where they hoped to escape the wrath of God which was about to descend upon the West.<sup>34</sup> Through his position as medical doctor, professor, and confidante of poets and princes, Jung-Stilling became one of the more influential religious figures of his day both in Germany and abroad. Jung-Stilling kept alive a sense of religious life and mystery at the same time that he enjoyed what he regarded as the legitimate pleasures in life. His vivid and detailed eschatological teachings were certainly representative of the radical German pietists of the 18th century and were to have a great influence on the Russian Mennonites.

The foregoing is a brief review of the historical development of German pietism and a reference



to some of the more important figures. It seems that each successive generation had to adopt a somewhat more radical pietism and eschatology in order to satisfy the emotional needs and religious hunger awakened by the movement. In the process German pietism changed from a theology of hope to one of self-satisfied insularity.<sup>35</sup>

The emphasis of many of the radical pietists on direct prophetic revelation and vivid eschatological interpretation was reminiscent of the Mormons and Adventists in North America. In fact William Miller (1782-1849), the founder of the Adventist Church, had determined that the second coming of Christ would occur in 1843-1844. This was only eight years later than the date set by Johan Bengel.<sup>36</sup> Miller and Joseph Smith (1805-1844), the founder of the Mormon Church, were representative of the more extreme groups which developed out of the 19th century Evangelical movement.

There were also other parallels between the German pietists, the English Revivalists, and American Evangelicals and Fundamentalists. (Fundamentalism developed in the 20th century as a reaction against increasing modernism in the American Evangelical movement.) Like many separatist pietists, the Fundamentalists were quick to deny any confessional or denominational association insisting that the five fundamentals selected by the Niagara Conference in 1895 contained the essence of Christian truth. The Fundamentalist cause was solidified by the publication in 1909 of the Scofield (dispensationalist) Bible and 12 booklets which defended these teachings. Of course any such selection of fundamentals was determined by an experiential revelation to which only a chosen few were privy. The cause of the Fundamentalists was strengthened by prophetic conferences, the founding of Bible Schools, and the activities of many itinerant evangelists.<sup>37</sup> The similarities to the Spener/Halle movement in Germany are unmistakable in many of these characteristics.

In his Mennonite Encyclopedia article, Dr. Cornelius Krahn refers to some of the direct influences which German pietism had on the English Revivalist movement and the American Fundamentalist movement.

“Various waves of Pietism have influenced European Christendom. In France, Switzerland, and the Netherlands, “Reveil” became another form which influenced the Mennonites particularly in Holland. Later the Baptist movement spread from England to Germany and other countries influencing the Mennonites of Russia, Prussia and Poland. The Gemeinschaftsbewegung of the 19th century was another form of much the same movement, which influenced the Mennonites of the Palatinate. Pietism also affected Anglican Christianity through the Moravians. John Wesley was influenced by Moravian missionaries in his work in England. The Moravians established outposts in Holland, England, and Pennsylvania. The various awakenings and revivals of North America were closely related to continental Pietism. The assertion that the Great Awakening during the first half of the 18th century, primarily promoted by Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield, had its beginnings among the Mennonites has not been clearly established. The revival movements of the 19th century centering around Charles G. Finney, Dwight L. Moody, J. Wilbur Chapman, Billy Sunday, and Billy Graham have very much the same emphasis as Pietism, although each has peculiarities and methods of its own, and although the mass type of evangelism was seldom practiced in Europe.”

As most of the descendants of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde are presently in North and Central America the foregoing comparison of the German Pietists and American Fundamentalist should serve to provide a better understanding of the influences of the pietist movement on the Russian Mennonites.

#### 4.04 Grace And Discipleship Experienced.

The foregoing provides a brief introduction to some of the essential features of pietism and a number of its significant variants. A more meaningful understanding can be obtained through a comparison of the teachings of pietism and Anabaptist-Mennonitism. Dr. Robert Friedmann is one of the few academics to have made a scholarly analysis along these lines. In 1949 Dr. Robert Friedmann published the results of his study under the title, **Mennonite Piety Through the Centuries**. In this monumental work he compares and contrasts the two movements as follows:

“In spite of the above observations, there are a number of other reasons which would lead us to believe in the possibility of connections between Anabaptism and Pietism. Anabaptism was essentially a movement which insisted upon an earnest and uncompromising endeavor to live a life of a true discipleship of Christ, that is to give expression in fellowship and love to the deepest Christian faith, with full readiness to suffer in conflict with the evil world order. So long as this willingness to suffer as an expression of deepest faith and this readiness to enter into a nonresistant struggle for salvation was a living reality, just so long was Anabaptism a great and powerful movement. Fellowship and suffering

were the outward marks, but an inmost Christian experience was the foundation which made the outward marks possible. Wherever and as soon as these inner forces declined and consequently the readiness to suffer or to migrate to a distant land ceased to exist (and this is to be noted among the Anabaptists after 1600 in practically all of Central Europe) the situation changed completely. There were still numerous groups of Anabaptists in existence, but they held their faith more in quiet or in secret, and were more concerned to have the personal experience of salvation than to work it out in a radical following of Christ. This quietistic tendency, however, brings us very near to the pietistic attitude.

"Pietism in the larger sense is a quiet conventicle-Christianity which is primarily concerned with the inner experience of salvation and only secondarily with the expression of love toward the brotherhood, and not at all in a radical world transformation. Neither Anabaptism nor Pietism lay the primary weight on theology and dogmatics; both seek the inner experience of a true piety. But, whereas in Anabaptism a decisive element is the goal of spreading the Gospel, and everything personal is pressed into the background, Pietism on the other hand is in its essence pure subjectivity. It is of no moment to us here to distinguish how far Pietism was an ecclesiastical reform movement and how far it found expression outside of the organized churches, or even, as in Herrnhut, created a new church. A decisive element in Pietism seems to be the creation of quiet groups for the practice of piety which were not intended to take up the conflict with the world. This also assumed the belief in the possibility of a holy life, of the new birth, which could be lived within the framework of the middle-class life of the time. Among the Anabaptists 'the cross' was consciously the leader in life's destiny and signified practical opposition against the evil world, whereas in Pietism 'the cross' was more a symbol of an emotional experience such as is suggested by the 'sweet Saviour' of Zinzendorf (süßer Heiland). The Pietist ceased to place the emphasis upon the outer life which was in any case unsatisfactory, but rather upon the pure inner perfecting of holiness, on the possession of Christ in prayer, song, sacrament, and fellowship. In brief, his purpose was edification, enjoying or 'tasting' of salvation which had already been achieved. Without doubt a genuine and high morality was developed among many pietistic groups and brought to nearly as high a level as was the case formerly in Anabaptism, and this may have led to strong connections between the two movements. But this pietistic morality acquired another meaning. It ultimately meant for the Pietist, apparently, the gradual disappearance of that concrete Christianity which had been the goal of the original Anabaptists, and the substitution for it of an emotional Christianity which no longer caused the authorities of state or church any trouble. So the Pietist made peace with the world as it is, and in spite of his sincere intentions to achieve a real *Christlichkeit*, avoided or eliminated the friction and opposition which he would otherwise have had to face. Without doubt many Anabaptists ultimately also followed this road, without being conscious of what they were doing. It was the easier and yet a 'Christian' way.

"Many things were common possessions of the two groups. Both groups justified their policy on the basis of the leadership of the Holy Spirit, which taught them the correct understanding of the Scriptures. Both claimed to live strictly according to the Bible, that is, neither had confidence in a Christianity of the theologians and scholars. Both were seriously concerned with a Christian reality which lies beyond church and worship, although they understood the ultimate nature of this Christian reality differently. After all how could it be determined who possessed the 'right' Holy Spirit except through the evidence of the same in life?"<sup>38</sup>

Although pietism and Anabaptist-Mennonitism had some outward characteristics in common, it is evident from the foregoing that the most essential principles of the two confessions were fundamentally different and often directly opposed to each other. This was especially so with respect to the experience of grace and discipleship. In another chapter of his book, Dr. Friedmann explains the differing positions which the two concepts occupied in their respective religious confessions.

"In any case we observe that there are many real points of contact in the things which both groups rejected. But this is also true of positive elements in the thinking of the groups. Both groups truly sought to comprehend the whole of life in their systems. That is, both believed in the possibility of a sanctification of life, in contrast to the theology of the ineradicable depravity of human nature. 'The regenerated do not sin,' or 'cannot sin,' or, 'overcome the tendency to sin:' in such expressions we recognize a faith in a positive content of life, and therewith also a faith in a new way of life. However, it also becomes evident at once that this new way is unfortunately not the same way for both groups, as one would have a right to expect it would be among Christians.

"By the sealing of the new birth in baptism the Anabaptist brethren indicate their readiness to follow the hard and difficult way of discipleship (Nachfolge). That is to say, they declare their readiness to follow a way which has as its final goal the kingdom of God. For this reason also the Anabaptist knows no compromise. He is altogether radical, since he is out to change the world. In all ages he has challenged the authorities who have realized that he was intent on a genuine revolution according to Christ, but were unwilling to tolerate

him. Hence the new birth meant for the Anabaptist a great obligation and task, the very opposite to a peaceful possession. This work at God's kingdom, to be sure, did fill him with inner joy and peace, an experience which frequently astonished his opponents, but that is a by-product and not the goal.

"The way of Pietism on the other hand is quite different in regard to the new birth and its consequences. It begins with the thought of one's own depravity and the consciousness of sin in the sense that the theologians, especially Luther, have conceived it. This is followed by the struggle for repentance (*Busskampf*), an exclusively mental labor with oneself, which is quite apart from all thought of love. Then comes the process of the new birth, the consciousness of redemption and of a sure possession of salvation, and freedom in the enjoyment of this new possession. This is also a joy, but not the joy of the 'confessor' and disciple of Christ, but the joy of one who has been 'blessed' with the gifts of grace. This experience does not call into question the life of this world, since one has already overcome its demons individually and privately. One seeks therefore edification and uplift, but not a change of the world. The Pietist never finds himself in such severe testing as the Anabaptist, for his way is a way of much less conflict, and therefore much easier to tread.

"For this reason also the writings which the Pietists took over from the Anabaptists, and which we reported earlier, have such a different significance for the two groups. Among the Anabaptists they were primarily writings of comfort and exhortation, of help in time of testing and comfort in severe suffering. Among the Pietists however they became edificatory writings and therefore changed their real content of significance without changing the form of words. They became a means of revival or joyous uplift, or as it is usually put, a means for 'the practice of godliness,' *the praxis pietatis*.

"For the Pietist therefore the following of Christ (*Nachfolge Christi*)—in the full concrete sense of the Gospel commission—was replaced by the *praxis pietatis* which, it is true, was not altogether foreign to the Anabaptists, and which consisted of the inner experience of salvation and the cultivation of this experience. Thus many words and even attitudes taken by the two groups have the appearance of likeness, whereas in reality they contain deep inner antitheses.

"'Following Christ' (*Nachfolge Christi*) is a central concept of the Anabaptists, however variously they may have understood it in successive periods of their history. This concept of discipleship demands a great and voluntary obedience in thought and deed, an obedience concerning which Peter Walpot wrote in 1571 in connection with 2 Corinthians 10:5 as was mentioned earlier in chapter five. It means the acceptance in an absolutely concrete fashion of the call of Christ and the Gospel.

"This 'following Christ' has two fundamental meanings: love and cross, a relationship already noticed by the contemporaries of the early Brethren. Sebastian Franck, for instance, the great champion of a spiritual religion, described the Anabaptists in his broad-minded and sympathetic *Chronica, Zeitbuch und Geschichtsbibel* of 1531 in this way. He writes: 'As far as one could see they taught nothing but love, faith, and the cross. They showed themselves humble and patient under much suffering. They brake bread with one another as an evidence of unity and love. They helped each other faithfully with mutual aid, lending and giving, and taught that all things would be held in common. They called each other brethren, but those who were not of their sect they scarcely greeted. They died as martyrs, patiently and humbly enduring all persecution.' Love and cross were indeed the real pillars of this movement.

"'Cross' stands for the suffering which results from the clash with 'the world' which does not understand the Christian, and 'love' stands for the complete renunciation of the use of force as well as the active practice of brotherly love in the church to the extent of community of goods as it was practiced among the Hutterians. Without such a church discipleship has no meaning. Never is love conceived as something emotional, but rather as a frame of mind which demands concrete expression. Thus understood, love implies the hard road of daily self-conquest and has nothing to do with a general morality or with a righteousness of works, as the opponents of the Anabaptists often claimed.

"With the Pietist the *praxis pietatis* means something quite different. In place of the fear of God (*Gottesfurcht*), comes the experience of *Gonseligkeit*, a blissful form of devotion; and in the place of the above described strict concept of love comes a mild friendliness and morality. It is true that in the area of ethics there are strong points of contact and apparent likenesses. However, the tendency toward a humanitarian moralism is without doubt one of the particular marks of most pietistic circles. This moralism, however, has no direct connection with the idea of the kingdom of God, but rather has its roots in an emotional good will of the regenerated. For the Pietist the independent individual conscience has become the ultimate authority.'<sup>39</sup>

Of course the differences in the Pietist and Anabaptist-Mennonite understanding of the concepts of grace and discipleship were the result of the differing hermeneutics of the two religions. This would have to be so as both groups claimed to find their sole authority in the writings of the Bible. As has already been mentioned, everything depends on the standard by which the principles of Biblical in-

terpretation are governed. Dr. Friedmann explained this problem as follows:

“The cause of so much misunderstanding and astonishment at Anabaptism in many ecclesiastical circles including Pietism, was something altogether different. It was the Anabaptist shift in point of view from which the Holy Scripture itself was read, the shift of focus from the **Doctrine of Justification**, as it is to be found in the epistles of the Apostle Paul, over to the **Doctrine of the Kingdom of God** which the Gospel itself proclaimed. Certainly both belong together, but nevertheless there are decisive differences which arise as a result of this difference in focus. The question is: Is the Gospel to be understood through Paul, or is Paul to be understood through the Gospel? He who seeks to secure a total understanding of Holy Scripture from the point of view of Paul, starts with the experience of sin, and experiences salvation in consciousness of freely bestowed grace. But he who seeks to understand the Holy Scripture from the point of view of the Gospel, starts with the requirement of discipleship (Nachfolge), that is, he starts from the point of view of concrete love and the cross, and takes from them his sense of commission. . . . It is to be expected that both types of thinking and both manners of life should meet each other frequently. For the redeemed sinner knows that love is necessary, just as the soldier of the Kingdom of God cannot dispense with the Grace of God. Nevertheless the above indicated antithesis remains, as history has demonstrated.”<sup>40</sup>

At the risk of oversimplification one might summarize the views of Dr. Robert Friedmann as follows: Through grace to be like Christ was the result of conversion for the Anabaptist-Mennonite and because of his endeavors to be like Christ he was called a Christian. As a result of the discipleship of love the Anabaptist-Mennonite experienced a quiet inward peace and joy but only as an incidental consequence. In a sense both the Anabaptist-Mennonite and Pietist believed in an existential or experiential Christianity. The difference lay in the directional focus of the two confessions. For the Anabaptist-Mennonite to exist or to live in Christ meant to live out and practice the teachings and example of Christ as recorded in the Gospels within the context of the Gemeinde. i.e. An objective or gospel experiential piety.

In stark contrast the pietist experienced Christ through a subjective and emotional search for inward peace which was the essence of his faith. i.e. A subjective experiential piety. For the pietist discipleship in the evangelical sense was only an incidental consequence. To the pietist to be a Christian meant to have individually experienced the grace of God and to have attained a certain degree of inward realization of this experience. Some observers would note that it was exactly this individualistic notion or understanding of salvation which would make it so attractive to many Mennonites. This was especially so among the wealthy in Russian Mennonite society where the distinctions between the landowning class and the lower ‘Anwohner’ and labourer class were continually growing. Naturally a theology which required a sharing of wealth with a lesser socio-economic class through the medium of the Gemeinde as part of the salvation process would not be popular with those not thoroughly committed to the faith.

#### 4.05 The Millennium.

Anabaptist-Mennonite theology and the influences of the pietist movement cannot be fully understood without a consideration of the teaching of the ‘millennium’. This is the teaching of the thousand year physical reign of Christ on earth either before or after His second coming. The teaching was also known as chiliasm and is integral to the theology and faith of pietism. The foregoing is particularly relevant when one considers that the teaching of a future millennium is directly contrary to the Anabaptist-Mennonite theology of the present spiritual earthly Kingdom (see Section 4.02). The Anabaptist-Mennonite belief that the thousand year reign of Christ existed in the heart of a disciple immediately upon his conversion to the Kingdom of God has also been described by D. Robert Friedmann as the **Doctrine of Two Worlds**. The evangelical millennium is a peaceful one and consists only of believers who earnestly follow the Lamb like sheep to the slaughter. Together the believers make up the peaceable earthly Kingdom of Christ or Church of Christ, which was inaugurated by the birth of Christ almost 2000 years ago. The true Church of Christ is governed by the evangelical prescriptions of the Bible and therefore is a visible, nonconforming and suffering Church. This Church lives in earnest anticipation of the second coming of Christ.

But the Anabaptist-Mennonites did not accept the idea of an intervening time period and therefore their position could be described as nonmillennial or amillennial. The pietist teaching of the millennium is contrary to the theology of the Kingdom because it postpones to some future time the reign of Christ in the hearts of his followers and converts. By this teaching the urgency of living a life of evangelical piety in the here and now is postponed to the future as according to the millennial view, true regeneration and the imposition of the rule of evangelical piety will in any event only

come after the advent of the second coming of Christ. As a consequence the proponents of such an interpretation can now shift their emphasis to the "enjoyment and realization of their salvation" as the force and spirit of the great commandment of Christ "to take up My cross and follow Me" is thereby abandoned. i.e. Because the evangelical following of the Lamb will only take place in the future reign of Christ. For many chiliasmists any strivings to live out a new life of evangelical piety would be merely the proud and arrogant attempts of a new generation of scribes and pharisees to earn their salvation by works-righteousness.

In his Mennonite Encyclopedia article on chiliasm, J. C. Wenger of Goshen, Indiana, has summarized the main ingredients of the teaching of the millennium and its historical development as follows:

"Chiliasm, the doctrine of a thousand-year reign of Christ on earth following His second coming for His saints. The term comes from the Greek word for 'thousand' and the chief N.T. passage upon which the view is based is Rev. 20:1-10. Modern chiliasts base much of their teaching, however, upon a literal interpretation and application of Old Testament prophecies regarding the Jewish kingdom. The views of the Jewish apocalyptic books on the glory of the Messianic days also exerted some influence on the chiliasts of the second century Christian Church. Papias, for instance, quoted from Baruch 29 to show how fruitful the earth would be during the millennial reign of Christ.

"In modern times the term 'millennialism' or 'premillennialism' is more commonly used instead of 'chiliasm.' The 'pre' refers to the second coming of Christ as being 'before' the establishment of the earthly kingdom. Postmillennialism holds that Christ will return after the kingdom of God has been realized spiritually. Amillennialism (also called non-millennialism) holds that there will be no earthly kingdom at all and that there will be no golden age spiritually before the second coming of Christ.

"Among the early (2nd-5th centuries) adherents of chiliasm may be mentioned: Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Commodianus, Victorinus, and Lactantius. On the other hand, there is no trace of it in the Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Polycarp, Tatian, Athenagoras, or Theophilus; and it is specifically opposed by Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Jerome, and Augustine. Typical of the chiliasm of A.D. 200 is Irenaeus; the world is to last six thousand years, comparable to the six creative days, and then shall come the millennial 'day' of one thousand years, God's Sabbath. Near the end of the sixth day Antichrist will appear. At the end of the sixth day Christ will appear in glory and triumph over His enemies, and then reign on earth for one thousand years. During this time Jerusalem will be rebuilt and the earth will become very fruitful. Peace and righteousness will prevail. At the end of this millennium Christ will hold the judgment and effect the new creation. (For Irenaeus Christ's millennial reign did not have a Jewish character; it was not modern dispensationalism.)

"Of the forty early Church Fathers (not counting schismatics) who left writings, about eight held to chiliasm. By the fourth century the view was almost dead and remained so for a thousand years."<sup>41</sup>

Apparently the teaching of the millennium was not revived and adopted by any of the major movements of the Reformation. Professor Wenger goes on to explain that the teaching was also completely rejected by the Anabaptist-Mennonites.

"All the leading reformers rejected chiliasm, as did the historic creeds of Christendom. Except for Melchior Hofmann, only a few fringe figures of the Anabaptist movement were chiliastic; all the major leaders held to views which would now be called amillennial (non-millennial). Menno Simons explicitly rejected chiliasm (summary of relevant quotations in Ira D. Landis, 'The Faith of Our Fathers on Eschatology', Chapter 1). There is no trace of chiliasm in any of the older Mennonite confessions of faith: Schleithem (1527), Twisck (ca 1617), the Dutch Mennonite deposition of 1626, Olive Branch (1627), Jan Cents (1630), Dordrecht (1632), or Prussian (1660, 1678) . . . ."<sup>42</sup>

Nevertheless some of the more extreme charismatics of the Reformation period such as Thomas Muentzer (1488-1525) espoused the teaching of the millennium and in fact set about a program of evangelization by force of arms in order to set the stage for the imminent second coming of Christ and the institution of the true Kingdom of God.<sup>43</sup> Of course this was directly contrary to the teachings of the nonresistant Christians, who held that no force, deceit, misrepresentation, or other non-evangelical means could be employed by a follower of Christ even if the object and purpose was to save a soul.

In his Mennonite Encyclopedia article J. C. Wenger goes on to explain that there was absolutely no connection between the nonresistant Anabaptist-Mennonites and the radical charismatics such as Muentzer, and others.

"As was mentioned above there is no trace of chiliasm in the first generation of the main line of the Anabaptists, whether Swiss, Dutch, or German, represented by such men as Conrad Grebel, Michael Sattler, Hans Langenmantel, Pilgram Marpeck, Thomas von Imbroich, Obbe Philips, Menno Simons, Dirk Philips, Leenaert Bouwens, and the Hut-

terites Jakob Hutter and Peter Riedemann. From many of these leaders we have tracts, books, or letters which more or less clearly delineate their doctrinal position, and none of these leaders exhibits chiliastic views. For that one must go to such persons as Melchior Hofmann (Strasbourg, Emden, Holland), Hans Hut (Augsburg, Bavaria), and the revolutionary Münsterite movement (a degenerate form of Melchiorism). Hut (d. 1527) expected Christ to return about 1530 and to set up a spiritual, though not a physical, kingdom. So far as is now known the chiliasm of Hut never was accepted by his fellow leaders and had no later influence. Melchior Hofmann (d. 1543), who became an Anabaptist of a unique type in 1530, was an ardent chiliast, and though he had no influence on the Swiss and was expressly repudiated by the Swiss Brethren who took part in the Bern disputation of 1538, he had considerable influence in Northwest Germany (Emden, 1530) and Holland (1530-33) and is responsible for the chiliasm which appeared there in the early years (up to 1540). His chiliasm finally found an outlet in the violent Münsterite movement (1534-35), though he himself never advocated violence.

"The Philips brothers and Menno Simons succeeded in purging the Obbenite-Mennonite brotherhood (1533-44) of all Münsterism and chiliastic tendencies, and as a result of Münster the later Anabaptists and Mennonites became very careful in this matter. There seems to be no further trace of chiliasm among the Dutch, German, or Swiss Mennonites until at least two centuries later."<sup>44</sup>

Thus it can be seen that early leaders such as Menno Simons, Dirk Philips, and others, completely cleansed the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement of all traces of millennialism. In addition a number of later Anabaptist-Mennonite leaders wrote powerful expositions denouncing the doctrine. In this regard Wenger refers to the following writers: "P. J. Twisck, 1565-1636, had written an exposition of Revelation 20, and Jakob Denner, 1659-1746, had included a sermon on this passage in his book of sermons entitled *Betrachtungen*, 1730. Heinrich Funck [d. 1760], a Mennonite bishop in the Franconia Conference, had also written an exposition of the law and its fulfillment in Christ, entitled *Eine Restitution oder Erklärung einiger Hauptpunkte des Gesetzes*, which was published in 1763 in Philadelphia."<sup>45</sup> It is noteworthy that these writers represent a wide range of spiritual tradition in the Anabaptist-Mennonite church. They include Dutch Friesian, North German (Altonau) Dömpelaar, and Swiss-American Mennonite. This again seems to underline the fact that clear, unequivocal, and unified patterns emerge when Anabaptist-Mennonite principles are applied to analyse a particular situation even though the different Anabaptist-Mennonite historical streams have had absolutely no contact for decades. Some prominent leaders of the American Mennonite Church who rejected the millennium teaching included: John F. Funk (1865-1944), John Horsch (1867-1941) and Daniel Kauffmann (1865-1944).

According to Wenger there are four major groups in the modern Protestant Church which hold to the teaching of a future millennium. These are: 1) Pietism; 2) The Plymouth Brethren who originated in England around 1830; 3) The Adventist Bodies who originated about 1845; 4) The Adherents of the Scofield Bible which was published in 1909. Both the Plymouth Brethren and the Scofield adherents hold to a modern form of millennialism which is known as dispensationalism. The dispensationalists believe that the teachings of Christ are not applicable to the present age. Professor Wenger explains this form of millennialism as follows:

"Both the Plymouth Brethren and Scofield hold to a modern form of chiliasm known as dispensationalism. According to this neo-chiliasm, redemptive history is to be divided into seven dispensations in each of which God deals with man on different terms, and each of which ends in human failure and divine judgment. The church, say dispensationalists, is not in O.T. prophecy, and Christians are not bound to keep 'kingdom ethics' including the Sermon on the Mount; Jesus first offered the kingdom to the Jews but was rejected, upon which this Jewish kingdom was 'postponed' to the millennial age; the Jews will be converted en masse at the sight of Christ at His 'revelation' seven years after the 'rapture' of the church; during the millennium the Jews will lead the nations, the Gentiles will keep the O.T. Jewish feasts, Jewish sacrifices and temple worship will be reinstated, and the Jewish Sabbath will be observed. The church is thus a sort of parenthesis between the Jewish rejection of Christ as their King, and the Jewish kingdom of Christ which will obtain in the millennium. This dispensationalism has gained considerable acceptance in Bible schools and institutes, through prophecy journals and magazines, prophetic conferences, etc., in modern American Protestantism in the last fifty years, less in England and continental Europe."<sup>46</sup>

In his book *Mennonites in Canada 1920-1940*, Frank H. Epp has referred to a form of dispensationalism which has been widely adopted among the American Fundamentalists.

"The fundamentalists also challenged the overly optimistic liberal spirit with respect to human development and social evolution. Helpful to this end were the doctrines of dispensationalism. Dispensationalist teaching had originated with the Plymouth Brethren in England

and Ireland a century earlier and become a popular doctrine within American Protestant circles by the 1870's. As already indicated, the Niagara Bible Conference was a strong Canadian source of such teaching. According to the dispensationalists, history was divided into periods or dispensations, usually seven in number. In each age, God had his followers, though the qualities of the faithful differed from period to period and certain divine expectations did not apply to them until the dawn of the millennium, a 1,000-year period referred to in the Book of Revelation.

"In this way, the ethical teachings of the Kingdom, which spelled out the social obligations of the church, could be omitted from fundamentalist dogma since, it was conveniently argued, they were not applicable in the present age. The overriding concern of the church in the present times should be to preach and to save souls for the future. Christian energies should be channelled not towards action for social reform but rather towards the salvation of individuals."<sup>47</sup>

From the foregoing description it is evident that there are many parallels between Fundamentalist theology and the teachings of some of the milder separatist pietists such as the German Philadelphia movement which also believed in seven dispensations and also placed undivided emphasis on the propagation of their understanding of Christianity throughout the world.

Another form of millennialism holds that the second coming of Christ cannot occur until the "Gospel" (as interpreted by them) has been spread throughout the entire world. In the meantime Kingdom ethics and the socio-economic teachings of Christ are not in effect. 2 John 9. This is an interesting variation of the themes common to the German pietists adding a third element to the pietist credo of "salvation by faith alone" and the requirement of "enjoyment of salvation". This form of millennialism holds that the admonition of Christ "to go . . . into all the world to preach the Gospel to every creature", Mark 16:15, supersedes all the other teachings of Christ. This view appears to negate the Anabaptist-Mennonite concept of a balanced evangelical piety which recognizes that all the teachings of Christ are valid and in full effect in the earthly peaceable Kingdom of Christ, (see Section 4.08). The Anabaptist-Mennonites would also note that even the great commission was subject and secondary to the great commandment of love. Mark 12:28-31; 1 Corinthians 13.

In view of the fact that the fundamental teachings of Anabaptist-Mennonite theology are in direct conflict with the concept of a future millennium, it is amazing to note the extent to which these teachings have infiltrated into the Mennonite Church. But it must not be forgotten that millennialism was an essential ingredient of pietism and that pietism had affected and eventually subverted many branches of the Mennonite Church. In his Mennonite Encyclopedia essay, J. C. Wenger explains some of the avenues by which millennialism entered the Mennonite Church.

"The question therefore arises as to time and circumstances of the entrance of chiliasm (premillennialism) into the modern Mennonite Church. This took place in the latter part of the 19th or early part of the 20th century, depending on which country is involved. Russia came first, South Germany, America, and Switzerland following in that order, but none interdependent. Modern Dutch Mennonites have manifested no interest in chiliasm at all. The writings of Johann Heinrich Jung (pen name: Stilling, 1740-1817) were of some influence in leading some of the Russian Mennonites to adopt millennial views. Plymouth Brethren influence came from England to Russia, mediated in part through Germany. Claasz Epp adopted chiliastic views and in 1880 led a group of his followers into central Asia to escape the Antichrist and to wait for the Lord. He set the date for the Lord's return at March 8, 1889, later postponed by two years. Epp (d. 1913) became increasingly unbalanced and fanatical and finally alienated most of his deluded followers."<sup>48</sup>

Another group very much influenced by the radical eschatology of pietists such as Jung-Stilling was the Templar (Jerusalem) Church which subscribed to the 'establishment' of the Kingdom of God on earth . . . in Palestine in order to be enabled to 'build the Temple of God'.<sup>49</sup>

But in the end a milder less radical form of millennial teaching held sway among the Russian Mennonites particularly in the Mennonite Brethren Church which became the most significant proponent of pietism and millennialism in Russia. Henry H. Janzen, a leading minister of the Canadian General Conference Church has described this milder and more mellow form of millennialism as follows:

"Jakob W. Reimer, preacher of Rückenau, Russia, became a leading advocate of chiliasm. As an evangelist and Bible expositor of great fame among the Mennonites in Russia, he engaged himself in a thorough study of Daniel and Revelation. His booklet **Der wundervolle Ratschluss Gottes mit der Menschheit** (The Wonderful Plan of Salvation of God with Men), already in its fifth edition, may be taken as typical of the Mennonite Brethren position. A few quotations from it follow:

"*A Beautiful Picture of the Future*: God will make a new covenant with His people. The citizens of the coming Messianic Kingdom will receive forgiveness of sins, a new

heart, and the spirit of their God. God will make such people of them as will walk in His ways. They shall all know the Lord. As the water covers the sea, the land shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord. Jerusalem shall be again the place of the manifestation of God.

“The heathen will also partake of the blessings of the new City of God. This will extend over the whole earth. The nations will come to Jerusalem to worship the King, the ruler of the world, and to be instructed in His ways.

“The godless will be destroyed out of the land. For the righteous, death will be abolished forever. All nations will live in peace. Everyone will dwell under his own vine and fig tree, without fear. The whole creation will experience an amazing change.

“*The Millennium*: Christ will be the King on earth, and will reign with His saints over all the nations. The times of refreshing have come. Peace reigns over all.

“But even though the reign of the King Jesus Christ will be glorious, not all the inhabitants of the earth will be truly loyal. . . . Also in the millennium there will be not a few who will love the darkness more than light. In their heart many will scorn the government of the incomparable King, Jesus Christ.”

“Another paragraph follows, in which Reimer speaks about the Last Judgment, the ‘Great White Throne.’ ‘The 1,000-year Sabbath will come to an end, and God will put the whole world to another test. Satan will be released from his prison for a short period of time and will go out to seduce the nations. Many will follow his tempting voice and join him in his mad attempt to overthrow Christ, the King of Kings. . . . Then will come the final fulfillment of the glorious Plan of God’s Salvation.’

“This teaching has been unofficially accepted in the course of the years by the entire Mennonite Brethren Church. Today one would hardly find any congregation and very few individual members who would oppose the teaching on chiliasm as given above.”<sup>50</sup>

Professor J. C. Wenger also discusses some of the means by which millennialism or chiliasm made inroads into the Mennonite Church elsewhere in Europe and in North America.

“Around the turn of the present century Mennonites in many lands, Switzerland, France, Germany, and America, began to experience their first contact with millennialism in their own ranks. Young men attended Bible schools where premillennialism was taught, and returned home with ‘keys’ to the interpretation of Daniel and Revelation, both of which are books containing much figurative and symbolical material which had not been much studied or taught by Mennonites, even by the ministers, before that time.

“Only two American Mennonite bodies are officially committed to premillennialism in their adopted confessions of faith: the Evangelical Mennonite Church (formerly Defenseless Mennonites), and the United Missionary Church (formerly Mennonite Brethren in Christ). The Mennonite Brethren Church, the Evangelical Mennonite Church, and the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren are almost solidly premillennial, though not officially committed.”<sup>51</sup>

Wenger has noted that Dwight L. Moody (1833-1899) and the Moody Bible School in Chicago also adopted pre-millennial teachings thereby influencing many Mennonite groups with which it came into contact. Similar teachings were apparently also espoused by the Grace Bible Institute in Omaha, Nebraska and in the Bible schools of the American Evangelicals. Many of these same institutions also taught a very strict dispensationalism. i.e. That the teachings of the Gospels do not apply in the present age.

There are numerous forms of millennialism with all manner of permutations and variations of the basic concepts. These include premillennialism, which holds that the second coming of Christ will occur before the tribulation, as well as post-millennialism which holds that there will be a perpetual improvement in the Church and world eventually ushering into reality the millennium after the tribulation. From the foregoing discussion it is evident that a great deal of tension would occur when the pietists entered the Mennonite realm with a view to converting them to the pietist understanding of Christian truth.

#### 4.06 The Kingdom Theology of the Anabaptist-Mennonites and Pietists.

By shifting the evangelical teachings of the Kingdom to a future millennium the pietists are left with a somewhat ambiguous teaching respecting the present Kingdom of God in the here and now. In his essay “The Doctrine of Two Worlds”, Dr. Robert Friedmann discusses some of the differences between pietist and Anabaptist-Mennonite regarding the earthly Kingdom of Christ.

“The kingdom theology was never systematically formulated by the Anabaptists; implicitly, however, it is very much there. Even as Jesus spoke mainly in parables, thus revealing His theological ideas but indirectly, so it is also with the Anabaptists. Very clear, even radical is their dualism con-



cerning the two realms. Their disparagement and even fear of the world goes beyond that opposition which we would find in Paul's derogation of the flesh. While the latter leads to asceticism and celibacy, the Anabaptist dualism is of a rather different kind, requiring complete separation from the world as the realm of the prince of darkness. The Anabaptists, however, were not Puritans. The mere practice of purity of morals would mean little to them even though the idea of a 'church without spot and wrinkle' is quite common with the Anabaptists. The Puritans certainly had one element of the kingdom theology, the strictness of discipline; but they lacked certain other elements, due to their Calvinistic outlook.

"The terms most often used by Anabaptists are *Nachfolge* (discipleship) and *Gehorsam* (obedience); that is the acceptance of Christ's leadership and that spirit which permeates His teachings. In short, their way of thinking and of evaluation is that of the kingdom theology, even though an explicit theology of this kind might not be so easily demonstrable. They felt absolutely certain that they were citizens of that other (spiritual) world here and now, and accepted the values, the outlook on history and the social consequences which follow with this position as a matter of course.

"This theology, however, needs one further analysis to exclude misunderstanding. Frequent attempts have been made to integrate kingdom theology and the typical Protestant theology of salvation, i.e., justification by faith alone. The outstanding attempt in this direction is Pietism, which likewise speaks of God's kingdom and its building up mainly through intensive mission work. As in so many other areas, Anabaptism and Pietism have certain similarities also at this point. The Anabaptists, too, were intent on mission work and they were aware that by this work they were instrumental in the building God's kingdom here and now. Likewise the Pietist emphasis upon the new birth is quite similar to that of Anabaptists, although the accompanying methodic struggle of repentance (the *Busskampf*) of Pietism is totally foreign to Anabaptism. In spite of all these similarities the concept of the kingdom in Pietism is yet basically different from that in Anabaptism. To Pietism of all shades the kingdom means the assembling of all those who have passed through the *Busskampf* experience and know themselves now as the reborn; they represent then the citizens of that kingdom, the conventicle of the saved who now enjoy their state of salvation in quiet withdrawal and devotional uplift (edification). The world outside is not challenged, and accordingly does not react against the Pietist. In Pietism the dualism of the two realms is never dynamic, and the world is not decried as darkness, but is marginally accepted. Above all the brotherhood idea is not present, at least not in the sense of the old evangelical brotherhoods with their togetherness and sharing.

"To the Pietist the kingdom is the assembly or society of the redeemed, who join in a sort of conventicle; to Anabaptism it is a closely knit, nonindividualistic brotherhood where the brother is constitutive to the idea of the kingdom and its realization, and where the concern with one's own salvation from original sin is but marginal, and any thought of its 'enjoyment' completely foreign. Obedience stands here in opposition to enjoyment (edification). In Anabaptism the kingdom idea is the primary concern, and thus becomes dynamic, challenging, and extremely other-dimensional. With Pietism individual salvation is the primary concern, and the kingdom idea assumes a non-dynamic and only mildly dualistic character, thus leading to less tension with the kingdom of this world. In Pietism the idea of the cross becomes more emotional than existential, just as the idea of the Spirit is further reduced to a psychological uplift without the existential 'I cannot do otherwise' of the Anabaptists. Finally, Pietism places undue emphasis on death and dying, as if the kingdom of God were synonymous with heaven or paradise. Nothing is farther from Anabaptism than that. Thus, although the kingdom idea and even a kind of kingdom theology occurs also within the respected circles of Protestantism, namely, the pietistic wings of Lutheranism and Calvinism, the difference between this and the kingdom theology of Anabaptism is nevertheless very real and tangible, and forbids any confusion between Anabaptism and Pietism.

"It was only in fairly recent times that a more adequate appreciation of this kingdom theology was promoted and with it a new understanding of the life and work of Christ and the meaning of discipleship. Two men were primarily instrumental in this regard: Albert Schweitzer, whose first book on this subject was published 1901, and Leonhard Ragaz, the Swiss theologian, whose magazine *Neue Wege* began to appear in 1907 and whose major books were published between 1922 and 1925. Unfortunately, neither of these two men were too successful in their endeavor as they challenged too strongly the traditional viewpoints of most Protestant theologians. This is particularly true of Ragaz whose work was an unceasing 'prophetic' fight for the recovery of the original meaning of the kingdom theology and its consequences. In this connection he likes to speak of *Die Sache Christi*, that is, loyalty or devotion to that which Christ stands for and is most concerned with, instead of 'Christian religion' with its concentration on institutional church bodies. He also urges a 'going back from Paul to Jesus,' very outspokenly connecting discipleship with the kingdom idea.<sup>52</sup>

The reader will note here the unequivocal conclusion of Dr. Friedmann that the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith and Pietism are two completely independent Christian religions and thought systems which should not be confused with each other. In closing his essay, Dr. Friedmann concludes that "to be concerned with one's own salvation first and foremost is not the same as to feel a burning passion to serve the '*Sache Christi*' through '*Nachfolge*' and obedience, through the creation of a nucleus of the Kingdom here and now. The latter is the never-ending concern of those who have a vision of that other dimension which alone is the place where Spirit may truly become flesh."<sup>53</sup>

#### 4.07 Reflections On The Friedmann Analysis.

Far reaching consequences flow from the distinctions referred to. Dr. Cornelius Krahn in the Mennonite Encyclopedia article on Pietism characterizes these differences in emphasis as follows:

“Robert Friedmann, who has delivered the only thorough theological comparison of the two movements concludes that they are substantially different, and that when Pietism came into the Mennonite fold it at the very least blunted the essential thrust of Anabaptism as discipleship in conflict with the world, and at the most, substantially changed and redirected Anabaptist-Mennonite theology and piety from a sturdy movement to conquer the world by bringing men under the Lordship of Christ into a subjective emotionalized search for inner peace and godliness which lost its readiness to defy the world for the sake of its understanding of the Gospel and the Christian ethic. Pietistic Mennonitism, he claims, was much more ready to accommodate itself to the prevailing culture and abandon such characteristic Anabaptist teachings as nonresistance and nonconformity”.<sup>54</sup>

Of course as Dr. Friedmann has stated, there is also a form of “an inward realized salvation” or “inward peace”, which is integral to the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. This Anabaptist-Mennonite ‘inward realization’ can be characterized as the “quiet inward peace and joy of the individual who has been reborn through grace, and through grace has taken up the Cross, and a Life of Discipleship”. In the context of characterizing a particular Mennonite writing, Dr. Robert Friedmann refers to this concept as follows: “There is again the compiling of Bible quotations, and again the well-poised simplicity of thought. But above all it is striking that there is no anxiety about one’s own salvation but rather the good conscience of one who has surrendered his will to God in obedience to His Word which was to be his guide in all situations of his life. So much for this book and the type of piety it represents”.<sup>55</sup>

The Anabaptist-Mennonite would argue that the differences in the concepts of salvation and conversion of the two confessions could be illustrated by the example of the pilgrim lost in a deep and impenetrable forest. Suddenly the pilgrim perceives a faint flickering light which represents salvation. Immediately upon becoming aware of this distant light the pietist becomes emotionally enraptured and calls to all his friends and even strangers at a distance to come and join him in a celebration as he revels in the joy of having realized the light of salvation. In contrast when the Anabaptist-Mennonite perceives the light he leaves whatever he is doing in order to follow the same. In his earnestness to draw nearer to the light, which is guiding and leading him to the fulfillment of salvation, he stumbles over briars and thorns, climbs over mountains and crevasses, no matter how difficult the pilgrimage might be.

Such examples are invariably oversimplified, although they may be of assistance in portraying the concepts involved. The Anabaptist-Mennonite would also argue that the pietist had a very limited concept of the grace and power of God. For the pietist frequently pointed to any emphasis on living a life of evangelical piety as being an impossible attempt to earn salvation by works. To the Anabaptist-Mennonite, this position always seemed to be indicative of a God who barely had enough strength and power to grasp and snatch the sinner out of a world of sin to salvation. i.e. Like someone completely exhausted by pushing a boulder up a hill with no power left for any other task but just only that of providing salvation. In contrast, the Anabaptist-Mennonite had no concerns in this regard having full assurance of faith that according to the Gospel, God had more than enough strength and might to provide for regeneration as well as for salvation.

In fact to the Anabaptist-Mennonite this seemed to be the very reason for the pietist misunderstanding of these concepts. For the Anabaptist-Mennonite to be “reborn” meant an inward regeneration and not merely enjoyment through a “plan of salvation”. To the Anabaptist-Mennonite the question was “Are you converted?”. i.e. Are you converted to walk earnestly in the footsteps of Christ in the furtherance of His peaceable Kingdom on earth? In contrast the question of the rebirth to the pietist was a matter of asking “Are you saved?”. i.e. Have you been able to achieve an inward awareness and realization of your salvation? To the Pietist the ultimate question is “Are you a happy Christian?”. Thus the Anabaptist-Mennonite would perceive the pietist concept of conversion as being only a partial conversion and as representing only a superficial understanding of the evangelical teaching of being born again of the Spirit.

In his essay “From Jung-Stilling to Rudy Wiebe” Professor Victor G. Doerksen has referred to the disembodied piety of the pietist and the portrayal of the same in popular “Christian Fiction”

“There is one overwhelming difference between the fate of the Anabaptist martyr and the eighteenth century ‘soul’ that must be noted here. Put bluntly, the earlier heroes’ souls are attached to their bodies, with very drastic consequences. Unfortunately, it was not possible for them, the Felix Manzs and George Wagners of the sixteenth century, to declare

that they were prepared for martyrdom in attitude or 'spiritually,' and the martyr songs depict the physical consequences of this fact in excruciating detail. But by the eighteenth century, when a relatively high degree of toleration had developed, the protagonists are sophisticated enough to separate these two areas and so it is possible for the 'soul' to undergo a series of dramatic adventures no less spectacular than those of its more primitive forerunners without so much as being singed or getting wet. This process of internalization, for example, allowed Goethe's progressive Faust to recognize the devil as nothing more than a negative potential within himself and thus permitted him to be saved ultimately, unlike his hapless sixteenth century counterpart, whose body was literally splatted about when his soul became the devil's due. Through the process of separating body and soul (to the detriment of the former, while the latter is emphasized) it is possible to redefine all of the old terms: persecution, suffering, martyrdom, as well as others, so that the individual could be a spiritual adventurer and indeed, a martyr, without necessarily losing his often lofty stature in society and indeed at times without anyone else knowing about his sufferings at all—this being revealed only to himself and his God in his secret diary.<sup>55a</sup>

Professor Doerksen notes that the experience of such subjective piety was often shared as a model for others through publication. As a result certain elements of the 18th century pietist religious experience were given ongoing influence as legalistic formulae which are followed to the present day.

Part of the problem seems to originate in the different historical origins of the two movements. Although radical pietism divorced itself from the Lutheran and Reformed churches which gave it birth its basic or fundamental theological structure nevertheless was founded on the insights of the Reformers. The revelation of Martin Luther as a young Catholic monk who sought to earn his salvation by good works has been of special significance. Luther was inundated and oppressed with the Roman Catholic emphasis during the dark ages on earning salvation by works. The eminent theologian Dr. John C. Wenger has referred to this attempt by the sin-struck Luther to earn his salvation by works:

"He (Luther) himself said later that if self-denial and good works of all kinds could have brought anyone to heaven, he would have been successful, for he was so severe with himself that he endangered his own health. But the route of self-denial for its own sake (asceticism), and the doing of works which supposedly achieve merit, simply could not bring the scholarly and devout monk of Wittenberg to peace and joy. . . . It happened one day that Luther was sitting in deep thought. Somehow he happened to settle on Romans 1:17, which states that the righteousness of God is revealed in the Gospel and that it is obtained by faith. 'By faith', thought Luther: 'then it is not a quality in the Holy God by which He punishes us poor mortals. By faith! Righteousness by faith!' Luther was overwhelmed. In describing the scene later, Luther could only say that it was the Holy Spirit who illuminated him in the Black Monastery in Wittenberg. He says that it was as if he had been born again."<sup>56</sup>

Wenger goes on to note that the recovery of the Good News of salvation by grace which had been largely lost throughout the Dark Ages was the most basic foundation of the Reformation. For Luther and others like him who had been inundated by a mass of works-righteousness this discovery provided a key for the unraveling of Biblical truth. Unfortunately many of the later day descendants of Luther such as the radical pietists continued to insist that all Biblical truth must be understood exclusively from the vantage point that "man is saved by faith alone", even though the theological circumstances in the Western world had changed totally since the time of the Reformation. Unfortunately whenever pietism invaded the Mennonite fold this hermeneutical tunnel usually came with it.

The Anabaptist-Mennonites had an independent origin at the time of the Reformation and had never been encumbered by this restrictive emphasis. It seems that Anabaptist-Mennonite leaders such as Menno Simons were able to accept the obvious evangelical teaching that "man is saved by grace alone" without closing their eyes to other equally valid Biblical truth. To the Anabaptist-Mennonite Luther's famous prescription "that man is saved by faith alone" was not at all incompatible with numerous other statements in the Bible which revealed God to man and which guided man in his relationship with Jesus Christ. For example the Anabaptist-Mennonites would feel quite comfortable with the statement of the prophet Micah that "(God) hath shown thee. O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God?" Micah 6:8.<sup>57</sup> Another example would be the admonition of Paul to Timothy that the "Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly Kingdom: to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." 2 Timothy 4:18. Thus the Anabaptist-Mennonite was hermeneutical-free to consider his relationship to God in all its manifold facets and phases.

To the Anabaptist-Mennonite the hermeneutical deficiency of the pietists was further evidenced by what seemed to be the failure of the pietist to understand the concept of the discipleship of love. For the pietists invariably criticized the humble endeavors of the Anabaptist-Mennonite to live a life of discipleship as being merely a cold legalistic following of man-made rules by rote. To the pietist

it seemed to be such an unnecessary burden on the part of the Anabaptist-Mennonites when in accordance with the admonitions of Jesus they sought to maintain simpler life styles, or wore less fashionable clothes and lived in cheaper houses. To the pietist the Anabaptist-Mennonites' practice of mutual aid and helping others in need, at the cost of giving up their own enjoyments in entertainment and social life, seemed like such overwhelmingly difficult sacrifices to make.

The Anabaptist-Mennonite found this perception remarkable as to him there was no sacrifice or burden involved in this life of discipleship. In fact it was the very evidence of regeneration that he now had no desire to spend scarce resources on fashionable clothes or on expensive houses or lifestyles. Through the evangelical rebirth the thoughts and desires of the believer were rechanneled into evangelical piety and not merely into the enjoyment of salvation. To the Anabaptist-Mennonite it was a privilege and a joy to be able to serve his Master in love and blind obedience. For he had been freed from the bondage of sin only to be grasped and enslaved in a new bondage which was the discipleship of love.

This is how the Anabaptist-Mennonite knew that he had been touched by the healing hand of the Master and redeemed. This was the sacred and full assurance of evangelical faith. This is how the Anabaptist-Mennonite understood Christ when He said, "Come unto Me all ye that are heavy laden and I will give you rest for your soul. For my yoke is easy and My burdens are light." Of course the weak earthly mortal in his celestial insignificance frequently would stumble and fall but he had the full evangelical assurance of faith that the grace of his Redeemer was more than sufficient to provide salvation as well as to work regeneration in the sinner as a precious pearl in the hand of his Master.

These were the signs and evidence of the power and grace of God which the Anabaptist-Mennonite regarded so highly. How he treasured the sacred assurance of the apostle John who had said: "Hereby do we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments". 1 John 2:3. And not only that, for the apostle had gone on to explain that "these things we write unto you that your joy may be full". 1 John 1:4, and further that "this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not grievous". 1 John 5:3. However such assurances and inward joy always had to be understood from the viewpoint of a balanced and evangelical piety and not merely by way of a misunderstood emphasis on one or two aspects of the same. Indeed, the apostle John had been careful to qualify his reassuring words, saying that "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God". 1 John 5:13.

It should also be noted that the pietist assumption that those who feel saved are necessarily and inevitably saved is very much open to question. In order to be logical and consistent, the pietist would then also have to maintain that the devastated sinner discarded by society in the slums of the city is eternally damned to hell because he feels helpless and without hope. Similarly those individuals suffering from mental depression. This would not seem to be in accord with evangelical teachings. In fact, Dr. J. C. Wenger has pointed out that "The faithful disciple, walking in love and holiness but lacking a robust sense of being in Christ, is a thousand times more certain of heaven than the loquacious showman who shouts about his salvation and his spiritual gifts, but who is notably lacking in personal integrity and down-to-earth spiritual brokenness and faithfulness". Dr. Wenger goes on to state that "Everyone who turns from sin, makes the surrender of faith, and walks humbly with God, is secure. The degree of assurance felt by believers is bound to vary from one to another, but the reality of salvation is not dependent on one's feelings."<sup>38</sup> (2 Corinthians 10, 18. Good News Translation)

#### **4.08 The Elements of Evangelical Piety.**

Christian piety to the Pietist was basically directed to a subjective inward experience of salvation and the activities which supported or expanded the same. Therefore this form of piety tended to be very self assertive and iconoclastic. Sometimes this piety was also coupled with one or two other aspects such as the evangelicalism of the early American fundamentalists or the asceticism of the puritans, etc.

In contrast the piety of the Anabaptist-Mennonite could be described as consisting of numerous elements made up of the conduct and attitude which Christ and his apostles had prescribed by their example or specific teaching. The elements of evangelical piety quickly become evident from a review of the Gospels together with a Biblical concordance. They include; joy, peace, assurance, love, fear, sorrow, grief, worry, humility, weariness, despair, etc. To the Anabaptist-Mennonite each of these elements of piety was as Biblical as the other. Of course a proper balance had to be maintained be-

tween these various aspects which were always understood in terms of the supremacy of evangelical discipleship.

Accordingly the natural human desire for euphoria and constant emotional joy had to be overcome. The numerous references to the other scriptural elements of piety could not be ignored by the Anabaptist-Mennonites. These include the admonitions of the apostle Paul to put on "bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering", Colossians 3:12; to show "meekness unto all men", Titus 3:2; and to perfect holiness "in the fear of God", 2 Corinthians 7:1.

It was certainly also conceivable that a group could err from this evangelical balance by an overemphasis on certain aspects such as fear or humility. Such an imbalance was no improvement over the pietist concentration on joy or constant cognitive assurance. This is exactly what occurred in the Kleine Gemeinde when shortly after its founding in 1814 a group asserted an overemphasis upon the practice of the evangelical teachings of humility. In his memoirs Klaas Reimer explains how he had to battle to overcome and eradicate this false humility movement within his Gemeinde. In a sense, this humility movement could also be understood as a form of pietism as all the characteristics were the same except that the emphasis was on the constant experience of fear and humility rather than the constant experience of joy and assurance. In overcoming the challenge to the proper Anabaptist-Mennonite balance of these elements of piety Aeltester Klaas Reimer was merely reinforcing the supremacy of the call of Christ to take up the cross and to follow Him.

Nevertheless assurance and joy were necessary elements of Anabaptist-Mennonite piety although the terms meant something radically different when considered from the viewpoint of the evangelical centrality of Christ. A complete synthesis emerged pursuant to this hermeneutic. The epistle of James need no longer be ignored or regarded as "an epistle of straw". The admonition to "humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up", James 4:10, was in perfect harmony with this theology. The joy of Anabaptist-Mennonite was a quiet inward peace which was not in need of any externally stimulated emotional reassurance.

This joy and peace was the incidental consequence of conversion and evangelical regeneration and was a prize of perfect possession. To the Anabaptist-Mennonite this apparent dichotomy of his faith was expressed in beautiful terms by the Apostle Paul when he said "as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich; as having nothing and yet possessing all things." 2 Corinthians 6:10.

#### 4.09 The Joy of Discipleship.

These concepts will already be familiar to those readers who have read the selections of Anabaptist-Mennonite literature contained in chapter three. Peter Peters (1574-1651) was another early Anabaptist-Mennonite leader whose writings are of special interest to the Kleine Gemeinde story. A brief selection from his works will be referred to here in order to illustrate the joys of evangelical piety as it was understood by the Anabaptist-Mennonites. But first a few words need to be said about the life and theological work of Peter Peters.

Peter Peters was a minister of the Waterlaender Mennonite Gemeinde in Holland. Unlike many of his fellow Anabaptist-Mennonite leaders he did not have any special educational training and was a carpenter and windmill maker by occupation. Peters is said to have been a gentle, peace-loving and pious man adverse to doctrinal strife. For more than fifty years he worked with unusual effectiveness in the office of preacher.<sup>59</sup>

The Waterlaender Mennonite Gemeinde in Holland to which Peter Peters belonged later became known for its pietism and was eventually absorbed into the pietist-Mennonite Doopsgezinde. The Doopsgezinde in turn was eventually absorbed into the main stream of Dutch social and church life by increasing secularization within its ranks and by apostasy from the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. The worst of these trends must have infiltrated the Waterlaender Gemeinde only after the time of Peter Peters since it is apparent that these trends were earnestly opposed by him. His teachings are generally sound and based on the same principles and foundation as those of Menno Simons, Dirk Philips and the martyrs. Of course he differs from Menno Simons and Dirk Philips on some minor doctrinal points.<sup>60</sup> Such differences of view were probably beneficial as they insured that the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith could remain a living and vibrant one which need not stagnate under the burden of having only one fountain of theological inspiration.

The earlier nonresistant Christians had been little more than fugitives from the torture racks of the inquisitors and therefore it had not been necessary for them to deal at length with the concerns of the daily piety of a farmer or businessman. The early leaders often had a price on their head and

consequently they were more than occupied by the task of keeping a hunted and persecuted church alive and together. Consequently a great deal is to be found in their writings pertaining to the organization or polity of a Gemeinde. Only a short century later a moderate toleration came to exist for the Mennonite Church in some areas such as Holland. The Anabaptist-Mennonites were now again free to practice their chosen occupations as farmers, tradesmen, shopkeepers, etc., so that there was a great need for the development of theology to deal with these areas of life.

It is no wonder that the writings of Peter Peters were so popular, because this exactly is the emphasis of his work. In addition, Peter Peters used a poetic and pastoral language or vocabulary. He expressed his thoughts and concerns in a warm and loving manner. His admonitions were clearly stated in a dialogue format and his message was broken down into numerous points which are easy to follow and understand. Like all Anabaptist-Mennonites, Peter Peters had a comprehensive Biblical knowledge. Each individual point in his writings is usually documented with several scripture references so that his works in effect were a popular form of Bible study or Bible guide. The writings of Peter Peters will be discussed at great length later in this book and so the foregoing should be sufficient as a brief introduction.

The most popular writing of Peter Peters was **The Way to the City of Peace**,<sup>61</sup> which dealt with a Christian utopia in which the citizens are all earnest disciples of a loving king who had redeemed them from a life of sin and misery outside the boundaries of this City of Peace (Freidenreich). Within this flexible scenario Peters can explore and develop numerous facets of his theme such as how these citizens can obtain entry unto the difficult path and into the narrow gate which leads into this city, how these citizens are to treat their neighbours, how they are to conduct their marriages, etc.

This book alone went through eight editions in Dutch.<sup>62</sup> These works were dearly loved among the Dutch speaking Mennonites in Northern and Eastern Germany and when these groups turned to the German language the interest was strong enough so that **The Way to the City of Peace**, as well as other works of Peter Peters, were translated and published in German. The works of Peter Peters were great favourites among the Kleine Gemeinde people in Russia. Frequent references to Peter Peters, the beloved Aeltester and forefather of the faith, are sprinkled throughout their writings. Indeed, it could be said that no other writer reflects so accurately the particular Kleine Gemeinde attitude of day to day piety.

The writings of Peter Peters certainly illustrate that inward realization of joy and assurance was an integral part of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. Although the foundation of this faith was a discipleship of love expressed within the context of the Gemeinde, inward peace and joy was a necessary consequence and byproduct. This is the form of inward realization which runs as a current through the writings of Peter Peters. An excerpt from **The Way To The City of Peace (Der Weg Nach Friedenstadt)** will serve to illustrate the point.

"Therefore let us gather courage, in order that for a short time we can follow the crucified Christ, who is the Light, which will lead us through all strife and temptation to the wished for end in the spiritual Jerusalem, the perfect City of Peace, where all sorrow and sadness shall end (Hebrews 12:12; Revelations 21:2). Here our King and Bridegroom will embrace the upright and true prevailing conquerors and eternally crown them with the Crown of Life, and they will be with the Lord forever (2 Timothy 4:8; Revelations 2:10; 1 Thessalonians 4:17). O what a wonderful place that will be for one will gaze upon the friendly countenance of the Lord! (Matthew 25:34).

"This remember in your heart, beloved brother. Be of good courage, for the King whom we serve is very friendly, he has compassion for His poor lambs who follow the voice of the Shepherd because of love. Do not allow yourself to be deceived by your flesh, for then you will always think they are hard ways and burdensome commandments. Rather at all times pay attention to the Love of God, to the enormous recompense, to the viewing of His loving countenance and then the love within you will be inflamed and His commandments will become light and sweet for you to bear (1 John 5:3; Matthew 11:30). For His commandments—although they are contrary to the ways of flesh—are delightful and perfect, for they have been fashioned by the highest wisdom, and with this I commit you to the keeping of God."<sup>63</sup>

A somewhat lengthier extract from **Der Weg Nach Friedenstadt** illustrates the point even further. This quote is taken from a section of this book which Peter Peters has entitled **Here Follows A Lamentation By the Peace-Giver**. This writing is a figurative dialogue between the Peace-Giver (Freide), and a Human, representing mankind. The Peace-Giver is lamenting that despite the blessings and benefits which he bestows he is ignored and shunned by mankind. The Peace-Giver cannot understand how Humanity can so blissfully ignore and disregard Him.

"On miserable human, for once open your eyes and see, how deluded and blinded are your senses. Why do you so recklessly abandon yourself to all misfortune and anguish, fear and need, sorrow and grief, and all anxiety? (Ezekiel 18:31; Romans 2:5). Why do you disdain Me? (John 11:53). Me, the Peace-Giver, who so dearly wants to reside with you. For if I am with you, it will be well with you forever (Matthew 28:20; John 14:23). Where I live, I (Christ) make the poor rich in their poverty, give joy to the suffering, give peace to the afflicted and comfort the abandoned (2 Corinthians 6:10; Psalm 102:18); open the door for those in bondage and give a free heart to those who are dying (Isaiah 61:1; Romans 8:38). To he who is downtrodden by everyone I am as a loving Father and embrace them in My arms (Luke 15:20). Therefore, when you possess and retains Me, will remain secure even though the whole world shall pass away (Psalm 46:3). For where I am there is blessedness always and anything which overtakes those who possess Me serves them in everyway for the best (Romans 8:28).

"Why are you so hateful of Me? O you wretched human (Isaiah 33:7). Me, the one who entreats and begs you in such a friendly way (2 Corinthians 5:20) and wants to share with you such priceless treasures, which if you keep them, will ever be all sufficient for you (Isaiah 45:3). But it seems that before you would give anything for my sake you would rather carry it to the god of this world, to honour the same with expensive buildings and splendid houses, beautified with fine accessories and adornment (Amos 6:4). Or you would carry it to Bacchus, the god of fleshly indulgence with drunkenness, indulgent living, and all other sensuality, and so many thousand unuseful expenditures of time which in all events serve the one, who will inherit the fire of Hell together with you. Oh! Miserable human! Tire in the final end and allow yourself to be advised. For once incline your ears to my voice for I want to teach you the meaning of absolute peace (Isaiah 1:19; Psalm 34:12; Proverbs 1:23). . . .

"Are you then not rejecting me? I am turned away everywhere. By one because of a piece of ground no wider than a hand, by another because of an insignificant dollar, by another because of a divided inheritance, by another because of a promised property and by another because of a mistake of one word with which he means to preserve his vain honour. And for so long as the perishable things are worth so much to you that you quarrel, bicker, judge, argue, envy and begrudge each other, you are thereby rejecting Me (Luke 16:13; 1 Corinthians 6:7). And I definitely do not reside there and where I do not reside the evil enemy resides, and thereby follows damnation:

"If you cannot grasp this then do learn to see. But your eyes are so blinded through the temptations of your self love, your own self-righteousness and your own wisdom, that you do not know Me (Isaiah 65:2). Instead you gaze at Me (Me, the Peace Giver) as if I were a thief, who wishes to steal your empire and gold and who wants to reduce you to poverty (Jeremiah 5:25). For that reason you lock the door in My face and everywhere I must remain outside, in the country and city, so that I, the Peace-Giver, must depart from the earth . . . . And therefore the true Peace-Giver, who brings comfort (peace) to your soul remains unfamiliar to you.

"Oh! you deluded Human. Hurry, before the bitter death overcomes you, and reject from your heart all contention, dissatisfaction, and displeasure, and allow Me to dwell there. Have your desires in Me, and then you will have everything which your heart may wish (Psalm 37:4). . . .

"HUMAN! I will show you the place where I (Peace-Giver) live. I live with the Peace-Makers for they are My children (Matthew 5:9). I reside with the humble who are of a contrite spirit (Isaiah 57:15). I dwell with those who love Me for they keep My sayings (John 14:23). I reside with those who count all things but injury and dung for the sake of the excellency of the knowledge of Me (Philippians 3:8). I live with those who want nothing other than what God wants. (Acts 9:6). I dwell with those who would want to say with truth, Lord, if only I have You, I desire for nothing else under heaven or on earth. (Psalm 73:25).

"I gladly live with those persons who lament their own transgressions before Me with earnest repentance and who seek My grace with firm trust (Luke 7:38). I reside with those who are poor in spirit and who consider themselves the least of all the blessed ones and at all times in humility esteem each other higher than themselves (Matthew 5:3; Ephesians 3:8; Philippians 2:3). I dwell with those who receive all things from My hand with thanks, poverty as well as wealth, suffering as well as joy, reproach as well as good favour (John 1:22; 2 Corinthians 6:10). I reside with those who are pure in heart for they shall eternally look upon Me with joy (Matthew 5:8).

"These are the ones in which I dwell, this is the true Israel of God, these are the new creatures (Galations 6:15-16). This is the poor wretched people which I have preserved for Myself, and they trust in My name (Zephaniah 3:12). These are those who hate injustice, including covetousness (Isaiah 33:15). These are the ones that I show My hidden treasures (Isaiah 45:3). These are the ones who have left everything for My sake. **AND THEREFORE THEY FIND IN ME ETERNAL PEACE.**<sup>64</sup>

"These are the ones who find here a hundred fold more than what they have forsaken, and hereafter they shall possess eternal life (Matthew 19:27; Mark 10:30). These are the ones that I will crown with My glory. These I will protect as the apple of My eye. I am the shield of these and a very great reward (Genesis 15:1). They receive from my fullness grace upon grace (John 1:16). They are My house companions whom I will care for and nourish with the food of life (John 6:27). These I clothe with righteousness and make them full of my love (Isaiah 61:10). This is my community (Gemeinde) which I have purchased and washed with my blood (Ephesians 5:25; Revelation 1 and 5) and I have betrothed Myself with her for eternity and she (My Gemeinde) shall dwell in My palace eternally (Hosea 2:19).<sup>65</sup>

The form of "inward peace" reflected in these writings is as essential to the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith as "grace", "rebirth", and "discipleship". This is the same form of inward peace which one finds in the teachings of Menno Simons, Dirk Philips and other Anabaptist-Mennonite writers with the difference that, for reasons already explained, the earlier writers were not free to concentrate on the theme of daily piety to the same extent as did Peter Peters and his generation of writers.

Surely no one would want to suggest that the original Anabaptist-Mennonite martyrs and writers were devoid of inward warmth and peace. Such a suggestion would be in direct conflict with the teachings expressed in their writings. Inasmuch as the Anabaptist-Mennonites regarded the Bible as their sole and supreme authority it would be impossible for them not to profess such a joy and true inward warmth. In fact the Anabaptist-Mennonite literature is filled with expressions of joy and inward peace. This is especially evident in the testimonies of the martyrs, many of which were written as they awaited torture and death for their faith.

It is also evident from these writings and those of Peter Peters that this "inward peace" and "joy" of the Anabaptist-Mennonites had only scant outward characteristics in common with the emotionally induced and often strident "peace and enjoyment of salvation" which was central and fundamental to some species of the pietist faith. Writers who have tried to characterize Peter Peters as some sort of forerunner or early pietist are seriously mistaken. For the inward warmth and mildness of Peter Peters is always expressed in the context of strict evangelical discipleship and sound Anabaptist-Mennonite doctrine. The expressions of "inward joy and peace" are invariably only such as flow and result from this discipleship. To reiterate, for the Anabaptist-Mennonite "inward realization was only an incidental consequence of the discipleship of love of the penitent and regenerated sinner". In contrast, to the pietist, "inward realization" was the essence and focal point of his faith.

#### FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER FOUR. OF SUCH IS THE KINGDOM

- 1a. For a balanced treatment of Anabaptist-Mennonite teachings see J.C. Wenger, *Introduction to Theology* (Herald Press, Scottsdale, Pa. 1956), 418 pp.
1. J.C. Wenger, *The Complete Works of Menno Simons, op.cit.*, 1031-1032.
2. Paul M. Lederach, *The Third Way*, (Scottsdale, Pa., Herald Press, 1980), 31.
3. J.C. Wenger, *op.cit.*, 1033-1034. For a sound exposition of Anabaptist-Mennonite doctrine see Daniel Kauffman, *Doctrines of the Bible*, (Herald Press, Scottsdale, 1927), 639 pp.
4. R. Friedmann, "The Doctrine of Two Worlds", in Guy F. Hershberger, *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision, op.cit.*, 106.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 110. In his work *Doctrines of the Mennonites* (Mennonite Publishing House, Scottsdale, Pa. 1952), page 20, Dr. J.C. Wenger refers also to the Eschatological expectations of the Anabaptist-Mennonites.
6. R. Friedmann, *op.cit.*, 112.
7. *Ibid.*, 113.
8. Dr. Cornelius Krahn, "Pietism", ME, Volume 4, 176.
9. Robert Friedmann, *Mennonite Piety Through the Centuries, op.cit.*, p. 72.
10. *Ibid.*, 4.
11. C. Krahn, *op.cit.*, 176.
12. *Ibid.*, 176-177.
13. *Ibid.*
14. F.E. Stoeffler, *German Pietism During the Eighteenth Century*, (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1973), 47-48.
15. *Ibid.*, 14.
16. *Ibid.*, 17.
17. Isaac Peters quoted in Peter M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood In Russia 1789-1910*, (Fresno, California, G.C. of M.B. Churches, 1978), 72.
18. Dale Braun, *Understanding Pietism*, (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Mich., 1978), p. 53.
19. F.E. Stoeffler, *op.cit.*, 101.
20. *Ibid.*, 126.
21. M. Ludwig Hofacker, *Predigten*, (1930, J.F. Steinkopf, Stuttgart), XVII.
22. F.E. Stoeffler, *op.cit.*, 144.
23. *Ibid.*, 146.
24. *Ibid.*, 156.
25. *Ibid.*, 165.
26. *Ibid.*, 198.
27. *Ibid.*, 200.
28. C. Krahn, "Pietism", *op.cit.*, 176-177.
29. Stoeffler, *op.cit.*, 212.
30. *Ibid.*, 213.
31. *Ibid.*, 259.
32. *Ibid.*, 260.
33. *Ibid.*, 262.
- 33a. Victor G. Doerksen, "From Jung-Stilling to Rudy Wiebe", in *Mennonite Images* (Hyperion Press, Winnipeg, 1980), 201-203.



34. Stoeffler, *op.cit.*, p. 262.
35. *Ibid.*
36. Williston Walker, *A History of The Christian Church*. (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1970), 515-516.
37. *Ibid.*, 517.
38. R. Friedmann, *Mennonite Piety Through the Centuries*. *op.cit.*, 11-12.
39. *Ibid.*, 73-75.
40. *Ibid.*, 85-86.
41. J.C. Wenger, "Chiliasm", ME, Vol.1, 557-560.
42. *Ibid.*
43. Robert Friedmann, "Thomas Muentzer", ME 3, 788.
44. J.C. Wenger, "Chiliasm", *op.cit.*, 558.
45. *Ibid.*, 558.
46. *Ibid.*, 557.
47. Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada 1920-1940*, (MacMillan & Co., Toronto, 1982) 54.
48. J.C. Wenger, *op.cit.*, 558-559.
49. C. Krahn, "The Temple Church", ME 4, 693.
50. Henry H. Janzen, "Chiliasm As Accepted and Practiced in the Mennonite Brethren Church" ME 1, 559-560.
51. J.C. Wenger, "Chiliasm", *op.cit.*
52. R. Friedmann, "The Doctrine of Two Worlds", *op.cit.*, 115-117.
53. *Ibid.*, 118.
54. Dr. Cornelius Krahn, "Pietism", ME 4, 557-560.
55. R. Friedmann, *Mennonite Piety Through the Centuries*, *op.cit.*, p. 246.
- 55a. V.G. Doerksen, *op.cit.*, 199-200.
56. J.C. Wenger, *A Lay Guide To Romans*, (Herald Press, Scottdale, 1983), 37-38.
57. Adam Clarke, *Clarke's Commentary*, (Abingdon Press, New York), Volume 4, 723-724.
58. J.C. Wenger, *A Lay Guide to Romans*, *op.cit.*, 102-103.
59. Neff van der Zijpp, "Peter Peters", ME 4, 175.
60. Such as the teaching of marital avoidance.
61. Peter Peters, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, (Stuttgart, Druck von J.F. Steinkopf, 1860).
62. Robert Friedmann, *Mennonite Piety Through the Centuries*, *op.cit.*, 109.
63. Peter Peters, *op.cit.*, 90-91.
64. Emphasis by the translator.
65. Peter Peters, *op.cit.*, 93-97.

# *Part Two.*

## *The Molotschna*

### *Mennonite Settlement*

#### **Chapter Five.**

#### **The Church**

##### **5.01 Introduction**

The preceding chapters have dealt with the theology of the Anabaptist-Mennonites. This part of the book will deal with the socio-economic development of the Molotschna Mennonite colony where the Kleine Gemeinde was founded in 1812. But first it is necessary to consider the general history of the Russian Mennonite Church.

Under the leadership of courageous men such as Menno Simons and Dirk Philips the scattered flocks of nonresistant Christians had been gathered into a strong and vibrant movement. To escape persecution many followers of the faith had fled to Northern Germany and Prussia where they were afforded a measure of tolerance. By the middle of the 16th century the Mennonite Church in Prussia had been able to establish a fragile existence. It was here in Prussia that Dirk Philips served as the first Aeltester of the Flemish Gemeinde in Danzig.<sup>1</sup> He was succeeded by other strong leaders such as George Hansen who served as the Aeltester of the Danzig Flemish Gemeinde from 1690 until his death in 1703.<sup>2</sup> By the 18th century the Mennonite church was well established in the area of Danzig and the Vistula delta.

But soon severe restrictions to the practice of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith once more loomed on the horizon. At the same time a growing population made the prohibition against the economic growth of the Prussian Mennonite community seem more and more onerous. As a consequence many Prussian Mennonites again looked for a new homeland which they found in Russia through the invitation of Katherine the Great, the Russian monarch at the time. This resulted in the emigration of Prussian Mennonites to Russia where they founded the Chortitza colony in 1789 and the Molotschna colony in 1804.

Essential to an understanding of the Russian Mennonite church is the fact that the Mennonites were not a monolithic uniform people. One of the tenets of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith was that the Church of God consisted only of true believers who were all individually responsible to determine the will of God through prayerful study of the Holy Scriptures. Therefore many shades of opinion and interpretation were bound to develop. In addition, the fundamental principle of nonresistance precluded one strong leader from seizing power and forcibly standardizing the theology of the movement as happened in the case of other religious confessions. These factors combined with the vast differences in cultural and social background of the various Anabaptist Mennonite groups scattered all over Europe, resulted in the establishment of numerous organized Gemeinden each experiencing their own socio-economic and theological evolution.<sup>3</sup>

When these groups were thrown together by emigrations resulting from persecution or other social pressures, differences and separations were bound to occur.<sup>4</sup> One such division took place in Holland in 1566 and resulted in the establishment of two groups who were known as the "Flemish" and the "Frisian".<sup>5</sup> Although both groups rejected the tendencies towards culturalism and pietism later found in the **Doopsgezinde** in Holland,<sup>6</sup> they differed in various aspects of Mennonite faith and practice, with the Frisian in general being the more strict of the two.<sup>7</sup> In time each group also included a number of sub-groups with varying views and inter-

pretations.<sup>8</sup> When the Mennonites fled to Prussia in the middle of the 16th century these divisions were transferred with them as well.<sup>9</sup> Most of the Mennonites who emigrated to Russia were of the Flemish group.<sup>10</sup>

## 5.02 Flemish, Frisians, and Pietist-Mennonites to Russia

In 1789 the Chortitza settlement was established at the junction of the Dneiper and Chortitza rivers by 228 Mennonite families from West Prussia. Within a decade they had been joined by additional families so that a total of about 400 families became the base of the Chortitza settlement.<sup>11</sup> The majority of these families were Flemish and were organized into a congregation with Berend Penner elected as Aeltester in 1790, although only after serious conflict and disputation.<sup>12</sup> However he died the following year, and after considerable debate he was replaced by Johan Wiebe.<sup>13</sup>

In 1794 a much smaller group of 118 families of Frisian background immigrated and settled separately in the Chortitza village of Schoenwiese.<sup>14</sup> By 1800 this group was organized as a Gemeinde under the Frisian Aeltester Heinrich Janzen.<sup>15</sup> It was these Frisians who stood by the Kleine Gemeinde during its first years when it literally battled for survival. In 1819 the total population of the Chortitza settlement was 2,888 consisting of 560 families.<sup>16</sup>

In 1804 another 365 families from West Prussia arrived on the banks of the Molotschna River, in South Russia, and established the Molotschna Mennonite Colony. This settlement was to become the most successful and prosperous of all the Mennonite settlements in Russia.<sup>17</sup> These immigrants were almost exclusively of the Flemish group. It is noted at this point that the Molotschna immigrants in general were more well-to-do than the Chortitza immigrants had been. A higher percentage of the Molotschna group had belonged to the propertied class in West Prussia and consequently also possessed more of the skills and abilities necessary to the establishment of the new settlement.<sup>18</sup>

In any event this large Flemish group was organized as a Gemeinde in 1805 when Jacob Enns was elected as the first Aeltester.<sup>19</sup> It was from this large Flemish Gemeinde that Klaas Reimer was excommunicated because of his loving and persistent reform efforts. As a consequence the small flock of Klaas Reimer started to worship separately in 1812, with the official founding of the Kleine Gemeinde occurring in 1814. The remaining part of the large Flemish Gemeinde then started to refer to itself as the "Grosze" Gemeinde in order to distinguish itself from the Kleine Gemeinde.<sup>20</sup>

Between 1817 and 1824 another 260 families left Prussia and settled in the Molotschna Mennonite Colony.<sup>21</sup> These new immigrants brought two additional Mennonite Gemeinden into the Molotschna. Firstly, in 1819 about 100 families of Frisians under their Aeltester Franz Goertz settled in the south-eastern portion of the Molotschna colony in seven villages centering around Rudnerweide.<sup>22</sup> Secondly, in 1821, a small group of 30 families of Old Flemish (who were originally of a more pure Anabaptist-Mennonite orientation) under their Aeltester Peter Wedel founded and settled the village of Alexanderwohl.<sup>23</sup> These two groups had already adopted pietist teachings in Prussia.

By 1821 there were four Mennonite Gemeinden in the Molotschna with a population of roughly 700 families of which very approximately: 80 per cent belonged to the Molotschna Grosze Flemish Gemeinde, 14 per cent belonged to the Rudnerweide centered congregation and about 3 per cent belonged to each the Kleine Gemeinde and the Alexanderwohl Gemeinde. Counting the Flemish Gemeinde and a Frisian Gemeinde in the Chortitz Colony, there were a total of six Mennonite Gemeinden in Russia by 1821 consisting of a total population of about 1,300 families.

## 5.03 The Inroads of Pietism Shatters the Grosze Gemeinde

In 1824 the religious scene was drastically altered by a major division which tore apart the whole Molotschna Grosze Flemish Gemeinde. Insensitive leadership, which had been a problem at the time of the establishment of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde, again played a major role. At that time the reins of leadership were in the hands of Jakob Enns who had been elected as the first Aeltester in 1805.<sup>24</sup> The leadership of Enns has been characterized as zealous but without spiritual sensitivity.<sup>25</sup> His violent character and outright rejection of Anabaptist-Mennonite principles had been the direct cause for the secession from the "Grosze" Gemeinde by Ministers Klaas Reimer and Cornelius Janzen and some 18 families in 1812.

These leadership problems were not solved by the death of Jakob Enns in 1818. He was replaced as Aeltester by Jakob Fast who has been described as a pious but weak man who was unable to keep peace in his Gemeinde.<sup>26</sup> When Jakob Fast died he was replaced by Bernhard Fast, who was elected as Aeltester in 1821. The new Aeltester was an intelligent and liberal thinker in a cultural and social sense, although his philosophy strayed considerably from Anabaptist-Mennonite principles. Nevertheless, many of his progressive actions and reforms were sound.

Bernhard Fast was spiritually out of touch with the views of the majority of his Gemeinde and his leadership encountered sharp opposition on the following issues: 1) His decision to be ordained by the Frisian (pietist) Elder; 2) He had admitted a non-Mennonite missionary (a pietist to partake of the Lord's Supper; 3) He promoted the work of the Russian Bible Society; 4) He supported the (pietist) Orloff Verein school which was established in 1824, and which was the first secondary school of the Russian Mennonites; and 5) He favoured the observance of holidays according to the Russian Calendar.<sup>27</sup> The conservative majority in the Gemeinde could not be reconciled to these actions and particularly to the readiness of Aeltester Fast to adopt the teachings of pietism. Consequently Aeltester Fast and his progressive wing lost the confidence of the majority of the Gemeinde. By the 1850s the Orloff Gemeinde had been isolated from all other Mennonite groups because of the insensitive and shortsighted leadership of Aeltester Fast.

The conservative opposition to Aeltester Fast was led by four of his ministers, namely: Jakob Warkentin, Altona; David Hiebert, Lindenau; Franz Wiens, Petershagen; and Johan Friesen, Neukirch.<sup>28</sup> It is noteworthy that the senior minister of the group, Johan Friesen, was a brother-in-law to Aeltester Klaas Reimer of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde.<sup>29</sup> By 1824, 430 families had left the Gemeinde of Aeltester Fast to join these ministers in the formation of a new conservative "Grosze" Gemeinde: i.e. The "Reine" or "Pure" Flemish Gemeinde. The first Aeltester of this new "Grosze" Gemeinde was Jakob Warkentin who served from 1824 to 1842.<sup>30</sup> The first meetinghouse of this Gemeinde was built in Lichtenau in 1826 with a second meetinghouse built in Petershagen in 1831. Consequently this group was also known as the Lichtenau-Petershagen Gemeinde.<sup>31</sup>

Aeltester Bernhard Fast with some 142 families continued as a Gemeinde which became known as the Orloff-Halbstaedt Gemeinde. The meeting house of this Gemeinde had been built in Orloff in 1807 and was later enlarged. The Orloff-Halbstaedt Mennonite Gemeinde was the culturally progressive group and also provided much of the economic and social leadership of the Molotschna Mennonite during the 19th century. For example, an outstanding leader such as Johann Cornies belonged to this Gemeinde.

The progressive cultural-Mennonitism which became the symbol and pride of the Russian Mennonites by the end of the 19th century originated with Aeltester Bernhard Fast and his Orloff-Halbstaedt Gemeinde. Indeed all of the Russian Mennonites benefited from the positive progressive developments which radiated from the Orloff group: e.g. education, farming, etc.. But, regrettably, any movement can be carried to an extreme, and within 70 years this progressive cultural-Mennonitism had joined hands with Pietist-Mennonitism to become the twin sacraments of a society which bore little or no resemblance to the concepts of the Anabaptist-Mennonite founders only several centuries earlier.

In the meantime, two more Old Flemish Gemeinden had arrived in the Molotschna. Firstly, a group of 40 families under the leadership of Aeltester Wilhelm Lange arrived in the Molotschna in 1833 and founded and settled the village of Gnadenfeld. An additional Old Flemish group consisting of 68 families under the leadership of Cornelius Wedel arrived on the Molotschna in 1836 founding and settling the village of Waldheim. Counting the Alexanderwohl Gemeinde this made a total of three Old Flemish Gemeinden in the Molotschna. These groups also varied somewhat in their religious practises and consequently did not amalgamate into one Old Flemish Gemeinde.<sup>32</sup> The Gnadenfeld group in particular, had come under the influences of Moravian Pietism in Prussia and became the focal point of Pietist activity in the Molotschna during the 1850s.<sup>33</sup>

#### **5.04 Comparison of the Grosze, Orloff, and Kleine Gemeinden**

Until the "awakening" of the 1860's, the "Grosze" Gemeinde was characterized by the atrophying of religious tradition and by conservatism in all areas: e.g. religion, economic,

education, etc. The conflicting philosophies represented by the "Grosze" Gemeinde and the Orloff Gemeinde were to cause the two groups to clash frequently and bitterly in the following decade. The Orloff group wanted what they considered "progress" and the Lichtenau group resisted and entrenched. The convulsions resulting from this conflict came to a head in 1842 when the Fuersorgekomitee in Odessa, which administered the German colonies, deposed Jakob Warkentin as the Aeltester of the "Grosze" Gemeinde and also broke its power by splitting it into three smaller Gemeinden.<sup>34</sup> These three Gemeinden each had their own Aeltester and were known as: The Lichtenau-Petershagen Gemeinde, the Margenau-Schoensee Gemeinde and the Pordenau Gemeinde. The progressive Orloff Gemeinde now had undisputed social and economic leadership.

In comparison to the "Grosze" Gemeinde and the Orloff Gemeinde, the central emphasis of the Kleine Gemeinde was to teach and practice the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. The group made all efforts to avoid embroilment in the disputation and divisions above referred to. Nor did the Kleine Gemeinde participate in municipal government at the district level. For a time they did take part in local village government and at least one of their members is known to have served as village Schulz: Cornelius Plett (1820-1900) in the village of Kleefeld which was the second largest village in the Molotschna.<sup>35</sup> Russian Mennonite historian Franz Isaac reports that "although this Gemeinde in the beginning refused to take part in elections, later they themselves served in village offices".<sup>36</sup> It thus appears that this was not an isolated case.

However by the 1860s the policy of the Kleine Gemeinde had again changed in that they no longer participated to this extent. To enact or enforce any fine or other punishment would have been contrary to the teachings of nonresistance of the Kleine Gemeinde.<sup>37</sup> With the constant church strife and economic turmoil which raged through the Molotschna during the 1860s these sort of punishments became a frequent occurrence and consequently it is understandable that the Kleine Gemeinde again reverted to its original policy of not serving in these offices nor voting for the same.

The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde was also progressive in its economic policy as long as no conflict developed with their religious views. The Kleine Gemeinde were excellent farmers,<sup>38</sup> although their beliefs restricted them from large scale enterprise. Nevertheless they were known as progressive farmers and as people who managed their affairs very well.<sup>39</sup> They also cooperated eagerly with the Agricultural Society which had been established in 1830 under the leadership of Johan Cornies. The Agricultural Society had been given the mission and goal to institute new and better farming techniques and methods among the Russian Mennonites.

The Kleine Gemeinde enjoyed such a favourable relationship with the Agricultural Society that the latter actually relaxed some of its normally inflexible regulations in order to meet the Kleine Gemeinde half-way in its preference for a simpler and more subdued lifestyle. The Agricultural Society allowed the Kleine Gemeinde to construct less elaborate appurtenances to their premises and also to paint their properties in more subdued colors. Even historian Peter M. Friesen, who generally has little that is favourable to say about the Kleine Gemeinde or any of the other Anabaptist-Mennonite groups, admits that, "The yards, fields, gardens, and cattle of the Kleine Gemeinde belonged to the best in the Colonies".<sup>40</sup>

## 5.05 The destruction of the Grosze Gemeinde

In comparison, the "Grosze" Gemeinde openly resisted the activities of the Agricultural Society and the consequential actions of the Gebietsamt (Municipal government) to enforce the dictates of the Society. The hostility between the "Grosze" Gemeinde and the Agricultural Society and Johan Cornies (which was centered in the Orloff Gemeinde), is symbolized by an episode in which a Schulz of a Molotschna village repeatedly reported that the woodlot and orchard trees allocated to his village for planting refused to grow. Upon investigation it appeared that notwithstanding explicitly clear instructions the trees had been planted upside down with the roots in the air. As a result Johan Cornies and the Agricultural Society gave orders to the effect that this Schulz be excommunicated and banned from the "Grosze" Gemeinde and in addition that he was to be physically punished and imprisoned.<sup>41</sup>

The forcible division of the "Grosze" Gemeinde into three Gemeinden and the deposition of Aeltester Jakob Warkentin in 1842 had not completely broken this resistance, which now became centered in Aeltester Heinrich Wiens, of the Morgenau-Schoensee Gemeinde.<sup>41</sup> The issue came to a head in 1847 when the Supervisory Committee (Fuersorgekomitee) in Odessa,

pursuant to the influence and representations of Johan Cornies and his Orloff group (by now in a position of dominance), forcibly removed Heinrich Wiens from his position as Aeltester and also exiled him from Russia.<sup>43</sup> Although the Kleine Gemeinde believed that it had an obligation to cooperate wholeheartedly with all government authorities where there was no conflict with their beliefs,<sup>44</sup> and themselves had a good relationship with the Agricultural Society, they definitely did not approve of the excessive measures used by Cornies in this and other cases.

### **5.06 The plurality of the Molotschna Mennonite Church**

The foregoing illustrates that it is impossible to neatly place every Mennonite group in Russia on a simple spectrum of conservative to liberal, and then to analyse every issue from such a perspective as has been the tendency of some historians in the past. By 1842 there were nine separate Mennonite Gemeinde in the Molotschna alone. In addition, the Bergthaler Mennonite settlement had been established in 1833 by 145 families.<sup>45</sup> There were a total of twelve Mennonite Gemeinden in Russia by 1842. The Aeltesters of the various Molotschna Mennonite Gemeinden on occasion consulted and acted as committee and in this capacity were known as the Kirchenkovent.<sup>46</sup> The members of the Molotschna Kirchenkovent in 1850 were: Aeltester Johan Friesen, Kleine Gemeinde; Aeltester Bernhard Fast, Orloff-Halbstaedt Gemeinde; Aeltester Durk Warkentin, Lichtenau-Petershagen (Flemish) Gemeinde; Aeltester Heinrich Toews, Pordenau (Flemish) Gemeinde; Heinrich Wiens, had been disposed as the Aeltester of the Margenau-Schoensee (Flemish) Gemeinde in 1847 because of his resistance to the Orloff group; Aeltester Benjamin Ratzlaff, Rudnerwie Friesian Gemeinde; Aeltester Peter Wedel, Alexanderwohl Old Flemish Gemeinde; Aeltester August Lenzmann became Aeltester of the Gnadenfeld Old Flemish Gemeinde<sup>47</sup> in 1854; and Aeltester Peter Schmidt of the Waldheim Old Flemish Gemeinde.

The religious scene in the Molotschna was very much a plural one by 1850 with different groups representing various positions on different aspects of life. The view of Molotschna Mennonite religious life as the small ultra conservative "Kleine Gemeinde" juxtaposed against a monolithic "Grosze Gemeinde" is a gross misrepresentation. It could also be noted that notwithstanding its name, the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde was not the smallest Gemeinde in the Molotschna. In fact according to the available information, the Kleine Gemeinde was larger than or at least equal in size to all three of the Old Flemish Gemeinden in the settlement. e.g. The Gnadenfeld Gemeinde which in 1833 consisted of 40 families compared to 69 families for the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde according to the records of the 1840 ministerial election.<sup>48</sup>

By comparison there were a total of 2733 Mennonite families in the Molotschna by 1841.<sup>49</sup> By 1850, the close of the period under review, the population of the Kleine Gemeinde had increased to about 100 families.<sup>50</sup> i.e. a five-fold increase in its first four decades. The population of the Molotschna in 1854 was about 17,000,<sup>51</sup> or about 3000 families in 1850. Therefore it appears that the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde was approximately holding its own in terms of a percentage of the Molotschna population.

### **5.07 Comparative review of the Chortitz settlement**

At this point it would also be beneficial to consider briefly the historical development of the Chortitz colony. Fortunately the early tragic disputation of the settlement was seemingly resolved by the early 19th century. As the original settlers had been less well-to-do, a growing class of talented craftsmen developed right from the start. At the same time, the general prosperity never equalled that of the Molotschna, so that the disparity between rich and poor in the Chortitz settlement never became as intense.

Consequently the Chortitz settlement dealt more generously with its poorer people and as early as 1836 had acted to resettle some 150 landless families in the Bergthaler settlement. During the landless dispute which raged through the Molotschna colony during the 1860s the Chortitz settlement provided immediate relief for its poor and also purchased a block of land to resettle some of its landless families as early as 1868.

The Chortitz settlers also seemed to be more homogeneous in religious matters. Fortunately most of the later Prussian Mennonite emigrants of 1818-1837, who had already adopted pietist teachings in Prussia, by-passed the Chortitz settlement in favour of the Molotschna. Conse-

quently there was less religious turmoil and a greater number of the Chortitza settlers remained true to the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith and heritage. Almost one-half of the 1870s Russian Mennonite emigrants originated in the Chortitza settlement, notwithstanding that the Molotschna was more than twice its size.

Similarly the Chortitza settlement did not experience the cultural and church battles which tore apart the Molotschna for so many years. Dr. David G. Rempel, one of the foremost authorities on the Russian-Mennonites, has pointed out that "While Chortitza had not brought forth a Cornies, it did not elect to responsible office such men as Friesen and Schmidt".<sup>52</sup> Being somewhat removed from the progressive innovations of a strong man like Cornies also insulated the Chortitza colony from the worst of his despotic measures so that the counter extremes of anticultural opposition did not develop to the same degree. Thus the Chortitza settlement was able to proceed with a more moderate pace of progressive development thereby avoiding many of the religious, cultural, educational, and socio-economic extremes of the Molotschna settlement.

## 5.08 Conclusion

This completes our review of the ecclesiastical (church) history of the Molotschna Mennonites for the first half of the 19th century. Dr. Adam Giesinger, the foremost historian of the German people in Russia, had characterized the prevailing situation as follows:

"These Mennonite congregations, although all claimed to be loyal followers of Menno Simons, held a wide range of views regarding the application of religion to practical affairs. The large Flemish congregations in both the Chortitza and Molotschna settlement were relatively conservative and set the tone of life for the average Mennonite, a sober, hard-working individual, suspicious of outsiders, pious but not excessively zealous in religious matters. More open to outside influences and more broad-minded, although not outdone by the Flemish majority in piety, were the Frisian congregations in Kronsweide and Rudnerweide and the Old Flemish at Alexanderwohl. The most progressive group from a worldly point of view was Bernhard Fast's congregation. It supplied most of the officials of the local government and the leader in the field of education. It was they who mainly brought the Molotschna Mennonite settlement to its pre-eminence in the Black Sea region. Although there were occasional clashes with the elders of the Grosze Gemeinde, this leadership received general support. Only the members of the Kleine Gemeinde the most conservative of the lot, remained aloof".<sup>52</sup>

i.e. The Kleine Gemeinde remained aloof from the Church and economic disputes which preoccupied the affairs of the Molotschna for the period in question and which were mainly pursued by the progressive Orloff group and resisted by the "Grosze" Gemeinde.

In concluding this section a few comments should be made regarding what has been perceived as the schismatic tendencies of the Mennonites in general. In this regard it must be noted that such tendencies are not restricted to the Mennonites and are also found to a similar or even greater extent among the Pietist groups, whose church organization and structure was frequently similar to that of the Mennonites. In any event there seem to be countless groups in the Pietist movement representing every shade and degree of opinion. It seems that the various pietist groups were frequently unable to cooperate with each other apparently on the grounds of minor differences in technicalities.

Therefore one might conclude that schismatic tendencies were inherent in any organization based on voluntary membership. It appears that the divisions among the Russian Mennonites to an extent merely represented a normal readjustment and interchanging of groups in order to create representation for the various views and attitudes naturally present in a large body of people. Thus not everyone was inclined towards Cultural-Mennonitism, nor to Pietist-Mennonitism, nor to Anabaptist-Mennonitism. Although regrettable, a large diversity of views was unavoidable and perhaps even healthy.

Of course such separations and differences would not always be resolved without pain and disruption to the society. The most unfortunate aspect of this process was when one group, although peaceful in name, used coercion and force in effecting its will over that of another group. Molotschna Mennonite historian and one time minister of the Orloff Gemeinde Franz Isaac, spoke out sharply against the intolerance which in his view had plagued much of Molotschna Mennonite history. Dr. Cornelius Krahn has characterized these views as follows:

“In paragraphs between the documents in his book he (Franz Isaac) freely expressed his convictions, particularly in the concluding chapter. The following sentence is characteristic: “One is astonished and wonders how it is possible among Mennonites for the stronger group with their spiritual leaders at the helm, again and again to attack smaller groups as if they alone had the right to exist, not realizing that all Mennonites are merely a tolerated sect”. He considered the “failure to recognize the line between religious and the civil authorities and responsibility” as the crux of this problem. Again and again he reproaches the religious leadership for appealing to civil authority to achieve its goals; he believing that a spiritual leader must achieve his goals by setting an example of true piety and Christian living.”<sup>54</sup>

The divisions were particularly distasteful to the Anabaptist-Mennonite groups as oneness and unity of believers was central to their theology. Even here these groups had to note that such unity and peace had been impossible even among the Gemeinden of the Apostolic era and that human frailty and weakness made the achievement of such a goal impossible. Nevertheless the earnestness and sincerity of many of these groups in pursuing this ideal can be highly respected.

## FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER FIVE. THE CHURCH.

1. N. von der Zijpp, “Danzig Mennonite Church”, ME 2, 9.
2. N. von der Zijpp, “George Hansen”, ME 2, 653-654.
3. Dr. Cornelius Krahn, *Smith's Story of the Mennonites* (Faith and Life Press, Newton, Kansas, 1981), 109-113.
4. N. van der Zijpp, “Flemish Mennonites”, ME 2, 337-340.
5. N. van der Zijpp, “Frisian Mennonites”, *ibid*, 413-414.
6. Dr. Cornelius Krahn, *op.cit.*, 130-133.
7. Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 31-40. See also Krahn, *Smith's Story of the Mennonites*, *op.cit.*, 110-111.
8. Dr. Cornelius Krahn, *op.cit.*, 166-176.
9. H.G. Mannhardt, “Danzig Mennonite Church”, ME 2, 9-11.
10. Dr. Adam Giesinger, *From Katherline to Kruschev* (Selfpublished, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1974), 184.
11. Cornelius Krahn, “Chortitza Mennonite Settlement”, ME 1, 569-574.
12. Dr. Cornelius Krahn, *Smith's Story of the Mennonites*, *op.cit.*, 252-257.
13. Dr. Adam Giesinger, *op.cit.*, 184.
14. Dr. Cornelius Krahn, *op.cit.*, 256.
15. Dr. Cornelius Krahn, “Kronsweide Mennonite Church”, ME 3, 249.
16. Dr. C. Krahn, “The Chortitza, Mennonite Settlement”, ME 1, 570.
17. Dr. Cornelius Krahn, “Molotschna Mennonite Settlement”, ME 3, 732-737.
18. C.J. Dyck, *An Introduction to Mennonite History* (Herald Press, Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1967), 130.
19. Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 91-92.
20. H. Goerz, *Die Molotschnaer Ansiedlung* (Echo-verlag, Steinbach, Manitoba, 1950), 58.
21. B.H. Unruh, *Niederdeutschen Hintergründe der Mennonitischen Ostwanderung in 16. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Selbsverlag, Karlsruhe, Germany, 1955), 356-376.
22. Giesinger, *op.cit.*, 185.
23. *Ibid*, 185-186.
24. A. Braun, “Jakob Enns”, ME 2, 225. See also Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 165-169 for a record of the succession of Elders of the Mennonite Gemeinde in Chortitza and Molotschna.
25. Peter M. Friesen, *Ibid*, 92-95 and 127-130.
26. Giesinger, *op.cit.*, 185.
27. C.K. Neff, “Bernhard Fast”, ME 2, 315.
28. Franz Isaac, *op.cit.*, 93-94.
29. Aeltester Peter Toews, *Sammlung*, *op.cit.*, 20. The wives of Rev. Johann Friesen and Klaas Reimer were sisters, and were also sisters to Abraham Friesen the second Aeltester of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. The sons of this Rev. Johann Friesen were to become very prominent leaders in the Kleine Gemeinde, namely: Johann Friesen (1807-1872) was the third Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde, Abraham Friesen (1808-1891) was a minister, and Klaas Friesen (1818-1871) was a deacon. Another son, Peter Friesen was a minister in the “Grosze” Gemeinde. (See *History and Events*, *op.cit.*, 53, 73, 75-76 and 78.
30. Dr. Cornelius Krahn, “Jakob Warkentin”, ME 4, 889.
31. H. Goerz, “Lichtenau-Petershagen Mennonite Church”, ME 4, 335.
32. Giesinger, *op.cit.*, 187.
33. J.A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, Fresno, California, 1975), 28-29.
34. Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 143.
35. Plett Picture Book, *op.cit.*, 18.
36. Franz Isaac, *op.cit.*, 92.
37. See *History and Events*, *op.cit.*, 57-58.
38. Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 135.
39. *Ibid*, 93.
40. *Ibid*, 198.
41. *Ibid*, 197-198.
42. Cornelius Krahn, “Heinrich Wiens”, ME 4, 949.
43. See Franz Isaac, *op.cit.*, 93-123.
44. Aeltester Abraham Friesen, *Eine Kurze Beschreibung des Aeltesten Abraham Friesen in Orloff an der Molotschna, Sued Ruszland anno 1828* (Druck von Paul Springer, Beatrice, Nebraska, 1904), 14.



45. Giesinger, *op.cit.*, 187.
  46. Dr. Cornelius Krahn, "Kirchenkonvent", ME 3, 180.
  47. Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 165-169.
  48. Aeltester Peter Toews, *Sammlung*, *op.cit.*, 184.
  49. Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada 1786-1920* (Macmillan of Canada, Toronto, Canada, 1974), 169.
  50. Aeltester Peter Toews, *op.cit.*, 319.
  51. *Ibid.*, 328.
  52. Dr. David G. Rempel, *The Mennonite Colonies in New Russia*, (Doctoral dissertation, Stanford University, California, 1933), 201-203.
  53. Giesinger, *op.cit.*, 186.
  54. Cornelius Krahn, "Franz Isaac", ME 3, 54.
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# Chapter Six.

## The Pioneer Years

### 6.00 Introduction

The ecclesiastical (church) aspects of a society constitute only a part of the total life experience of the members of that community. People are born and die. The individual must earn a livelihood, support and raise a family. The history of a people is incomplete without some consideration of the social and physical setting in which they live. The next four chapters will deal with various aspects of social and economic life in the Molotschna Mennonite Colony. Namely, the pioneer settlement, agriculture, government administration and education.

Such a review is necessary in order to outline the setting which was the birthplace and home of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde for three-quarters of a century. This chapter will consider several aspects of the founding and pioneer settlement of the Molotschna Mennonite Colony. First, the journey of the pioneers. Two, the establishment of the new villages. Three, various reports of the progress of the settlers.

### 6.01 The Journey of the Molotschna Pioneers

The Molotschna settlers traveled over one thousand miles from their homes in West Prussia to the area about 120 werst (or 80 miles) north of the Black Sea port of Berjansk, where the Molotschna colony was located. The original Molotschna settlers made their journey in small groups of covered wagons. A total of 162 families arrived at the Chortitzta Mennonite settlement in 1803 and another 162 families came in 1804.<sup>1</sup> The journey from West Prussia to the Mennonite Colonies was an ordeal to test even the strongest. This undertaking may truly be considered to have been an act of faith on the part of these emigrants. The Chortitzta settlers had travelled overland to Riga on the Baltic Sea from where they travelled south on the Dongave River to Dubrovno on the Dnieper where the first group stayed over winter. The next spring they continued on their way, arriving at the location of what was to become the Chortitzta colony in June of 1789.<sup>2</sup> This group lacked skills, leadership and financial resources and consequently experienced extreme difficulties during the pioneer years.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to the earlier Chortitzta settlers the Molotschna pioneers made the entire journey from West Prussia to their new homes in Southern Russia by land. This journey of some 1000 miles was an undertaking which took weeks to complete. One report describes the route as having gone through Ostroblenka, Brest-Litovsk, Kavel, Ostrag in Volynia, Berkitschev, Slatopolie, Elisavegrad to Chortitz.<sup>4</sup> The Molotschna pioneers, travelling over primitive roads in 1803, with wagon loads of possessions and herding their livestock, took an average of 5 to 7 weeks to complete their journey.<sup>5</sup> Others reported that the journey took up to 12 weeks.<sup>6</sup>

One early source adds an interesting detail to the account of the journey. From the time of crossing the Russian border each party of settlers was accompanied from station to station by a soldier familiar with the road, language, and customs of the various parts of Russia to be traversed. The guard served not only for protection and security but also to aid the settlers, who were unacquainted with the language in the lands through which they were travelling, in the efficient and reasonable acquisition of the provisions necessary during the course of the journey. This report considers this to have been a very wise general regulation on the part of the Russian government.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to this sort of protection the Molotschna pioneers also received financial support from the Russian government. Franz Isaac describes this support and some related aspects of the later immigration as follows:

“The first immigrants received 10 Rubels per soul for travelling expenses and a gift of 40 rubel per family for horses and wagon from the government authorities in Grodno. To tide them over from the completion of their journey until the first harvest they received 8 kopeken per day for each soul as money for nourishment. They also received 25 rubel for agricultural implements; for livestock and domestic establishment, 100 rubel; for spring expenses, (for seed) 15 rubel; for fall expenses 5 rubel; and a quantity of lumber which was calculated at 100 rubel per family for the first settlement and at 159 rubel and 34 kopeken per family for the second settlement. The foregoing monies were received as a loan advanced to the settlers which was to

be repaid over a 10 year period after the expiration of an initial 10 year period. Because of deaths among the livestock and crop failures this period was extended by five years.

After 1805 the immigrants received loans only according to the measure of their needs. Money was not available for travel expenses and nourishment. After 1828 those who could not pay for their own travelling expenses were not allowed to immigrate. These general regulations had the consequences that many poorer families received the monies to travel as a gift from the Gemeinden in Prussia, as this was still easier than to support these families there. But such families were seldom able to complete such a resettlement. This contributed to a more rapid creation of a proletariat among the Russian Gemeinden which were still weak at the time.

In addition to being required to pay for the costs of the journey, the immigrants were obligated to deposit a security with the Russian Consul in Danzig, which was only returned after the family had arrived in the Molotschna. Soon the immigration was completely prohibited as the authorities were also concerned that sufficient land would be available for the future of these families. Approximately 700 families immigrated after 1805. The foregoing statistics as to loan advances, family numbers, etc., have been provided by the Secretary of the Gebietsamtes".<sup>8</sup>

The same foreign travelers already mentioned above also provide us with a view and opinion of the Molotschna pioneers themselves.

"They had come with their own wagons, some of them being drawn by from five to seven of their own horses, carrying such beautiful furniture as: chests, closets, chairs, tables, bedsteads made of walnut wood, so that their homes were quite appealing. Many had sold their property (in Prussia) for thirty to forty thousand gilders, and each one could proudly affirm that he had paid his ten percent emigration dues honestly. Sixty-three of the 322 families had not accepted the advance money offered by the Russian government, and what is more, eight-nine families had each brought from ten to twenty thousand ducats in cash with them with which they now supported their poorer brethren. Many very poor families followed later, partially funded by the Prussian congregations. Among the descendants of these poor emigrants, who often pushed or pulled their own small wagons, many now belong to the wealthiest Mennonites in Russia. In the two (three) years since they had arrived, they were able to finish most of their homes. This, indeed, leaves a very positive impression of their activity, especially if one remembers what is involved in building such homes in this country."<sup>9</sup>

Not every report describes this emigration quite as favourably. The **Gemeinde Berichte** are a valuable source of information for the early years of the Molotschna Colony. These reports were prepared in 1848 by the Schulz and school teacher of each village at the request of Eugen von Hahn who was the Chief Supervisor of foreign colonies in Russia at the time. The author of the report for the village of Halbstaedt has noted that "the assets of the immigrants consisted mainly of their horses, wagons, and for some also livestock. The majority barely had sufficient cash funds to cover the requirements of the journey; which deficiency greatly increased the difficulties of the settlement."<sup>10</sup>

Peter Isaac, the author of **Stammbuch Meine Voreltern**, states that his grandfather Franz Isaac and his grandmother's parents, Johan Warkentins travelled from West Prussia to Southern Russia by wagon train. He mentions that this wagon train consisted of two wheeled carts which were pulled by a horse. The most necessary belongings were loaded on the wagon and whoever could do so had to walk. Peter Isaac also mentions that his great-grandparents, Johan Warkentins, were quite well-to-do, and that they bought a double farm in the Molotschna village of Blumenort.<sup>11</sup>

A number of the families who later joined the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde already knew each other in Prussia. Peter Isaac reports that the following families had travelled together in one wagon train. His grandfather Franz Isaac; his grandmother Margaretha Warkentin and her parents the Johann Warkentins; the aged grandfather Isaac Loewen (1787-1873) and his parents the Isaac Loewens; and his oldest uncle by marriage Johan Toews together with his parents, the Cornelius Toews' family. These were all prominent Kleine Gemeinde families.

## 6.02 Settling in the Molotschna.

This group stayed at the Island Camp in the Chortitz settlement for a year. This was a common practice for these emigrant groups as in the meantime the arrangements for settling in the Molotschna colony 60 miles distant could be completed. This practice also continued later as Peter Isaac reports that the Johan Plett family which emigrated from West Prussia in 1828

stayed at the Old Colony for a while as one of their daughters, Helena Plett, died in the village of Schoenwiese where she was working at the time.<sup>12</sup>

Those of the Molotschna pioneers who left Prussia in 1803 arrived at the Chortitz Mennonite colony on the Dneiper River in fall of 1803. It was too late to commence with the establishment of their own homes in that year and so they overwintered at the Chortitz colony. Here the Molotschna settlers obtained provisions, shelter, and feed for their livestock. They were also able to obtain the benefit of the dearly bought experience of the earlier Chortitzer settlers in terms of methods of building construction and farming practises, all of which helped them to avoid costly mistakes. In turn they were able to pay for these benefits in cash thus providing the stimulus which the Chortitzer settlement so badly needed.<sup>13</sup>

Then in the spring of 1804, after they had been joined by a second group which had just arrived from Prussia, the settlers made their way to the location of their new homeland. The Molotschna settlement itself consisted of 120,000 desjatien (about 320,000 acres) of land which lay on the east bank of the Molotschna River, about 70 miles southeast of the Chortitz Colony. The settlement extended up to the Tokmak River in the north. A short distance to the north of the Tokmak River was the Russian town of Tokmak. To the south the settlement extended to the river Jushanlee. It was along these rivers that the villages of the immigrants were to be built. According to a report of 1806 this land was covered with grass which was as high as a man, through which one could walk only with great effort. Not a tree or a shrub was to be seen on this endless rolling steppe.<sup>14</sup>

Here and there on the plain the settlers could see small groups of black tents made of felt surrounded by grazing livestock. When the settlers approached these settlements over the horizontal steppes they made their first acquaintance with their new neighbours, the Nogaier. Several riders came to greet them. They were wild looking in their strange long robes. In their girdles they carried knives and iron hammers. In their hands they held spears. Curiosity and suspicion was mirrored in their dark eyes.<sup>15</sup> Franz Isaac provides a brief description of the people who were to be the closest neighbours of the new settlers.

“Not a single tree nor shelter was to be found at the new settlement location by the first pioneers, and consequently they had to camp under an open sky until they had prepared themselves a temporary shelter in whatever manner they found possible. The pioneers found that their land complex in many areas was occupied by Nogaier, who in fact did move on but remained adjacent. The Nogaier placed their dwellings, which were in the shape of beehives and covered with felt blankets, onto two wheeled wagons and hauled them to their new place of abode or lodging. (Ackerman, Burkut, etc.). The poorest and most worn out horses of the settlers were purchased for next to nothing by the Nogaier for slaughter, but the best horses were frequently taken directly from the barns or pastures during the night time without any arrangements having been made.

The first settlers were able to purchase the most necessary provisions in the neighbouring Russian village of Tokmak which had been established a number of years earlier. Other neighbours of the settlers were the Dukkobours, a sect which originated with the Greek Orthodox Church. The Dukkobours settled the villages of Bogdanowka, Troitzkaja, Terpenic, and others, which were located on the right bank of the Molotschna River, at the same time as the Mennonites. But because of contrary religious and legal considerations the Dukkobours were exiled to the Caucasus in the year 1841 and their settlements given over to the Russians.”<sup>16</sup>

When the first groups of the Molotschna settlers had arrived at the Chortitz Colony in 1803 they immediately elected Klaas Wiens, a well-to-do settler, as their first Oberschulz.<sup>17</sup> Using their temporary homes as a base they then selected the locations where their first villages were to be built. Nine villages were established in 1804. These were Halbstaedt, Muntau, Schoenau, Fischau, Lindenau, Lichtenau, Blumstein, Munsterberg, and Altonau.<sup>18</sup> Once the locations had been chosen the various groups of villagers selected the site of their village by lot. It appears that some of the settlers had previously decided to settle together. In other cases lots were drawn to determine in which village the immigrant would settle. Then the individual “Wirtschaften” or village farms in the village plan were also divided among the settlers. A few of the more well-to-do families obtained a double “Wirtschaft”.<sup>19</sup>

### 6.03 The villages come to life.

The actual layout of the villages was done from the point of view of German order and compliance with regulations. H. Goerz, the author of *Die Molotschnaer Ansiedlung*, describes

the plan of these villages as follows: „Each of these first villages consisted of twenty “Wirtschaften” or village farms, the yards of which extended to both sides of the street. The village lot of each farm was 280 feet wide. The house was set back 98 feet from the village street so that there was room for a small garden between the house and street. In the villages which were laid out later, the village lots were definitely wider”.<sup>20</sup>

Once the village layouts and village groups were organized the settlers proceeded with the construction of their homes. Many of the settlers built earth huts for themselves and also for their livestock. It must be remembered that the climate here was far more favourable than was the case 75 years later in the Manitoba Mennonite settlement. Nevertheless considerable difficulties were encountered. Only a few of the more well-to-do settlers and of those who had a better supply of labour, were able to construct a wooden dwelling house to be shared by two or more families for the winter. The wood for this purpose had to be hauled a distance of 85 werst.<sup>21</sup> While the settlers lived in their temporary shelters they proceeded with the construction of their first homes. Because of various difficulties these permanent homes were not generally completed until 1806.<sup>22</sup>

After the first few years the houses and other buildings were all constructed out of bricks and all in accordance with the West Prussian style. The various buildings differed from each other mainly in their size, and quality of construction. The poorer people built their premises of raw brick while the more prosperous used kilned brick. Originally ditches ran along the street but these were soon replaced by wooden fences which in turn were replaced by brick fences.<sup>23</sup>

### 6.04 A report by foreign travellers.

It is impossible to report in any detail on more than a few aspects of the founding and early development of the Molotschna Colony. Two reports will be included here in order to add depth to the reader's understanding of the early years in this settlement. Both reports are written by outsiders which is noteworthy as their view of the Mennonites and their accomplishments is frequently more favourable than the view of the Mennonites themselves. The first report referred to here is that of foreign travellers as contained in the *Beitrag* of Reiswitz and Wadzeck.<sup>24</sup>

a) At the break of day (writes a traveller coming from the Orechov via Tokmak in 1807) we came around a mountain and caught sight of the six houses that bear the name Prischib. This is the home of the inspector of the Molotschna colonies, at present the young Baron Uexkuell, who had studied in Germany. He very obligingly afforded us the opportunity to look around this region so suited to grain and vegetable growing. On the right bank of the Molotschna lie the colonies founded by the Wuerttembergers, the Germans, the Poles, the West Prussians, the Hessians (from Nassau), and the East and South Prussians (the so-called Molotschna Colonial District, most heavily populated by Lutherans and some Catholics).

b) In order to acquaint ourselves with the conditions pertaining in the colony we first drove to Tokmak where the annual fair was just being held. A bridge is built over the arm of the river here which leads to the first Mennonite colonies. Driving from one to the other, we visited eighteen settlements in three days and were received with pleasure by this diligent and industrious little group of people. Because they have only begun to develop this region since 1805 (1804!), the Mennonites had not yet begun to engage in those handicrafts which were not absolutely essential. Their houses, barns, granaries, gardens and fields witness to their love of order and industry. Already these industrious people own well-built windmills equipped to bag flour. Because of the absence of a market, the flour, which we found to be white and finely ground, is still only used in their own homes. They brought a load of butter to Taganrog which was so eagerly bought up that they immediately saw to it that two more shipments were sent. Livestock inventory: these Mennonites not only brought many cattle, horses and sheep along with them from Prussia, but also breeding stock. Even though their women preferred the sheep brought from Prussia because of their longer wool, they have nevertheless received (from the crown) seven Spanish (merino) rams and five ewes from Odessa. In order to improve their strain, they want to acquire 140 large white Russian sheep for purposes of cross-breeding. Regrettably, many sheep were stolen. It is too bad there is a total absence of timber. Not even a wild shrub on the Molotschna River. They have to attempt to get the lumber they need from the Dnieper, some sixty to seventy wersts away. The Sea of Azov is approximately the same distance removed. However, nature has seen to it that they will never suffer a shortage of fuel for burning, since the grass of the steppes grows so lush and so tall that one can barely make his way through it (O

where has that grass gone to!); moreover, a type of bulrush grows in the river that can be used for fuel. (Soon they also began to use manure, pressed into bricks, for fuel, which continues to this day.) All of them assert that they are quite satisfied, and if only they were finished with their initial arrangements they would turn their hand to the arts and crafts. (Freely used.)

c) The same traveller, from whom most of number 1 was taken, writes the following about Molotschna between 1817 and 1820. The land, which is level here, is considered more fertile than that of the Old Colony. Nevertheless, aside from that which has been planted, not even a tree or shrub can be found. Every effort is made to remedy this situation by planting trees. Farming is carried on the same way here as in the Old Colony. Animal husbandry, however, appears easier because there is a better supply of grass and water. And yet this colony has suffered more from animal diseases than the old one. Now they have provided the so-called "Tschumacken" (Russian oxen drivers), to whom they ascribe the transmission of the disease, with a special road (the "salt road") so that they dare no longer make contact with the colony. Cattle of Russian stock are seldom found here because they produce less milk than the German ones, and allow themselves to be milked only when the calf is present. Attempts have been made to deceive the tender instincts of these animals with a stuffed calf-hide (!?), though not always successfully. Since the Molotschna is not navigable and flows into a swampy land-locked sea (the Molotschna Liman), all products are sent to the Sea of Azov or to the Crimean peninsula. However, most of the butter and cheese is sold to buyers who come to the very homes of the settlers.

d) .....

e) The "New Colony", in spite of its much later beginnings, is far ahead of the "old" one on its location, equipment, and even in its standard of living; indeed, the later immigrants, because they were generally well-off or even rich, had all lived there for one or two years, paying well for everything they received, raised the standard of the Old Colony. In return, the settlers of the Old Colony helped those of Molotschna with advice and help, enabling them to progress more rapidly (#31 and 53). There is a considerable vinegar brewery in Halbstadt, and its wealthy owner (Johann Klaassen, the second colony administrator of the Molotschna District) has now also started a cloth factory.

f) While the surrounding neighbors of the Chortitz Colony are exclusively Russian, especially many of noble descent, who live in a friendly relationship with them, the Molotschna Colony is surrounded by the "Nogai" or "Nogaizy," an originally nomadic and very warlike, i.e., robbing Tatar race of some 5,000 persons descended from a Crimean Khan. They hate the newcomers who have limited their pasture-lands, and earlier expressed their displeasure against them in various ways. About ten years ago four Mennonite settlers were killed one night not far from a Mennonite village by these Tatars in a most lamentable fashion. Many other settlers escaped a similar fate only by making a hasty escape, through presence of mind or a lucky turn of events. Nevertheless, the danger threatening the settlers from these barbarians is diminishing from year to year since the government is doing everything in its power to civilize them. They have now been forced to give up their nomadic lifestyle, settle down and cultivate the land. To give up their old, free way of life, however, is very difficult for them. Since the murder of the four Mennonites, the Tatars have also been forced to give up their traditional custom whereby every man constantly carries a weapon on his person. This was an iron hammer attached to a long wooden handle! They used these hammers especially to kill wolves after they had been tired in the chase by their very swift horses. (Later they had to use a short, thick leather whip for this purpose, called a "Kantscherg," "Malachai," or even "Nogaika," for which purpose a lead bullet was braided into the end of it: also a wicked toy!) In spite of all these measures, the rustling of cattle continues. (Later the Mennonites and Tatars became good friends; in 1860 the latter all emigrated to Turkey.) Their former localities were turned into Bulgarian colonies or Russian farm villages.

g) As far as the climate is concerned, in the region surrounding the Chortitz and Molotschna colonies, there were (and still are) particularly severe blizzards (in Low German: "de Stuem," in Russian: "Viuga"), usually lasting from two to four days during the winter season, a season itself subject to variation as to duration and great temperature fluctuations. At such times it was especially dangerous to travel on the steppes because they were very sparsely populated and points of orientation were few. Large numbers of cattle are lost during these blizzards, especially when they suddenly appear early in the fall and the herds cannot be brought into the barns, enclosures, or at least into protective valleys in time. The animals, especially the sheep, run irresistibly before the wind until they find shelter or a cover. Sleet is perhaps even worse if it strikes the herds unexpectedly out in the open and continues for

several days. Summers are mostly long and very warm, up to 30° Reaumur in the shade; by August the steppes have turned predominantly grey; in September or October the fall rains usually set in and a new growth, even new flowers, give the steppes the appearance of a new spring. The spring is probably richer in grass and flowers, but often very fickle in regard to its beginning and changes in temperature. In the beginning the settlers suffered from severe fevers and other diseases due to these rapid, drastic variations in climate. If the precipitation, even though not in larger amounts, would fall at the right time, the steppes, given the inexhaustible fertility of the soil, would become a region of unsurpassable productivity. (In spite of the unstable weather conditions and unpredictable rain and snow fall, this region has made the colonies rich. Freely used.)

### 6.05 A government administrator reports.

A second report looks at the Molotschna colony from the point of view of government administrator. During the 1860's the Russian government commissioned a study of the various settlements of foreign colonists in Russia. The requested report was prepared by Privy Councillor Alexander Klaus who published his findings in a report which has been translated and published in German under the title of *Unsere Kolonien*.<sup>25</sup> Klaus characterizes the early years of the Molotschna Colony as follows:

“In spite of the fact that the area around the Molotschna had an inadequate rainfall and was completely treeless, the entire subsequent Mennonite migration came primarily to this region. No longer did only the impoverished people from Prussia move to us (as was the case earlier in Chortitza), but now a good number of wealthy farmers, indeed some capitalists, were among them. Due to these circumstances Molotschna came to be the Mennonite economic and intellectual focal point, the pride and darling of the (imperial) colonial authorities....”

3. Regarding the Chortitza and Molotschna settlements in general, Klaus writes the following:

a) “until 1824 this colonization advanced mainly due to the influx of new members from outside. During the same period the number of villages in the Molotschna area increased to 40 while Chortitza grew to 18. ... From then on Mennonite colonization was carried on with the indigenous resources drawn from the mother colonies. ...” (From 1824 onward the immigration of aliens was prohibited in principle and allowed only in exceptional circumstances. See above, Gnadenfeld. By 1860 there were 18 villages in the Chortitza area and 55 in the Molotschna area, including the Hutterite<sup>47</sup> colony and 5 villages in the Bergthal region located in the District of Mariupol. The population stood at about 30,000, consisting of about 6,000 families. They owned about 165,000 dessiatines crown lands and 100,000 dessiatines of privately acquired land on which a large number of ranches, industrial plants and estates existed. (One dessiatine equals 2 Morgen<sup>48</sup> or 1 1/11 French hectares or 2 7/10 American acres.)

b) “The Mennonite villages,” Klaus continues, “are generally not very large; they usually consisted of 13 to 50 farms of approximately 65 dessiatines each. ... It might be superfluous to add that each village was extremely spacious and arranged in an orderly fashion, that each yard, the location of the house and farm buildings, their outside facades and inner arrangement, were all identical, differing only in size and roominess or solidity and quality of materials used. (Wood in the older, while in the later period adobe or burned bricks—the latter used as pantile—were the most common materials.) Groves of trees and orchards surrounded each village, and on either side of the streets there are shady gardens and flower-beds. ...

c) “Gradually the young people who left the farms turned to professions, trades and businesses, etc. They founded new villages on land set aside for such purposes and began farming on their own or rented land, by preference on that of the Nogai. The Mennonites very quickly (notwithstanding the fear expressed by Contentius) rose to a level of prosperity and organization hitherto unknown among us. As though by magic one village after another arose on the steppes where earlier neither water nor shrub, not to speak of trees, had been common; plenty of wholesome well-water could be found while groves of fruit, shade and mulberry trees soon grew in abundance; lush, well-cared-for meadows, large herds of sheep, cattle and horses, all of the best breeds, were plentiful.”

### 6.06 Conclusion.

The pioneer years did not pass without contention and adversity. Notwithstanding these trials progress was made. Franz Isaac characterizes as follows the process through which the Molotschna Mennonite community developed.

“In the previous fatherlands where the achievements of the ancestors had so quickly been forgotten and gradually diminished in their existence, difficult times had also been experienced and overcome. How many trials, temptations, and self-denials may it have cost before they overcame the difficulties which the emigration and the establishment of a new settlement brought with it: To learn to live with and among each other, and until a self-administration, in-so-far as granted to them, was established. Experience teaches that much is involved before people who have originated in different regions have come to know each other as one group, and have come to an intimate life as one Gemeinde.”<sup>27</sup>

In 1848 the writer of the **Gemeinde Berichte** for the village of Tiege reported nostalgically with respect to these early settlement years.

“In order to give the descendants an understanding of the courage with which their ancestors embarked upon the founding of the colonies, the differences between the old and new homelands is presented heré. In Prussia they left a fine pleasant region where a number of them also had very well developed “Wirtschaften”. In Prussia there were fine fat meadows, streets with rows of planted trees, blooming gardens which were filled with ripening fruit exactly at the time of departure. At their arrival here the settlers found nothing but a great empty space, a desolate steppe where neither bush nor tree was to be found, and no roof could be found to protect against the steaming rays of the sun. An unfamiliar race of people were to be their future neighbours, who caused anxious concerns by their half wild appearance. Many privations and the uncertain future conspired to make dismal their voices and to rob them of their courage. But there was no time here for brooding and complaining. The sites for the new homes were laid out and divided by lots, huts in and partially above ground were prepared for use and the construction of the residences was commenced. A beehive of activity was underway such as had never previously been seen in this region.”<sup>28</sup>

The foregoing is an excellent conclusion to this brief look at the founding of the Molotschna Colony and at the pioneering years. The writer of this **Berichte** truly sums up the spirit of the Molotschna pioneers.

## FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER SIX. THE PIONEER YEARS.

1. C. Krahn, **Smith's Story of the Mennonites**, op.cit., 257.
2. William Schroeder, **The Bergthal Colony** (CMBC Publications, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1974), 3.
3. Cornelius J. Dyck, op.cit., 128-129.
4. Peter M. Friesen, op.cit., 185.
5. H. Goerz, op.cit., 9-10.
6. Margaret Woltner, **Gemeinde Berichten**, 1941, 102.
7. *Ibid*, 107.
8. Franz Isaac, **Die Molotschnaer Mennoniten** (H.J. Braun, Halbstaedt, Taurien, 1908), 10-11.
9. Peter M. Friesen, op.cit., 186-187.
10. M. Woltner, op.cit., 90.
11. Peter Isaac, **Stammbuch Meine Voreltern** (Prairie View Press, Rosenort, Manitoba, 1980), 8-9.
12. *Ibid*, 54. It is noteworthy that the Johan Plett family overwintered in the Friesian village of Schoenwiese. The Choritzza Frisian Gemeinde had stood by the Molotschna Kleine Gemeinde during its infant years when it literally struggled for its very existence. Thus it appears that the special bond between the Frisian Old Colony Gemeinde and the Kleine Gemeinde was still continuing.
13. Peter M. Friesen, op.cit., 112.
14. H. Goerz, op.cit., 11.
15. *Ibid*, 14.
16. Franz Isaac, op.cit., 11.
17. M. Woltner, op.cit., 99. Wiens settled in the Molotschna village of Altona.
18. *Ibid*, 96.
19. *Ibid*, 111.
20. H. Goerz, op.cit., 13.
21. Woltner, op.cit., 99 and 111.
22. *Ibid*, 94.
23. H. Goerz, op.cit., 14.
24. Peter M. Friesen, op.cit., 186-190.
25. A. Klaus, **Unsere Kolonien** (Odessa Zeitung, Odessa, South Russia, 1887).
26. Peter M. Friesen, op.cit., 121-122.
27. Franz Isaac, op.cit., 11-12.
28. M. Woltner, op.cit., 104.



# Chapter Seven.

## Agriculture

### 7.00 Introduction

The primary occupation of the members of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia was always farming. This continued to be the case for most of the descendants of the Kleine Gemeinde in North America for many years. Accordingly the reader will have a special interest in agricultural developments during the years that the Kleine Gemeinde was in Russia. This chapter will consider the livestock industry, Johan Cornies, farming methods, and conclude with a comparison of the Russian and Manitoba Mennonite farmer in 1910.

Having settled in his village the Molotschna pioneer had one more problem, namely, a shortage of markets for his products, especially for grain and flour. The situation was considerably better with respect to livestock products, which were frequently purchased at the farmer's yard and hauled away by merchants. Consequently the production of grain for sale on the open market was almost non-existent until the opening of the sea port Berdjansk on the Black Sea in 1830 made the world grain markets accessible.

### 7.01 The Livestock Industry

The Molotschna farmer was a mixed farmer for the first decades with the main commercial farming consisting of the production of horned cattle and sheep.<sup>1</sup> The raising of sheep was introduced to the Mennonite colonies by the Russian government which was anxious to raise the income level of its new settlers. Through the efforts of Contentious, the farsighted administrator of the colonies at the time, Merino sheep were introduced to the Molotschna colony in its first years.<sup>2</sup> This community flock was to serve as a means of improvement of the settlers' own stock. This promotion of the sheep industry was very successful. The wool from the sheep found a ready market in the mills of Ekaterinoslaw and the wool markets of Romny and Poltava.<sup>3</sup> The mutton was also readily saleable. In addition the by-products of the slaughtered sheep such as the hides could be made into fur coats and caps, and in the early years even into jackets and pants for the male members of the family.<sup>4</sup>

Although suffering a serious setback by the severe winter of 1812-1813 the sheep industry was rebuilt after 1825 under the leadership of Johan Cornies. Under his leadership the Molotschna sheep herd rose to 108,000 or 125 sheep per "Vollwirt" at its peak in 1836. The sheep industry declined thereafter because of decreasing wool prices caused by overseas competition from Australia and elsewhere. In addition, a growing demand for wheat resulted in less land being available for pasture.<sup>5</sup>

The breeding of cattle, and the production of dairy and beef products was a success similar to that of the sheep industry except on a much larger and more permanent scale.<sup>6</sup> The Molotschna settlers had brought with them a large number of East Friesian cattle from West Prussia. Notwithstanding severe losses due to the arduous journey from Prussia and the crude pioneer conditions, the cattle industry became firmly established in the Molotschna. Somewhat later, diseases spread by Russian teamsters hauling salt and other goods from the Crimea through the Molotschna were eliminated by the widening of the teamsters' roads, called "Tschumkenweg", to over a werst in width to avoid any contact with the livestock of the settlers.

Through cross breeding under the leadership of Cornies and his Agricultural Society a new breed of cow was developed known variously as the Molotschna, Red Dutch, and usually as the Red German cow. The new breed preserved the production capabilities of the East Friesian cattle but was hardier in the Molotschna climate. Annual milk production of these cows was upward of 580 gallons and fat content was 3.8 to 4 per cent. Dairy products in the form of cheese and butter were bought up in the colonies by merchants from Berdjansk, Sevastopol, Ekaterinoslaw, and elsewhere. A number of enterprising Mennonites, including Johan Cornies, also took up the business of purchasing these products for resale elsewhere. The sale of cattle for beef was also an important factor during these years with sales reaching 1,429 head at the peak in 1845.<sup>7</sup>

Another important agricultural activity during the first years was the breeding of horses. With scientific cross breeding, a fine combination farm and carriage horse was developed.

This horse was strongly built of medium height, and usually black or roan in colour. The increase in the grain industry is reflected in the numbers of horses owned by the average "Voll-wirt" farmer. "In 1836 the number of horses per farm in the Molotschna amounted to 6.2; by 1841 it had increased to 8.4, and by 1855 to 10.6".<sup>8</sup>

## 7.02 The Linen Industry

Another important agricultural activity during the first years of the Molotschna Colony was the production of small quantities of flax for the linen fibers. An excellent description of the raising of flax and the linen industry is given by historian Peter M. Friesen:

Formerly people were not concerned about the (flax) seeds; if one harvested more than was needed for seed the surplus was taken to the local oil presses, but this was of secondary importance since the first concern was for the linen fibers. About one-half acre (one-quarter dessiatine) or more was planted, and when it ripened properly it was pulled out by hand, tied in sheaves, set in shocks and, after it had dried, was carefully threshed. The further preparation of the linen was also very tedious, keeping the younger as well as older daughters, under the supervision of the mother, busy with spinning the fibers almost the entire winter. (At the most one will today find an occasional conservative grandmother spinning some sheepwool for stockings. The yarn would be woven into linen by weavers, of which there were plenty in those days, and then it would be bleached for a long time — this "night bleaching" was always quite an occasion in the village! — and then made into shirts by hand for the whole family by the mother and daughters. The proverb: "self-made and woven by hand, attired aright the peasants stand," was still fully operative. One did not only make the shirts out of this linen, but also the fine Sunday dresses of the wives and daughters, for which purpose it was dyed brown. And these our grandmothers, certainly considered themselves "*mennisten infyn*" in accordance with the common Dutch proverb (that is, extremely presentable according to Mennonite standards, "solid, practical, clean and pleasing but not conspicuous").<sup>9</sup>

With the availability of manufactured clothes this cottage industry eventually disappeared. Johan W. Dueck who was a young lad of 10 years of age at the time of emigration from Russia in 1874 recalls that his grandparents had spun their own flax and made their own clothes from the yarn. He also noted that this linen cloth was extremely durable.<sup>10</sup>

## 7.03 Johan Cornies — a great secular leader

Johan Cornies (1789-1848) is a man whose personality and achievement is unforgettably forged into the fabric of Russian Mennonite life. He was a contemporary of Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) the second Aeltester of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. In addition the two men were co-pioneers when the Molotschna village of Orloff was founded in 1804. Although Cornies came from a poorer family, his significance in the economic sphere equalled that of Friesen as a religious leader.

As a young man Cornies embarked upon an aggressive farming and business career. He got his first start as a merchant purchasing the farm products of the colonists for resale in the cities of Simferopol, Feodosiya, and Sevastopol. He then turned to the raising of cattle, sheep, and horses on a large scale. He was so successful in these endeavours that by 1847 his livestock consisted of 500 horses, 8,000 sheep, and 200 head of cattle. In 1830 Cornies leased a block of 9,000 acres of government land along the Jushanlee River on the south boundary of the Molotschna Colony where he cultivated up to 729 acres of land. Here he also experimented with the planting and raising of tree stocks.

The successful activities of Cornies did not go unnoticed for long. In 1817 the government appointed him as the lifetime head of what is commonly known as the Agricultural Society. This Society was founded at the request of the Fursorgekomitee (Supervisory Committee) in Odessa as a means of improving agricultural production in the Molotschna. Here again this amazing man was so successful that the jurisdiction of the Agricultural Society was eventually increased to include schools, afforestation and other activities. It has already been mentioned that Cornies was especially instrumental in the improving of the breeds of cattle and horses.<sup>11</sup>

One of his special interests was the development of the silk industry. This was developed to the point that in 1845, 207 families were involved in this activity. Many difficulties had to be overcome which included falling silk prices and diseases among the silk worms. As a result this enterprise was dissolved shortly after the death of Cornies in 1848. However the fine mulberry hedges which the settlers had planted between their properties remained and continued to enrich the appearance of the settlement.<sup>12</sup> It is interesting to note that during the 1870s, some

three decades later, the Kleine Gemeinde also attempted to develop a silk industry in Nebraska. In anticipation of this enterprise large groves of mulberry trees were planted so that it was reported that the colony had over 50 acres of mulberry trees by 1882. However the silk production was no more successful here than under the leading of Cornies in the Molotschna.<sup>14</sup>

The contributions of Johan Cornies to the development of the sheep and livestock industry has already been noted. But through his scientific experimentation Cornies also made significant contributions to the practice of other areas of agriculture. One of the problems always faced by the Molotschna grain grower was the significant lack of moisture in the region. Cornies recognized that moisture levels could be improved by the practise of summerfallow, which he implemented in 1835. Soon the practice of four-field crop rotation also became universal in the Molotschna through the efforts of Cornies. This consisted of the summer-fallowing of one fourth of cultivated land every year with crops such as wheat, barley, and oats being rotated on the other three quarters. It is interesting to note that this form of crop rotation was still a common practise among the Kleine Gemeinde farmers in Manitoba a century later. In any event these agricultural techniques were novel at the time and greatly increased production. In addition Cornies has been credited with the damming up of streams in the Molotschna to preserve water which was used for the irrigation of pasture and hay land.

Another significant activity in which Cornies took the lead was in the forestation of the treeless steppe. The Russian government had realized the vast benefits of such a program at a very early stage and had unsuccessfully tried to induce the colonies to plant trees. Many colonies, including the Mennonites, resented this order to plant trees. In addition, the government generally was not able to give guidance as to which trees would successfully grow in the climate. Cornies overcame the latter problem through extensive experimentation on his private estates. He then established a nursery to raise these trees at Jushanlee. He overcame the reluctance of many of the Mennonite farmers by simply making it a requirement that each farmer plant a certain number of trees in each year. Thus Cornies left the Mennonite colonies in Russia a living legacy in the form of millions of trees which not only provided shade and fruit, but also beautified their settlements. This legacy of planting trees was also brought to North America where towering maple and cottonwood groves indicated the places of the original farmsteads of the Kleine Gemeinde farmers in Manitoba.

#### **7.04 An analysis of the role of Johan Cornies.**

The influence of Cornies also extended to non-Mennonite colonists, and the surrounding Russians, especially the Dukhobors and the Molokans as well as the native tribes such as the Nogiar. He was a friend and respected adviser. Based on his accomplishments, a complete revolution had taken place in farming in the Molotschna by 1860. The early agricultural activities had disappeared and the raising of wheat had become the foremost enterprise. David G. Rempel, the foremost authority on economic developments among the Russian Mennonites and on whose doctoral dissertation "The Mennonite Colonies in New Russia" much of the foregoing is based, characterizes the far reaching influence of Cornies as follows:

"It would carry us too far afield to discuss all the other improvements which the Molochnaia Mennonites, and to a lesser extent those at Chortitsa, owe to Cornies' initiative and efforts. It will suffice here to enumerate but the most important. They are: The building of an artificial lake by every colony to insure a constant water supply for its flocks and herds; the erection of an improved, uniform type of farm building; the building of better school houses; the introduction of compulsory primary education; the raising of the qualifications for elementary school teachers, and the institution of periodic teachers conferences; the establishment of several continuation schools; and, finally, the encouragement of many industries and crafts and the laying of the foundations of an industrial colony. How much, for example, he was interested in the development of industries and trades, is shown by the fact that in order to give poor, but deserving artisans and tradesmen a start in their professions and businesses he created out of his own means a fund of about 100,000 rubles, from which they could borrow money at six per cent per annum, a rate which was much lower than that prevailing in the colonies. It would indeed be difficult to think of any phase of human activity among the Mennonites to which Cornies did not make some kind of a contribution. And the fame which especially the Molochnaia settlement attained for its successes in agriculture, stock-breeding and afforestation were in no small degree his personal achievements. People from all parts of European Russia came to the Molochnaia settlement to view those wonderful accomplishments".<sup>15</sup>

Not all of the Russian Mennonites were pleased with the activities of Cornies. The cultural battle between the progressive Orloff group headed by Cornies and the more traditional Grosze Gemeinde centered at Lichtenau has already been noted. The means which Cornies used to break the stranglehold of the overwhelming Grosze Gemeinde majority, such as the forcible beatings of those who failed to comply with what he regarded as progressive measures, were obviously contrary to the teachings of Menno Simons and other early Anabaptist-Mennonite writers. His use of control over the school system to import a certain degree of pietist teaching into the Molotschna school system also gives an additional clue as to the cause of the resistance he encountered from the Grosze Gemeinde. Johan Cornies overcame all opposition, finally resorting to the breakup of the Grosze Gemeinde and later even the imprisonment and exile of one of its Aeltesten in order to attain his goal. In the meantime, Grosze Gemeinde opposition to his tactics had reached the point where Cornies was denounced as the "antichrist".<sup>16</sup>

The other extreme in Russian Mennonite society unquestionably accepted Cornies and his techniques as the epitome of all that was good among the Russian Mennonites. Peter M. Friesen, whose monumental work probably best embodies the extreme view of the pietist-cultural Mennonites in Russia, says of Cornies as follows: "Menno and Cornies have given us Russian Mennonites, both in Russia and America, our ecclesiastical and cultural character for all time; as yet however, it is far from perfect! We see in Cornies' reform the healthy body (culture and civic community) for Menno's spirit (the heart of Christianity and church community). And we call upon our more than a hundred-thousand brothers and sisters in Russia and America: Let us remember our two teachers, Menno and Cornies! Let us acquire what we have inherited from our fathers".<sup>16</sup>

Peter M. Friesen's reference to Menno Simons is somewhat unclear as it is impossible to reconcile the despotic means used by Cornies in achieving his goals with the evangelical teachings of the nonresistant Menno.

However it must be noted that Cornies in many ways still reflected his Mennonite upbringing. Notwithstanding his phenomenal financial success, his lifestyle remained simple and tasteful. His biographer David H. Epp says of him that "although he owned the property of a prince he lived in the style of a farmer; not because of greed but because of principle".<sup>17</sup> Although he had many employees and servants he is said to have treated them well. Cornies was a lover of Mennonite simplicity and decorum. He followed Anabaptist-Mennonite practice in refusing to accept a medal and appointment to an Order, taking a plain memorial coin instead.<sup>18</sup> This adds to the mystery of what made Cornies the man that he was.

It is regrettable that some of the pietist-cultural Mennonites tended to ignore the traditional Anabaptist-Mennonite characteristics which were integral to the personality of Cornies. Without his inclination to self-sacrifice, humility, and modesty, Cornies could never have achieved what he did. It seems that those who later emulated the financial success of Cornies sometimes forgot these traits. The achievements of Cornies were usually focused in some betterment to his fellow humans. But the socio-economic achievements of the pietist-cultural Mennonites seemingly also included a caste system which segregated the more fortunate from their poorer brethren, who constituted by far the majority in Russian Mennonite society. All too often wealth and opulence was desired for its own sake and without regard for social costs. Orders and medals were pursued without shame. It appears that for some individuals pietist theology was a means by which beliefs and actions could be divorced, so that they could live totally at "peace" among a sea of downtrodden and oppressed Russian peasantry for whom they had no more concern than for their less fortunate fellow Mennonites.<sup>18a</sup>

## **7.05 The Kleine Gemeinde view of Johan Cornies.**

What was the position of the Kleine Gemeinde in all of this? The Kleine Gemeinde believed that it was responsible to cooperate willingly with the government authorities in all matters which were not directly contrary to Scripture. Historian Peter M. Friesen credits them with eagerly cooperating with Johan Cornies and the Agricultural Society.<sup>19</sup> He also notes that the Society met the Kleine Gemeinde half way in allowing them to paint their houses in more subdued colours,<sup>19</sup> possibly reflecting a similar preference of the part of Cornies himself. The Kleine Gemeinde people were successful farmers and according to Peter M. Friesen "the yards, fields, gardens and cattle of the Kleine Gemeinde belonged to the best in the Colonies".<sup>20</sup> It could be noted that this aptitude on the part of the Kleine Gemeinde can still be seen in the farms of many of their descendants in North America over a century later.

Nevertheless the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde could never do more than honour and obey Cornies as someone who was in authority over them. They were commanded by scripture to obey him as long as his commands were not contrary to scripture. They could never have condoned the use of physical force, or use of secular powers to break into pieces a man like Aeltester Heinrich Wiens of the Grosze Gemeinde. On the other hand the ministerial of the Kleine Gemeinde also declared that the actions of Aeltester Wiens in resisting the reforms of Cornies were equally wrong as they could not see that measures such as planting trees or improving the productivity of the land were in any way contrary to Scripture. It seems that the Kleine Gemeinde represented the moderate or median position in Russian Mennonite society with respect to economic developments.

## 7.06 Russian Mennonite Farm Implements and Practices.

Of great interest to the story of agriculture in the Molotschna is the development of the various implements and farming techniques which were in use from time to time. Franz Isaac, the author of *Die Molotschnaer Mennoniten*, discusses some developments in this regard.

"The only agricultural implements known to the settlers during the first years was the so-called "Werder" plow (or bottomland plow), which had been brought along from Prussia or constructed here, and a fathom wide harrows with wooden tines. With such a plow one turned the earth over the seed, plowed the stubble and the summer-fallow. In short, it was used for everything, although occasionally the farmers obtained a land cultivator for themselves for the more extensive working of the summer-fallow. With this machine the summerfallow was cultivated into widely separated furrows."

"The first wagons which our fathers had originally brought along from Prussia had wooden axles, wheel hubs which were almost two feet long and very strong (wooden) rims (felgen). They were not yet acquainted with metal rims. During the twenties (1820s) a wheelwright or master blacksmith could be found here and there, and consequently after a time wagons were to be found with iron axles and iron wheel rims. But this had also become essential as eventually the wooden Prussian rims (Felgen) had out-lived their usefulness."

"Many landowners mowed their own hay and grain, not only during the first years, but until the expiration of the thirties. And many a house-mother, who had taken her suckling child and other small ones with her to the field, followed behind the scythe, which the housefather maintained in diligent action all day, binding into sheaves the grain which had been cut. For nothing could remain unbound, as according to the saying at the time "what remained unbound was definitely lost". Many a housefather allowed the grain behind his scythe to be laid into precise piles by a half grown boy or girl, whereupon having laid the scythe aside momentarily, he bound the piles into sheaves and set them in a stook (mandeln) of fifteen sheaves, and then again took up his scythe. Indeed, farm operations at the time were very small compared to today (1900)."

"The style and manner of threshing consisted of the treading out of the grain with horses, but the most important and foremost threshing apparatus was the flail, with which most young people today (1900) would probably not even be familiar. The rye and also the barley, and especially the oats was threshed with the flail. One had to swing the flail over ones head almost throughout the whole winter. And not infrequently it occurred that the winter was not long enough for the completion of threshing. Consequently many stacks, especially of barley, remained unthreshed until the seeding time in spring, which resulted in good odds for the mice. Grain cleaners (fanning mill) only made their appearance here and there in the early forties and even then they were only very poorly designed. Consequently, after having threshed for a few days with horses, one frequently had to wait for a week or longer for a suitable wind."

"With the division of the land into the four-field system with black summer fallow, and with better tillage, the raising of grain was not only improved but also continually increased with the establishment of the seaport Berdjansk. But as land farming became more extensive and the raising of grain became more viable, the raising of livestock, especially sheep, was diminished to the same extent. At the commencement of the forties the threshing stone also came into use, and consequently the threshing of the grain with horses, as well as the threshing with the wagon, decreased after a time. Similarly the use of the flail was more and more diminished through the much easier and quicker mode of threshing with the stones. Only the wearisome mowing with the scythe could not be replaced by some more efficient method, for the mechanical mowers only found acceptance in the early eighteen seventies. By the eighteen sixties the five bottom "Bugger" and the three and four bottom plow, which were mainly of home made construction, were to be found in addition to the "werder" plow. By now the latter are no longer in use. The former as well as the one and two bottom plows are now manufactured in factories and are now made entirely of iron."<sup>21</sup>

It is interesting to note that a number of members of the Kleine Gemeinde were also involved in the manufacturing of implements on a small scale. The pursuit of a trade such as carpenter, teamster, or blacksmith was always encouraged in the Kleine Gemeinde as honourable occupations, but usually with the idea that they were only temporary steps which the individual used to eventually attain the goal of being a full farmer. Thus someone like Cornelius S. Plett (1820-1900) was a manufacturer of wagons and wagon wheels from 1841-1854 during which time the family lived as Anwohner in Lindenau. By 1854, when the village of Kleefeld was founded, the family had made sufficient headway to take up a full farm where Plett now made farming his full-time occupation.<sup>22</sup> Another similar case is that of Klaas R. Reimer (1837-1906) who opened up his own blacksmith shop at the age of 20. After three years in business Klaas R. Reimer was able to purchase a small farm in the village plan. Notwithstanding financial difficulties caused by the renting of additional land at high prices and declining income from the blacksmith shop Reimer reports in his autobiography that he was later successfully able to clear his debts by the construction of wagons and plows. These were built in Markuslandt and sold in the nearby Old Colony. Klaas R. Reimer also reports that in Russia he was visited by blacksmiths from all over Russia who had come to learn his techniques.<sup>23</sup>

An interesting description of the harvesting and threshing process in Russia is contained in the memoirs of Peter W. Toews (1866-1935). Peter was the son of Johan Toews (1829-1895) who was an older brother of Aeltester Peter Toews. In his remembrances Peter W. Toews notes that after he was a little older he had to help his parents in their farming enterprise.

“My most vivid recollections are of the threshing season. There were no threshing machines at that time. A considerable area in front of the hay barn was prepared by clearing it of weeds. This was the threshing floor (Tenne). A wagon load of grain was brought in and spread in circles upon the clean swept floor. Two horses were then hitched to a stone which was approximately two feet in diameter and three feet long. This stone had about six prongs. When the horses were in motion the stone rolled so that these prongs beat out the grain. The grain was continuously turned and shaken with a fork. One wagon load would be threshed in about an hour. Then the straw was removed and the grain was separated from the chaff with a grain cleaner. This procedure was continued throughout the entire day. Five to six loads were threshed out in this manner. As a young lad I rode on one of the two horses which were hitched to the threshing stone”.<sup>24</sup>

Johan W. Dueck (1865-1932) was another Kleine Gemeinde lad who later had vivid recollections of threshing in Russia during his youth. These remembrances have been published in *History and Events*.<sup>25</sup>

Peter M. Friesen reports that the practice of hiring Russians as labourers was unknown during the early years. This practise, which was also standard among Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde farmers, apparently only began toward the end of the eighteen thirties.<sup>26</sup> But Friesen reports that even during the forties, fifties, and sixties many of the farmers still cut their grain themselves with a scythe. Later reports indicate that the more well-to-do Kleine Gemeinde farmers hired Russian labourers by the wagonload. Kleine Gemeinde school teacher Abraham R. Friesen also reports that he hired a number of Russian reapers to help him harvest his allotment of grain.

In his memoirs, published by the *Steinbach Post* in 1944, Peter W. Toews (1866-1935) relates an interesting story with respect to the hiring of reapers in the Kleine Gemeinde: “In the beginning all cutting of grain was done with the scythe. The farmers hired many Russian workers for this task. These reapers were very good at their job. Usually a farmer drove to the market in a neighbouring Russian village on a Sunday in order to engage the reapers who were assembled there waiting for such employment. On one occasion it is to have occurred (during the Sunday worship service) that the Vorsaenger entoned (Vorgesagt) the song “Liebster Jesus, wir sind hier” (Precious Jesus, we are present). As the assembly was only meagre someone from out of the benches is to have said “and the rest are in Tokmak (a nearby Russian town).”<sup>27</sup> The reapers were hired in Tokmak on Sunday to commence work the next day. The Kleine Gemeinde was unique among the Russian Mennonites in having a very strict policy with respect to the treatment of their employees and servants. Any mistreatment or physical punishment of an employee or servant was cause for immediate disciplinary action by the Gemeinde. (See Section 18.09)

## 7.07 A graphic description by historian Peter M. Friesen

Peter M. Friesen renders a most valuable account of the early agricultural practices and farming implements. This description is an excellent addition to the information provided by Franz Isaac. Friesen describes the process of working the land, seeding, reaping and threshing as follows:

2. "Once upon a time," during the first decades, things were different. If the land-owner could come up with four horses which could be fed hay, straw, and chaff during the winter, and live off the grass in the meadow the rest of the time (but what excellent meadows!), he was quite satisfied. If, with his West Prussian "marshland" plow, he had plowed a small piece of land, called a "Gewende", some eighty to one-hundred fathoms long, he would then hitch his horses to his harrow with its wooden tines to level what he had plowed before proceeding to plow some more. Generally the owner himself walked behind the plow after he had "thrown" a number of handfuls of grain from his seed-bag (a linen bag slung across chest and shoulders) which he had at the ready. Some farmers were more well-to-do, owning a fifth horse and hiring a second driver who would be harrowing all the time while the other was plowing. The farm wagon, which our fathers had brought with them from Prussia, was, according to our current standards, a clumsy, unmanageable vehicle. These wagons had very thick wooden axles, hubs that were two feet long and very thick rims. The box-part of the wagon was made of the same kind of boards now found on wagons used for hauling manure. But these wagons were not only used for hauling manure and grain, for when the farmer, together with wife and children, wanted to go to church, a wedding, etc., shorter boards were simply laid across the side-boards for seats and the family drove solemnly off to its destination.

3. At harvest-time most of the farmers had to depend upon the scythe for cutting their grain and many even for cutting their grass. Where sons and daughters had not yet grown up, many a housewife had to take their infants and other small children with them into the field where, all day long, she would follow her husband, tying the cut grain into sheaves, later stacking these in shocks together with her husband. When the sons and daughters had grown up they took the place of their mother and father. At the age of fourteen they began to regard themselves as fully competent workers. Children aged ten and younger would pull a "drag-rake", a rake about five feet wide, in front of which they were hitched, in order to collect the scattered stems of grain. Constant injury to their bare feet from the grain and weed stubble was the worst part of this work. Bringing in the hay was much more enjoyable since the hayfields were softer and the temperature cooler. However, even the more difficult harvest work was done with more or less pleasure. The old folks knew well for whom they were working and the sons and daughters considered it an honor, — for John ("Jehan") to be a full-fledged cutter ("en Hauer"), for Tina ("Trienke") to be a full-fledged binder ("ne Bingersche") who followed on the heels of father or brother and with flushed face and sparkling eyes teasingly called out: „Father," or "John, let's have more!" "Well, Tina you shall have enough!" And now, Tina (or Nettie, Mary, Sara, Justina, etc.) get at it! And she did. Yes, our fathers and mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers worked hard, many of them too early in life and too hard. Many choleric fourteen to sixteen year-olds ruined themselves for life, and many of us, their descendants, have inherited their weaknesses and gained dull teeth from the sour grapes our fathers ate. This is the darker side of the "good old days" of our colonies! But Tina and John did not think about such things. It was a matter of pride if father "with his Annie," or "Henry and Nettie" had "cut and bound a whole dessiatine!" This was as honorable then as getting the top grade in school today.<sup>28</sup>

## 7.08 A comparison of Russian and Manitoba Mennonite farmers, 1910.

This chapter will conclude with a comparative examination of the Russian Mennonite farmer and the Manitoba Mennonite farmer in 1910. The work of historian Peter M. Friesen contains a graphic description of the implements of the Russian Mennonite "Vollwirt" in the year 1910.

"Today, the Mennonites of Chortitzta, Molotschna and their daughter colonies, believe that every farmer must own a large number of good horses: five for the plow, two for the harrow and another one or two for driving back and forth. He must also have an open wagon, or *oboianka*, with steel springs, which, in case of necessity, can carry six not too "heavy" people while springing properly and running as easily as possible on its axles, and a covered buggy on springs with glass doors "in case of rain," or for more distant trips to visit in the more remote colonies or landed estates, which one cannot yet reach by rail. Naturally, there must be several "Britschkas" — heavy wagons — which one has "shortened" to spread manure, transport grain to the railway,

the city or the *Pristani* (river port), or has "extended" into huge hayracks according to the old West Prussian models and improved by the Americans. The land is tilled with iron plows, having one or more bottoms, of Russian, German, English and American, though most often of indigenous Mennonite origin. Grass and grain are mowed with machines. The scythe is only used occasionally and that incidentally in order to cut the grass in a corner or mow weeds. Horse-drawn rakes and seeders are used. One can hardly imagine a farmer any longer without a horse-powered threshing machine, not to speak of the large land owners and renters where one or more steam threshers are deemed indispensable. The "threshing stone" (*Uutfahrsteen*), a stone cylinder with deep ridges turning on a metal axle and drawn by a pair of horses, often on a round threshing floor in a shed or more often out in the open, sometimes in small and sometimes in larger circles, which threshes the grain spread out on the floor, was once considered an innovation in the steppes but is now used only by the very small landowners. The heavy handwork that remains to be done is performed largely by servants and maids from the Poltava region and the other central provinces or also "Mordwines".<sup>29</sup>

The foregoing description of the farm of a Russian Mennonite "Vollwirt" would compare favourably with that of a somewhat above-average Kleine Gemeinde farmer on the Mennonite East Reserve at about the same time. However the American counterpart had to be more mechanized in his whole operation as labour was a much more expensive factor. Horse-powered threshing machines were completely unknown among the Kleine Gemeinde by 1910, whereas they still seem to be the standard equipment of the Russian Mennonite "Vollwirt". In fact, steam powered threshing machines became common among the Kleine Gemeinde farmers in Blumenort and Steinbach by the 1880s and 1890s. By 1910 the Blumenhof/Blumenort district alone had four tractor style steam engine threshing and plowing outfits to service an area of some 30 farmers with considerable custom work being done for the surrounding English and French population.

A somewhat above-average farmer in this same district would have had about a dozen good horses, about four more than his Russian Mennonite "Vollwirt" counterpart. Other reports<sup>30</sup> indicate that a reaper with a hand style delivery system, i.e. manually throwing the grain off the reaper in sheave bundles was not in common use among the Russian Mennonites until the end of the 1880s. The use of such a reaper is reported in the Manitoba village of Blumenhof in 1878 but with the remark that it was a complete oddity and not seen or used later.<sup>31</sup> According to Johan R. Dueck (1863-1937) mechanical mowers were purchased by the Kleine Gemeinde pioneers in Gruenfeld, Manitoba, in 1874, the year of settlement.<sup>31a</sup> The foregoing are a few comparative comments respecting the state of technology among the Russian Mennonites as compared to particular Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde settlements in Manitoba in 1910.

It must be recognized that there was good reason for the superior mechanization of the Manitoba Mennonite farmer. He operated under much less favourable circumstances and accordingly had to utilize every means at his disposal to remain competitive. The operations of the Russian Mennonite "Vollwirt" were simple. Utilizing an ample supply of Mennonite "Anwohner" labour, supplemented during the busy seasons by Russian servants, he put his crop into the ground and harvested it again cheaply with his inexhaustible labour supply making up for his lack of capital investment. Not so for those who moved to North America in the 1870s. Reports such as those of the prestigious Consul Cornelius Jansen, indicate that the emigrants were already warned about the comparative scarcity and high cost of labour in America.<sup>32</sup> From the very first the only labour of the 1870s emigrant was to be the sweat of his own brow and that of his sons.

Vast differences also existed in the marketing of the farmers produce. The Russian Mennonite farmer normally did not have to worry about marketing his crop at all. Eager merchants were happy to purchase his produce right off his own yard and also to haul it away.<sup>33</sup> By comparison the East Reserve farmer had to haul his produce over 40 miles of unimproved road to Winnipeg. This situation was alleviated in 1905 when the C.P.R. built its track through Giroux some 10 miles distant. Even here the East Reserve farmer received only a small price compared to the Russian Mennonite farmer whose grain was only 70 miles away from the seaport of Berdjansk where it was already much closer to the top paying world markets. A final difference of course was the vastly milder climate with which the Mennonite colonies in South Russia had been blessed. Not only was the crop of the East Reserve farmer subject to greater risks because of the shorter growing season, but the farmer himself had the same amount of field and crop work to do in a season which was almost two months shorter.



Finally, a comparative look at farm sizes. Peter M. Friesen indicates that in 1910 there were not quite 4000 "Vollwirte" (i.e. with the full village farm of 178 acres) among some 16,000 Russian Mennonite families. The total Russian Mennonite population in 1910 was 100,000. There were approximately 300 larger farmers and estate owners.<sup>34</sup> The remaining 12,000 families presumably were small farmers, fruit and vegetable growers, and also included the thousands of "Anwohner" labourers who worked in the large factories situated in or near the Mennonite colonies. Peter M. Friesen cites statistics to the effect that the average Mennonite family in Russia in 1910 owned about 130 acres. This includes all the newly-purchased undeveloped lands in Siberia and in other new settlements. Almost a third of this land was owned by about 300 farmers owning anywhere from 102 (about 270 acres) *desjateinen* to 6844 (about 18,000 acres) *desjateinen*.<sup>35</sup> Thus the actual average land ownership per Russian Mennonite family would be more in the range of 80 acres per family.

It is difficult to find valid comparative statistics for the Manitoba Mennonites. First of all the status of "Anwohner" was relatively unknown among the Manitoba Mennonites except perhaps for a older couple or a handful of employees in a rising Mennonite trade centre such as Steinbach. The West Reserve would be more suitable for comparison with the Russian Mennonite farming community as it was more orientated towards the grain farming economy. Nevertheless available statistics show that the average farm size in the East Reserve in 1900 was around 250 acres per farm. Almost every Mennonite family would own at least a homestead of 160 acres. Certainly the opportunity to start farming was open to any young Manitoba Mennonite lad with a desire to do so. Consequently there was excellent upward social mobility.

Improved or cultivated acreage was about 45 acres per farm with the Blumenort area leading with 62 acres per farm. Although the cultivated land of the average East Reserve farmer would have been somewhat less than half of that of the Russian Mennonite "Vollwirt", it must be remembered that the average East Reserve farmer was a mixed farmer who also had a small dairy, a few hogs, etc. The 1900 statistics show that the average farmer in the Kleine Gemeinde district of Blumenort/Blumenhof had 4.5 horses, and 6.8 cows.<sup>36</sup> It should also be remembered that these figures compare the average farmer or average Mennonite family in this Kleine Gemeinde district with that of the Russian Mennonite "Vollwirt" who was generally regarded as being near the pinnacle of his society representing the top twenty-five per cent of his society in socio-economic terms.

The above figures are put forward subject to the reservation that they are intended to serve as an approximate statistical comparison. The Kleine Gemeinde district considered was probably one of the more well-to-do in the East Reserve. On the other hand the West Reserve included many very prosperous grain growing areas. However these figures do show that the two societies were not that different in terms of total wealth. This was notwithstanding that the 1870s emigrants had often been forced to sell their properties at sacrifice prices of less than a third of market value.

In addition it can be noted that a major difference in the two societies is that among the Russian Mennonites the majority of the wealth is owned by about a quarter of the population. In America such differences were relatively unknown at the time. Nor was there a class consciousness among Manitoba Mennonite farmers so that a more established farmer with say 1000 acres, would refuse to associate with a less-well-to-do farmer with only 100 or only 10 acres. This concludes this consideration of agriculture in the Molotschna colony.

## FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER SEVEN. AGRICULTURE.

1. H. Goetz, *op.cit.*, 16.
2. Dr. David G. Rempel, *The Mennonite Colonies in New Russia*. Doctoral Dissertation, Stanford University, 1933, 124.
3. *Ibid.*, 125.
4. Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 183.
5. Dr. David G. Rempel, *op.cit.*, 126-127.
6. *Ibid.*, 128.
7. Dr. Cornelius Krahn, "Agriculture among the Mennonites in Russia" *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Volume One, 24.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 181.
10. *History and Events*, *op.cit.*, 101.
11. Walter Quiring, "Johann Cornies", *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Volume One, 716.
12. H. Goetz, *op.cit.*, 46.
13. D. Paul Miller, *A Case Study of Jansen, Nebraska*, Doctoral Dissertation. University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1953, 78-80.

14. Dr. David G. Rempel, *op.cit.*, 170-171.
15. *Ibid.*, 173.
16. Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 199.
17. David H. Epp, *Johan Cornies* (Echo-Verlag, Rosthern, Saskatchewan, 1945), 128.
18. *Ibid.*, 138.
- 18a. See James Urry, *op.cit.*, 411-412. For a discussion of this point.
19. Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 135.
20. *Ibid.*, 198.
21. Franz Isaac, *op.cit.*, 15-16.
22. Plett Picture Book, *op.cit.*, 17.
23. John C. Reimer, editor, *Reimer Familien register* (Selfpublished, Steinbach, Manitoba, 1958), 53.
24. Peter W. Toews, "Aus Meinem Leben", (Steinbach Post, September 6, 1944, courtesy of Margaret Krocker/Mennonite Genealogy, Winnipeg, Manitoba).
25. *History and Events, op.cit.*, 94.
26. Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 181.
27. Peter W. Toews, "Aus Meinem Leben", *op.cit.*
28. Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 176-179.
29. *Ibid.*, 175-176.
30. Dr. David G. Rempel, *op.cit.*, 250.
31. Rev. Abraham B. Klassen, *Lebens Erfahrung*, (Swallow, Alberta, Unpublished Memoirs), (Courtesy of Mennonite Heritage Centre and Mr. Dick B. Eids, Rosenort, Manitoba).
- 31a. **Das 60-Jaehrige Jublaem der Mennonitischen Ost-Reserve**, (Warte-Verlag, Steinbach, Manitoba, 1935), 19. See also Rev. Abram P. Isaac in "Erinnerungen", John C. Reimer, editor, *75 Gedenkfeier der Mennonitischen Einwanderung in Manitoba* (Festkomitee der Mennonitischen Ostreserve, Steinbach, Manitoba, 1949), 110-111, where Abram Isaac reports that reapers were purchased in 1878 which delivered unbound bundles of grain to the side of the reaper. These bundles were then bound manually. The fully developed binders were purchased in 1882. Each village in the East Reserve had one or more threshing machines. The first such machine was purchased in 1876 by Steinbacher Abram S. Friesen (nephew of Johann Friesen the third Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde) together with neighbour John Carlton. Abram S. Friesen (1848-1916) was also the owner of the first upright stationary steam engine which he purchased in 1877. Other similar engines were purchased by Voigt in Chortitz and Peter W. Toews and sons in Blumenort in 1878. These stationary steam engines quickly became a standard fixture in every village. In 1889 Abram S. Friesen purchased the first tractor style steam engine. The tractor steam engine was in general use in the East Reserve by the end of the 1890s.
32. G.R. Gaeddert and G.E. Reimer, *Exiled by the Czar* (Mennonite Publication Office, Newton, Kansas, 1956), 45-46.
33. John W. Dueck, *History and Events, op.cit.*, 101.
34. Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 879. Using the general average of 5 members per Mennonite family the number of Mennonite families in Russia in 1910 would be more like 20,000. This would mean that only one in five families belonged to the "Vollwirt" class.
35. *Ibid.*, 865. It might be noted that these estate owners undoubtedly included many who were Mennonite in name only in order to take advantage of economic privileges of the legal status of being a Mennonite Colonist. In America there was total freedom in this regard so that many well-to-do descendants of Mennonites could leave their Mennonite background at will and blend into North American society. Consequently the land ownership of such individuals in America would not be included in the statistics as they were in Russia.
36. Dr. John Warkentin, *The Mennonite Settlements of Southern Manitoba*, Doctoral Dissertation, University of Toronto, 1960, 179-182.

# Chapter Eight.

## Government Administration

### 8.00 Introduction.

For the purpose of government administration the Russian Mennonites had special legal status as foreign colonists together with the Germans and other European settlers. Among this classification the Mennonites were only a small minority. The invitation which Katherine the Great made to the Mennonites had also been extended to other groups and was accepted in large numbers by the Germans. Between the years 1764 and 1767, some 7000 German colonists had responded to this invitation and settled in the Volga region north-east of the Black Sea.<sup>1</sup> By comparison, the total Mennonite emigration from Prussia prior to 1809 only totalled some 800 families. The total population of the German colonists in Russia eventually reached a peak of some two million.<sup>2</sup>

These colonists were invited to Russia for the specific purpose of opening new lands which Russia had recently gained in conquest or otherwise and they were not to be treated as ordinary Russian citizens. In fact, self-government was one of the promises of the 1763 Manifesto of Katherine the Great and administrative machinery was established in order to govern these Colonists. The result of this special legal status was the creation of a veritable state within a state. In terms of the Russian Mennonites this has been referred to as "The Mennonite Commonwealth". This chapter will deal with a number of matters related to this administrative system. The relationship between the nonresistant Christian and the state, the local and district governmental systems, and the institutions of the Mennonites themselves will also be considered.

### 8.01 The Kontor and the Instruktion.

First, a review of the administrative machinery by which the Mennonites in Russia were governed. Dr. Adam Giesinger is one of the foremost experts with respect to the history of the Germans in Russia and much of the following is based on his work. In his authoritative study, entitled **From Katherine to Krushchew** Dr. Giesinger has presented a clear outline of the system which regulated the German colonists and Mennonites.

The government department which was established to administer the new foreign settlers and the colonization program in general was called the **Vormundschaftskanzlei, or Tutelkanzlei, fuer Auslaender**, i.e. Guardianship Council for Foreigners. This supervisory body had its headquarters in St. Petersburg, but because the German colonists in South Russia were so far distant, it was deemed advisable to set up an administrative office nearer to the colonists. This office, or Kontor, of the Guardianship Council was set up in Saratov on the Volga River, in 1766. The Kontor, as it was known among the Mennonites and other colonists, consisted of the following officers: "an Ober-richter (chief judge) and two members, assisted by a secretary, a bookkeeper, a translator, and a surveyor with the right to employ such other personnel as might be needed."<sup>3</sup>

In addition, the government issued an "Instruktion" in 1769 which set out the regulations and jurisdiction of the Guardianship Council and also guidelines to govern the day to day affairs of the colonists in great detail. Dr. Giesinger characterizes these "Instruktionen" as follows:

"This 'Instruktion' is an example of paternalism gone to extremes. It concerned itself not only with the colonists' problems in the temporal order but also with their spiritual welfare. It insisted on regular attendance at religious services, pious performance of religious duties, and sober moral behavior at all times. It instructed the clergy on their work. It told the colonists, many of them experienced farmers who were supposed to serve as models for the natives, what crops to grow, how to cultivate the land, when to sow and when to reap. It showed great concern regarding the leisure time the colonists might have in the winter months and recommended useful activities to keep them occupied. It aimed to prevent wasteful travel by requiring a passport even for a trip to the nearest city. So on and on, not forgetting detailed instructions to the officials regarding punishment to fit each crime!

"A section of the 'Instruktion' was devoted to the election of colonist officials and their duties. Each village was required to elect an overseer (Vorsteher or Schulz) and two assistants. These had authority to collect taxes for local purposes and to deal with minor litigation and petty crime in the village, but their main task was to enforce the ordinances of the 'Instruktion'. This required them to supervise every activity of the colonists' daily life and to punish those guilty of deviations from the norm, by fines, whipping, forced labor, or imprisonment on bread and water. To see to it that the Schulz and his assistants carried out their duties to the letter there was the District Commissar and behind him stood

the Kontor in Saratov.

"The colonists protested many details of the 'Instruktion' as infringing on the promised privilege of self-government, but their protests availed nothing. The initiative-stifling regulations were enforced and often in the most arbitrary way by harsh and corrupt Kontor officials with no sympathy for the colonists."<sup>4</sup>

## 8.02 A revised Kontor, 1797.

Naturally such regulations were considered too stifling by many of the colonists. However when Katherine the Great abolished the Kanzlei and Kontor in 1782 and put the colonists under the jurisdiction of the general Russian administration in the area a great outcry arose. Notwithstanding that the Kontor sometimes governed badly, these officials at least spoke German and were familiar with the needs of the colonists. Thus the Kanzlei and Kontor were re-established in 1797. This became the agency under which the Mennonites in Russia were governed until the Kontor was abolished in the 1870's. In 1802 the Kontor was placed under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior, and in 1837 it was transferred to the Ministry of Crown Domains. Dr. Giesinger explains the function of the new Kontor as follows:

"The restored Kontor regime was not quite the same as the original. The institution of District Commissars was abolished and was replaced by district officials elected by the colonists, an Obervorsteher (Oberschulze) and two or more assistants, and an appointed district secretary (Schreiber), for each of the ten districts into which the German Volga region was then divided. This district government had the duty of collecting taxes for the crown, as well as the crown loan repayments; it acted as a higher court for colonist litigation; it had to supervise the work of the village governments in its area; and it was held responsible for the moral behavior, the religious practice, and the farm management of the colonists under its jurisdiction. Respecting all of these matters it was held accountable to the Kontor in Saratov, to which it had to submit frequent reports and from which it received a constant stream of orders and advice.

"Early in the reign of Nicholas I, the government decided that the Volga Germans were being governed by a dangerously liberal system. To overcome this deficiency District Inspectors were appointed to supervise the work of district and village officials. Such an Inspector was to see that the laws were enforced; he was to visit the colonists in his district frequently and without warning; he had authority to arrest people stirring up disaffection against the government; and he was to keep an alert eye for secret meetings. Since the Volga Germans were an exceptionally law-abiding group and very loyal to the Tsar, these special police duties were not too onerous. Most of the District Inspectors did little except use their position to enrich themselves at the expense of the colonists."<sup>5</sup>

On 1800 a Kontor was also established in Ekaterinoslaw specifically for the purpose of administering the foreign colonists who had recently settled in the region north of the Black Sea and also in anticipation of the large numbers of colonists who were shortly to emigrate to Russia. This of course included the Chortitz Mennonite colony and the Molotschna colony which was to be established four years later. Dr. Giesinger expands on the workings of the Kontor:

"As in the Volga region, an 'Instruktion' was issued for the guidance of the officials and their subjects. Like the corresponding Volga document it prescribed in great detail how the colonists were to live and work. The first section was devoted to the religious duties of the colonists and those of their clergy; a much more lengthy second section dealt with the election of village and district officials and their duties. As in the case of their Volga counterparts, these officials had the onerous task of constant supervision of their people to assure that they lived frugally and soberly, went to church regularly, and worked hard from daybreak to dark, both summer and winter. Frivolity, idleness, wastefulness, and all other forms of immorality were to be eradicated from colonist life!"<sup>6</sup>

## 8.03 The Supervisory-Committee in Odessa, 1818.

By 1818 there were over 100 German colonies scattered over the Black Sea region, so that the Russian government considered it necessary to reorganize the Kontor into a more efficient body. Accordingly the Kontor was abolished and a new body established. This was the **Fuersorgekomitee fuer die auslaendische Ansiedler im Suedlichen Russland**. i.e. "Committee to look after the interests of the foreign settlers in southern Russia" or "Supervisory Committee". From 1818 to 1822 the headquarters of this body were in Ekaterinoslaw, and in Kishinev in Bessarabia from 1822 to 1833. The district offices were in Odessa, Ekaterinoslaw and Kishinev. After 1833 the regional offices were discontinued and the working of the Supervisory committee centered in Odessa. We again turn to Dr. Giesinger for a description of the jurisdiction of the Supervisory Committee. "The colonies subject to the Committee, mainly German but including a few Bulgarian and Jewish, were scattered over the four southern governments: Bassarabia, Kherson, Ekaterinoslaw and Taurida. For ad-

ministrative purposes they were split up into nine inspectoral districts, each with a resident Inspector, agent of the Fürsorgekomite. In the 1850's, of a total of 217 colonies under the jurisdiction of the Committee, 205 were German.<sup>7</sup>

Dr. Giesinger evaluates the administrative capability of the Supervisory Committee fairly favourably. Although the system was able to provide forceful leadership it did have disadvantages:

"The greatest weakness of the government system imposed on the German colonies in Russia was its stifling of initiative, its stress on conformity, its insistence on forcing all into the same mold. Methods justified perhaps for the lowest-grade human material were applied indiscriminately to all. This may have converted potential failures into near-successes, but it crushed the imaginative and the ingenious who might have led the way to better economic and political methods.

"One of the factors that vitiated to a large degree the element of democracy in the system was the fact that the village and district officials elected by the colonists had to be 'confirmed' by the Saratov Kontor in the Volga region or by the Fürsorgekomite in the south. The bureaucrats who held the whip hand in this way preferred properly subservient colonist officials and occasionally refused confirmation or deposed officeholders who showed too much independence.

"However, the separate administration, with all its weaknesses, because of its separateness, did have an advantage from the colonists' point of view. It helped them to preserve their German character, the culture they had brought with them. If their colonies had been incorporated into the Russian administrative structures from the beginning russification would undoubtedly have taken place to a considerable extent in a century."<sup>8</sup>

#### 8.04 The German servants of the Czar.

Fortunately, the Black Sea Kontor, and later the Supervisory Committee, was blessed with gifted administrators who were usually also from a German background and who were sympathetic to the needs of the colonists in general and the Mennonites in particular. In his authoritative work **From Katherine to Kruschew** Dr. Adam Giesinger has explained how military, technical, and administrative experts of German background were drawn into advisory positions and positions of leadership by the efforts of Peter the Great to modernize Russia in the early part of the 17th century. These German servants of the Czar played an important role in Russia for a period of two centuries which was ended by the Revolution in 1917. In the process these German administrators, many of whom were of Baltic Lutheran background, formed what could be characterized as a caste of professional administrators similar to the caste of professional military officers and administrators which developed in 19th century Prussia. It was from this group that many of the men who administered the Russian Mennonite Colonies were drawn. These men were usually devoted to a sound and honest government and generally had a sincere interest in the Mennonites and their advancement in the future.<sup>9</sup>

The first head of the Ekaterinoslaw Kontor created in 1800 was Samuel Contentius. He served as head of the Kontor from 1800 to 1818 and then as advisor to General Insov, who was the first president of the Supervisory Committee. Dr. Giesinger had characterized the administration of Contentius as follows: "His sympathetic handling of the problems of the colonization period contributed greatly to the successful establishment of the German Black Sea Colonies". In addition to his role in the establishment of the German colonies, Contentius is credited with arranging for the fruit culture and supervising the silk and wine industries. He laid the foundation of the future prosperity of the German settlements in the Black Sea region and particularly that of the Molotschna. The Agricultural Society under Johan Cornies was founded under his initiative and Cornies greatly admired Contentius and his ideals. Contentius devoted himself to his task until his death in 1830. It is symbolic of Contentius and the type of professional administrator he represented that his loyalty and devotion to his subjects continued even after his death, as he bequeathed his estate for the building of schools and churches.<sup>10</sup>

Other administrators of note included General Ivan Insov, who was the first president of the Supervisory Committee when it was established in 1818, and in which position he continued until 1845. The "eternal Insov", as he was known by the colonists, was sympathetic to their problems but to the detriment of the colonists, he grew neglectful in his later years.<sup>11</sup> Another exceptional leader of the Supervisory Committee was Eugen von Hahn, who became acting president of the Supervisory Committee in 1841, and finally replaced Insov in 1845.<sup>12</sup> Dr. Giesinger states that von Hahn "was an exceptionally effective leader, who revitalized local government, promoted better farming practices, and initiated improvements in the school system. Along with Contentius, Hahn holds a place of special honour in the tradition of the Black Sea Colonists."<sup>13</sup> As the reader will discover, Hahn played a special role in the life of the Kleine Gemeinde.

Eduard von Totleben was another outstanding German Baltic servant of the Czar with whom the Russian Mennonites were to become involved. Totleben was an army engineering captain who rose to prominence for his brilliant leadership during the Crimean War. Totleben rose rapidly in the Russian civil service and, as a friend of the Czar, it was he who was sent to the Mennonites in 1874 to persuade them not to emigrate. In 1878, he was appointed Governor-General of Southern Russia and left happy memories of his term in office.<sup>14</sup>

### 8.05 The German administrators and their Mennonite colonists.

As trained and professional administrators, these men were familiar with the beliefs and practices of the people they were to rule. It appears that they had a sincere empathy, respect, and love for their subjects. To the shame of the Mennonites they were frequently more familiar with the teachings of the Anabaptist-Mennonites than many of the Mennonite leaders themselves. It is reported that the shelves of the government administration were filled with the records of the disputes and quarrels of the Russian Mennonites.<sup>16</sup> These battles commenced from the time of the first settlements of Chortitza and the disgrace of the deputies Bartsch and Hoepfner. The exile of Aeltester Heinrich Wiens, the Halbstaedt church dispute, the "Barley" dispute, and the "landless" dispute, were only prominent examples of the numerous occasions on which the Russian Mennonites had completely lost sight of Anabaptist-Mennonite principles.

Time and time again the administrators had to step in and restore peace among the Mennonites. On occasion these professionals were even prepared to lecture the delegates who appeared before them on the fine points of evangelical doctrine. This was the case in a particular instance during the landless dispute of the 1870's when a delegate representing the Mennonite establishment arrived in St. Petersburg to submit a petition. The official to whom he was directed was Hayden who also happened to be a German Count. Count Hayden then proceeded to give the delegate a discourse on the unchristian conduct of the Mennonites. Historian Peter M. Friesen has referred to the report which the no doubt startled delegate gave to his brethren back in the Molotschna:

"The minister, at this point, became highly incensed. He showed these shelves with their mass of records to (the delegate) and asked him if he thought that no one in St. Petersburg knew of the unchristian partisanship, enmity and injustice among the Mennonites?—if enough of their shame had not already been brought into the capital city?—if this is the way those practice Christianity who claim to live precisely by the gospel? Then the minister went into his chamber, brought out a German Bible (!) (apparently kept in readiness for such a situation since the matter had been introduced earlier) and proceeded to read before the stunned (delegate) from the first part of the sixth chapter of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. And he expounded it with a clarity and a holy solemnity which made (the delegate) feel as though he were hearing the very first sermon of his life! The sermon had results."<sup>16</sup>

There must have been many occasions when these administrators simply had to shake their heads in amazement when various Mennonite groups came with their requests for special privileges or for a ruling in their favour by the Supervisory Committee. It must have been difficult even for an experienced or trained administrator to keep a straight face during such times as the "landless" dispute when representatives of certain factions of the establishment tried any means, including bribery, to obtain continued government support for their fraudulent mistreatment of their fellow Confessionists. In fact it must have been a relief for men like Contenius or Totleben when they discovered that there were actually a few groups still left among the Russian Mennonites who were not only Mennonites when some valuable right or privilege was being challenged or withdrawn, but who also actually attempted to live out the teachings of their forefathers in the faith. It appears that the Anabaptist-Mennonite groups were invariably treated with the utmost respect when they came into contact with the government.

### 8.06 Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe meets with Totleben.

An excellent example of this respect on the part of the Russian authorities is seen during the emigration period in the 1870's. Gerhard Wiebe the Aeltester of the Bergthaler Gemeinde, describes some of the meetings which occurred in his memorable book *Ursachen und Geschichte der Auswanderung der Mennoniten aus Russland nach America*. Wiebe explains how one of the delegates from the Chortitza Colony, a certain Epp, tried to ridicule the Bergthaler delegation at every step of the way. Apparently Epp expected to find favour in the eyes of the Russian leaders like General von Totleben by so doing. This eminence of Russian Mennonite society appears to have been very amazed when General Totleben, in meeting with the Mennonite delegates in Yalta, personally interviewed the "lowly and humble" Aeltester Wiebe from Bergthal and not himself. Epp and others

like him could not understand that to a man like Toleben, a year or two more or less of formal education made absolutely no difference. A war-scarred general looked at the quality of the man and was not impressed with the type of vanity and pride displayed by Epp.

Aeltester Wiebe describes what happened at the meeting in Yalta when it was announced that he was to be interviewed by Toleben; “When the hour had come, I left. My path led through a hallway past the rooms of the other, and I heard my friend Epp say, ‘Today his legs will tremble and his mouth will not be able to speak!’ I did not hold these words against him but felt all the more humble, and during these last few steps I still had to take, I quietly implored my heavenly Father for help, strength and support, and the merciful Father saw my fear and heard my supplications, for when I appeared before the general all my fear and alarm was gone.”<sup>17</sup> Fortunately, Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe has recorded a number of instances where the philosophy which he represented and that of Epp went before the Russian government authorities. At a meeting in Halbstaedt in May of 1874 at which both Epp and Wiebe were present a brief difference arose over the distance between the Bergthal Colony and the Chortitz Colony. Aeltester Wiebe describes this incident as follows: “Then he (Toleben) asked, ‘How far is it to Chortitz?’ ‘Almost 200 verst,’ I answered. Thereupon friend Epp said, ‘That is not so, it isn’t that far!’ Then I, poor man, forgetting that we were standing before the general and Governor, turned to my friend and said, ‘you should not accuse me of lying’. ‘I did not say it is but rather it is almost 200 verst because it is 190 verst to Chortitz, and ten verst is taken up by the Dnieper’. ‘How then have I lied?’ When I turn again to the general, he was holding his handkerchief in front of his mouth.”

The incident was not yet over. Aeltester Wiebe records that during a further exchange his friend Epp again wanted to be the spokesperson for the group, in reply to which Toleben said to him, “Please wait till you are asked.”<sup>18</sup> The mutual respect evident in this encounter will also become apparent in the history of the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites.

## 8.08 The Anabaptist-Mennonite and The State.

The teaching of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith was that the State and its administration was to be cheerfully obeyed in all matters not contrary to scripture. Compliance with the requirements of the government was to be more than a passive and hollow fulfilling of the laws of the Land, but rather a willing and eager satisfaction of the smallest details of the regulations and also the wishes of the government and its administrators. Aeltester Abraham Friesen makes this point very clearly in his **Einfache Erklarung** which was published in 1845 to rebut and silence the critics of the Kleine Gemeinde. In this writing Aeltester Friesen refers to the moral decay on the one hand and to the departure from Anabaptist-Mennonite (evangelical) principles on the other. He then proceeds to plead that if these so-called Mennonites did not wish to be obedient to the Word of God, at least they should pay heed to the express intention of the Russian government at the time of inviting the Mennonites to Russia, which was that they were to be model citizens. Aeltester Friesen articulates his position as follows:

“Only few pay more heed to the Word of the Lord, Psalm 81, 12, than to the original and earnest will of our Monarch which was expressed to us by the Director and Curator Lord Trappe, who was personally appointed by His most Gracious Majesty and Sovereign the Czar. This most eminent writing contains the following three exhortative points: Firstly, that in so far as possible the Mennonites be concerned that they have good teachers (Lehrer) and spiritual shepherds who will see to the well-being of their souls and to the pious daily conduct of their charges, so that we will in Russia also let our light so shine before men that they will see our good works and glorify our Father in Heaven. Matthew 5, 16. Secondly, that we would be on guard, so that no sheep with scabs might come among the herd, nor that wicked sheep living in gross sins, such as people given over to drunkenness, might come into our fellowship, and on account of which the good name of the Mennonites in Russia would be disgraced. That we shall at all times harbour only Love and Trust for our most Honourable Benefactor, in the firm assurance that, until and with his last breath of life, he will be a true friend and patron of the well-being of all pious Mennonites.”<sup>20</sup>

By this quote Aeltester Friesen no doubt intended to point out the promise by the Czar of Russia to have a benevolent interest in affairs of the Mennonites if they lived up to their name. Aeltester Friesen expands on this point:

“Do note, true reader, how the Gracious Lord has turned the goodwill and love of such a prominent and eminent man in our favour. For among other things the Honourable Mr. Trappe also attests that his Majesty was moved to tears, when he had to take leave from such individuals who had earlier expressed their love to him with tear-filled eyes. Beloved reader, you can well imagine that many earlier glorious Monarchs, as well as some

who are also alive today, wish to promote our eternal well-being and good fortune here in Russia. But one must stand by in shame when such a licentious, glorious, vain, proud, life of the flesh is lived out from our part. And what is more, that so much is stealthily infiltrating among the Mennonites, . . . .”<sup>21</sup>

A similar view is expressed by Peter Toews, the Aeltester of the Manitoba East Reserve Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde, more than three decades later. Here follows a brief extract from a sermon which Toews made at the time of a visit to the Eastern Mennonite Reserve in Manitoba on August 21, 1877 by Lord Dufferin, the Governor General of the Dominion of Canada. Dufferin in his visit was overwhelmed by the progress the Mennonites had made in developing the barren waste land in three short years. In his memorable speech, Lord Dufferin assured the Mennonite pioneers that if they had come to find a refuge where they would have freedom to practise their faith they had come to the right place. Aeltester Toews responded to these assurances in an address to his Gemeinde. This speech in turn has been preserved for posterity by Mr. Klaas C. Penner of Belize, who included an extract in his memoirs entitled **Ein Familie Buch**:

“. . . Indeed the Government of England had obtained the impression of the Mennonite Gemeinden, and now says to us, ‘We have heard that you are a God-fearing Gemeinde’. I believe that the government will have obtained this impression from earlier times. But would to God that the government would also obtain this impression from us: Would to God that a Government which in general regards the Mennonites as a God-fearing people and accordingly extends freedom to live in peace, would never have reason to revoke such freedom because of our lack of peacefulness.

“But what is one to say or think? Was it not the sins of our people which awakened the wrath of God and contributed to the ebbing away of our Privilegium in Russia? And in truth my beloved, everything will depend on us and our friends, as well as you in your youth, in our life and conduct and in our faithfulness. In short, that the government will not again so quickly revoke such freedoms to live out our faith will depend on us.

“If we will remain true to our beliefs and in the eyes of our government and its people, be a Gemeinde such as they have come to know from our fathers in the faith, then our God in Heaven will also watch over us and then the words which were given to us in the name of the Queen of England, will always remain in force over us, namely, ‘That under the flag which now waves over us, you will receive protection, peace, civil and religious freedom, and equal rights’.”<sup>22</sup>

This was the expressed view which the Anabaptist-Mennonite Gemeinde had of the State. How did the theory work out in practice? Later in this work a number of instances will be examined where the Kleine Gemeinde, came into contact with the Russian government and its administrators, through conflict and otherwise.

## 8.09 District and Village Organization.

The local and district governments and institutions of the Mennonites influenced their lives on a daily basis. For the purposes of regional government Russia was divided into provinces (or “governments”). The region where the Mennonites lived in Southern Russia was divided into three provinces. These were the following: Taurida, in which the Molotschna and Crimea were located; Ekaterinoslaw, in which Chortitza and later Borosenko and Markuslandt were located; Kherson, in which the Zagradovka villages were located and which lay south west of Ekaterinoslaw province and west of Taurida province.

For county or municipal government each province was divided into Wollost districts, although the German word “Gebietsamt” was more commonly used. Thus, for example, the Molotschna villages (or colonies as they were sometimes called) together were constituted as the Halbstaedt Wollost. The Gebietsamt or Wollost office was located in the village of Halbstaedt. In 1870, a second Wollost district was formed, consisting of the south-eastern portion of the Molotschna settlement with the seat of government located in the village of Gnadefeld.

Each of the villages in turn formed a unit of local administration with a village assembly composed of one representative from each farm and the village officials, which consisted of a Schulz (mayor), two Beisitzer (assistants), and a clrk. The Schulz and Beisitzer were elected by majority vote for a two year period. The Schulz was the pivotal figure in this scheme of local government. He represented the village at district meetings (Wollost), and before government officials. In addition to looking after roads, bridges, and general welfare, he and his assistants formed a court of first instance in many situations. The Schulz also enforced the numerous regulations which affected the life of the colonist.<sup>23</sup>

It might be noted again that the Kleine Gemeinde did not originally participate in these offices. Later they did so participate and even served in these offices. Two examples of Kleine Gemeinde



Schulzen are: Jakob W. Friesen (1808-1889) in the village of Blumstein, and Cornelius S. Plett (1820-1900) in the village of Kleefeld. No doubt there were more. Aeltester David P. Reimer (1894-1963) of Blumenort, Manitoba, has related that his grandfather Cornelius S. Plett (1820-1900) served as the Vorsteher (Schulz) of the village of Kleefeld, which was the second largest in the Molotschna. Plett had moved to the village of Kleefeld when it was founded in 1854. Aeltester David P. Reimer also noted that much paper work was involved in the performance of this office and that his mother, who was a gifted calligrapher, had been a great help to her father in this respect.<sup>24</sup>

One of the functions of the village Schulz was to see to the compliance with a very extensive form of building code and planning regulations. In this autobiography Rev. Cornelius L. Plett (1846-1935), a son of Cornelius S. Plett (1820-1900) provides an insight into the extent of these regulations:

“In the spring of 1854 the Molotschna village of Kleefeld was founded and the great-grandparents moved there as well now taking up a full farm in the village plan. Kleefeld was a large village of 40 establishments with farmsteads on both sides of the street. The Cornelius S. Pletts built on feuerstelle number 38. The buildings had to be constructed according to regulations which required that they be of the same size and constructed of mortared kilned bricks and a roof covered with plates of kilned clay. Barn and hayshed were joined to the dwelling house. Similarly the hay shed built across the end of the establishment was joined diagonally to the end of the barn. The barn in turn was joined to the house so that the whole establishment was under one roof. Except for one or two premises a fence of mortared kilned bricks had been built along the street.”<sup>25</sup>

Another report indicates that Jakob W. Friesen (1808-1889) served as the Schulz of the village of Blumstein a decade or so earlier, in 1843. Jakob Friesen was the son of Abraham Friesen, the second Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde. In a letter to his brother-in-law Rev. Heinrich Neufeld of the Grosze Gemeinde, Aeltester Friesen advises that his son has stated that a certain Epp has built his house higher out of his own desire and not because of the building regulations instituted by Johan Cornies.<sup>26</sup> The reference illustrates that these regulations became a very controversial issue among the Molotschna Mennonites even though they had been implemented for the well-being of all the colonists.

In fact the Kleine Gemeinde was the subject of much derision from the Grosze Gemeinde because of its policy of cooperation with Johan Cornies and the Agricultural Society. Indeed, they were regarded as the “anti-Christ” by some of the more reactionary Grosze Gemeinde people. This also provides a clue as to why the Kleine Gemeinde later again adopted a policy against the holding of such offices as during the 1860’s a village Schulz was frequently required to enforce the regulations of the Gebietsamt against the landless or against the adherents of the new pietist-influenced groups in the Molotschna. This frequently involved imposing a fine or imprisonment on these oppressed groups, which would have been against the conscience of the Kleine Gemeinde as well as other Anabaptist-Mennonites in the Molotschna.

## 8.10 Waisenverordung And Other Mutual Aid Institutions.

The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde participated fully in the general Brandordnung which was the mutual aid fire insurance system of the Mennonites. The Kleine Gemeinde also took part in the general Waisenverordung of the Molotschna Mennonite Colony. The Waisenverordung was a Mennonite mutual aid organization which managed the estates of widows and orphans.<sup>26a</sup> The shares of the surviving family were determined by the inheritance regulations of the Mennonites, whereby a widower, usually had to divest himself of one-half of his estate which then became the inheritance of his children. If such a widower subsequently remarried, his remaining share and any increase thereof could be inherited by his subsequent family.

The historical interests and concerns of Rev. John I. Penner (1893-1973) make it possible to present here two examples of this Mennonite form of devolution and settlement of estates. John I. Penner has preserved two documents<sup>27</sup> pertaining to the settlement of the estates of the first two wives of his grandfather Peter Penner (1813-1884).<sup>28</sup> Peter Penner was a member of the Kleine Gemeinde who originally farmed in the Molotschna village of Margenau. During the 1860’s he moved to the Kleine Gemeinde village of Rosenfeld in Borosenko where he farmed until 1874. He then emigrated to Manitoba where he settled in the village of Blumenort, five miles north of Steinbach.

These documents provide a valuable insight into the operation of the Waisenverordung and especially with respect to the Kleine Gemeinde relationship with this institution. The first wife of Peter Penner (1813-1884) was Margaretha Harms, a daughter of Johan Harms, who apparently owned village farm number 12 in Blumstein. Margaretha Harms was born in 1818 and died on December

18, 1846. The following document sets out the procedure which was followed in a situation such as this:

**Settlement of Inheritance (Theilungs-Verschreibung).**

“The settlement of the estate of Margaretha Penner, nee Harms, who died in Margenau as a married woman on December 18, 1846, was completed on January 4, 1847. The division of the estate was made between the surviving widower Peter Penner, and the four children which are the issue of his first marriage, namely; Peter age 7, Katharina age 6, Margaretha age 2, and Johan  $\frac{1}{4}$  years of age. This division was made in the presence of the duly appointed guardians, Peter Harms and Franz Kroeker, both from here; and the Schulzenamt from here; and also in the presence of the Waisen vorsteher Friesen from Friedensdorf. According to the tax assessment of the Schulzenamt, the Feuerstelle together with the buildings situated thereon is worth

	1050 Ruble
For livestock, household goods and furnishings	701 Ruble and 88 Kopck
Total	1751 Ruble and 88 Kopeken

Against the same are debts 1751 Ruble and 88 Kopeken. As the amount of the debt is equal to the value of the assets there is nothing available for distribution.

“The covenantor promises to raise the children in a Christian manner and without charge to provide the children with Sunday wear and everyday clothes. He also promises that he will earnestly send the children to school. In recompense the children are obligated to be helpful to their father on his enterprise (Wirtschaft) according to their capability. Should the children not be dealt with properly so that there would be reason to take the children away from their father, then the father will be obligated to pay for the upbringing of the children, 15 ruble per year for every child between the ages of 1 to 5 and 10 ruble per year for every child between the ages of 5 to 10 years.

Of his own volition, the covenantor also promises to give to each child:

1 head of livestock or	35 ruble
1 chest or	25 ruble
Total	60 ruble.

This voluntary contribution will be received by the children in the year that they reach the age of majority. This Settlement of Inheritance has been read and approved by all concerned and is hereby subscribed to by the hand of all the above mentioned parties.”

“Covenantor, Peter Penner. Guardians: Peter Harms and Franz Kroeker. Beisitzer: Isaak and Penner. And Waisenvorsteher Friesen.”

The foregoing indicates that the young 34 year old Peter Penner has not yet made a great deal of financial progress. The reader should bear in mind that Penner was relatively fortunate as by 1846 only one-third of the Molotschna Mennonite families were landowners at all. It might also be noted that the guardians both appear to be Kleine Gemeinde men. Harms, no doubt, was brother to the deceased Margaretha Penner, while Franz Kroeker was probably the father of Jakob M. Kroeker, who later served as the first Aeltester of the Scratching River Kleine Gemeinde in Manitoba.

However, Peter Penner (1813-1884) was known as a man who was able to make quick decisions and so we find that on January 26, 1847, he married Katharina Rempel (1828-1856). From an economic point of view this was a wise choice, for she was the daughter of Abraham Rempel, of Margenau, who was known to have been a very prosperous Kleine Gemeinde farmer. From the following document, it is certainly evident that Peter Penner had made substantial financial progress in the years after his second marriage. Unfortunately his second wife, Katharina Rempel, also died as a young woman leaving Penner as a widower with five more young children. Again a Settlement of Inheritance was made on behalf of the infant beneficiaries. This document provides as follows.

**Settlement of Inheritance (Theilungsverschreibung).**

“The settlement of the estate of the wife of Peter Penner, born Katharina Rempel, who died in Margenau, on July 4, 1856. This settlement of the estate was entered into and completed in the first day of August of this year between the surviving widower Penner and the infant children which are the issue of his second marriage, namely; Abraham 9 years, Martin 7 years, Aron 4 years, Cornelius 2 years, and Heinrich  $\frac{1}{2}$  year of age. Also party to this settlement were the duly appointed guardians of the infants, Martin Rempel, of Margenau, and Dirk Isaac, of Paulsheim, and the Schulzenamt from here as well as the Waisenamt from Paulsheim.

“According to the tax assessment of the Schulzenamt the entire estate of the covenantor less the loans applicable thereto, consists of 1440 ruble silver, written as one thousand four hundred and forty ruble, as there is no debt to be deducted. As everyone who is party to this settlement deems it to be just and valid, and as no one has any objection to make against the same, the covenantor shall keep the total estate to himself which is valued in accordance with the said tax. As the total estate consists of 1440 ruble, one-half or 720 ruble thereof belongs to the covenantor and the other one-half or 720 ruble thereof to the infant children.

"Everyone party to this distribution has taken into account that the three children of the first marriage shall share this inheritance equally with the children of the second marriage. Therefore this inheritance shall be divided into eight shares. Accordingly each child is entitled to 90 ruble silver as their inheritance from their mother. The covenantor is allowed to retain the capital of the infant beneficiaries in his farming operation (Wirtschaft) until the children attain the age of majority.

"In exchange the covenantor promises to raise the children in a Christian manner and to provide them with nourishment, Sunday and everyday wear, and linen without charge. He also promises to earnestly (gehoerig) send the children to school. In exchange the children are obligated to render reverence and obedience and in accordance with their capability to be of assistance to their father in his enterprise until they are of age.

"Should it occur that the children are not treated properly in the home so that they cannot remain, and that in consequence they have to be taken away, then the covenantor is obligated to pay 15 ruble per year for every child between the ages of 1 to 5 years, 10 ruble per year for every child between the ages 5 to 10 years and for every child between the ages 10 and 15 years 5 ruble bank (Banko?). These payments for the maintenance of the children are to be paid from his own resources. Likewise also the amounts for the interest on capital. The covenantor also voluntarily promises to give each child a Gesangbuch when they have reached the age of majority.

"Upon this Settlement of Inheritance having been orally and clearly read and approved by everyone the aforesaid men have hereunto subscribed their own hands."

"Covenantor Peter Penner. Guardians: Martin Rempel and Dirk Isaak. Schulz Heinrich Dirksen. Beisitzer, Franz Janzen and Gerhard Kroeker. Waisenvorsteher, Peters."

It can be seen that Peter Penner (1813-1884) has made good financial progress in a matter of some ten years. That this settlement of marriage is made only a little more than three weeks after the death of his second wife is explained by the fact that on August 19, 1856, Peter Penner married for the third time to Elizabeth Harder (1833-1870). It is noteworthy that the father-in-law Abraham Rempel must have had a good regard for his one-time son-in-law for when he passed away in Blumenort, Manitoba in 1878 he bequeathed a quarter section (NE¼33-7-6E) of land to Peter Penner as an inheritance.<sup>28</sup> It is also noted that the guardian Martin Rempel would apparently be the brother to the deceased Katharina Rempel. The other guardian, Dirk Isaak, remains unidentified.

The foregoing certainly provides the reader with an insight into the operation of the Waisenvorordnung. This concludes this chapter regarding government administration relative to the Molotschna Mennonites.

## FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER EIGHT. GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION

1. Giesinger *op.cit.*, 10.
2. *Ibid.*, 44.
3. *Ibid.*, 49.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, 50.
6. *Ibid.*, 51.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, 52.
9. *Ibid.*, 139-154.
10. D.H. Epp, "Kontenius" ME 3, 222-223.
11. Giesinger, *op.cit.*, 51-52.
12. D.H. Epp, "Eduard von Hahn", ME 2, 628-629.
13. Giesinger, *op.cit.*, 51-52.
14. *Ibid.*, 147 and 193.
15. Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 1025-1027.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe, *Causes and History* (Winnipeg, Manitoba, Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society; 1981) 27.
18. *Ibid.*, 38-39.
19. deleted.
20. Aeltester Abraham Friesen, *Einfache Erklarung* (Danzig, Gerhardschen Offizin, 1845) 14-16. Also reprinted in "Himmels Manna" Druckerel, Quackertown, Pennsylvania, 1901. 11-12.
21. *Ibid.* Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) was the second Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde.
22. Klaas C. Penner, *Ein Familie Buch* (Spanish Lookout, Belize, Edward K. Reimer, 1973) 12.
23. Dr. David G. Rempel, *op.cit.*, 114-115.
24. Gerhard J. Thielmann, *Plettentag am 2 July, 1945* (Blumenort, Manitoba, Self-published, 1945) 33.
25. *Plett Picture Book, op.cit.*, 17.

26. Aeltester Peter Toews, *Sammlung, op.cit.*, 195. See Section 16.11.

26a. **Waisenverordnung of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde**

The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde had always participated fully in the Waisenverordnung, Brandordnung and school system of the Molotschna Mennonite colony. These systems were constituted by the general authority of the settlement and supported by all Gemeinden in the colony. i.e. Six Gemeinden by 1840 and almost twice that number by 1875. In this the Kleine Gemeinde was uniquely different from the Berghthaler and Furstenlaender settlers in Manitoba who had come from areas where the Mennonites all belonged to the same church e.g. Bergthal which had established a very successful territorial church system in Russia. As a result of this distinction the Kleine Gemeinde placed relatively greater emphasis on its church treasury and deaconry as a vehicle for loans and other assistance to its needy and poor members. (See Chapter 18).

During the 1860's the Kleine Gemeinde founded expansionary settlements in Annenfeld, Crimea; Markuslandt, just east of the Chortitzer colony; and Borosenko some 60 miles north-west of Nikopol. (See *History and Events* page 39) Nevertheless the group continued to use the Molotschna Waisenverordnung to some extent. But it was evident that a completely new Waisenverordnung would have to be established in preparation for the emigration to America. It appears that a Waisenvorsteher, Gerhard Schellenberg (1827-1908), was elected for this purpose in the fall of 1873. Schellenberg was a former minister who had joined the Kleine Gemeinde in 1864. He was resident in the village of Rosenfeld in the Borosenko settlement.

In a letter of January 16, 1874, to Aeltester Peter Toews of the Blumenhoff (Gruenfeld) congregation of the Kleine Gemeinde, Schellenberg expressed his concern that he would receive the moral support of the Gemeinde in organizing the Teilungsverordnung for the purpose of the emigration and its establishment in the new world. In order to satisfy himself in this regard he requested that the Aeltesten, ministers and deacons of both Kleine Gemeinde congregations endorse the Teilungsverordnung through a written memorandum. Schellenberg arrived in Manitoba in 1874 with the first contingent of Mennonite pioneers. He settled in the village of Rosenfeld located between present day Steinbach and Kleefeld, where he continued to manage the Waisenamt (or Orphans trust office) for a number of years.

The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde Waisenverordnung in Manitoba was formally organized in 1877. In his 1872-1878 Diary, Aeltester Peter Toews refers to a brotherhood meeting in Steinbach of January 6, 1877, where the following resolution was enacted: "The Waisenordnung shall continue here as it was in Russia, with the exception that instead of Gebietsamt (Municipal government) it shall be under the administration of the Gemeinde". The same brotherhood meeting also enacted similar resolutions with respect to the Brandordnung and the educational system.

In 1882, Aeltester Peter Toews and about one-half of the Manitoba Kleine Gemeinde seceded to join the Gemeinde of John Holdeman. Notwithstanding the tension produced by this division the Kleine Gemeinde and the Holdeman Gemeinde continued to cooperate together in a joint Waisenamt organization. In Russia members of both groups had worked with a Waisenamt which had served almost a dozen Gemeinden, and consequently this cooperation would not have been seen as unusual. In 1890 the Teilungsverordnung was reviewed and revised. The updated Teilungsverordnung was considered and approved at a meeting in Kleefeld held on January 28, 1890. A Waisenvorsteher was to be elected every four years from among the participating Gemeinden and examined and approved by the leadership of each Gemeinde. The revised estate regulations were published in a booklet form in 1902 under the title *Teilungsverordnung von der Molotschna aus Russland eingewanderten Mennoniten-Gemeinden in Manitoba*. The Waisenvorsteher at the time of this publication was David Loewen (1836-1915) of Hochstaedt, a village several miles south of Kleefeld. David Loewen was a member of the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, often referred to as the Holdemans Gemeinde.

The Waisenordnung of the Molotschna Mennonites reached another important milestone in 1910 when another reorganization and revision was undertaken. Peter F. Unger, a Blumenhof area farmer and school teacher, has reported in his diary that a new Waisenman was elected in this year who was hesitant to take up the office without a review and strengthening of the institution. Abram R. Penner (1874-1956) of Blumenort was one of the subsequent Waisen vorsteher. Peter H. Wiebe (1874-1934) was elected as Waisenvorsteher in 1927. He was a resident of Steinbach and a member of the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite. He was the Teilungs-Vorsteher when the Teilungsverordnung regulations of the Molotschna Mennonites were republished in 1933. Many examples of the function of the Waisen Verordnung over the years are still extant.

It seems that the Teilungsverordnung of the Molotschna Mennonites dissolved shortly after the death of Peter H. Wiebe in 1934. A spokesman of the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, in Greenland, Manitoba, indicated that by the 1930's the needs of orphans and widows were frequently dealt with by the local congregations and the deacons who appointed guardians (Vormuender) and trustees (Gutmänner) to assist as and when required. A definite trend to the use of wills and the settlement of estates in accordance with provincial law was also evident. As a result, there was less need for a separate department of the church to administer estates or to invest trust funds for widows and orphans or to assist them in determining their respective legal rights.

The Kleingemeinde, the other major group to evolve out of the Russian Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde, continued the institution of Waisenverordnung for several decades on a much smaller scale. Two of the Waisenvorsteher of this smaller independent Kleingemeinde Waisenamt were Isaac P. Loewen (1891-1963) of Blumenort, who served during the 1940's and Cornelius A. Plett (1896-1963) of Prairie Rose, who served from 1948 to 1958. It seems that in 1958 the office of Waisenvorsteher to some extent was incorporated into the function of the Estates Committee of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference which had evolved out of the remnants of the Kleingemeinde which did not move to Mexico in 1948. A noteworthy Kleingemeinde effort to practice the evangelical teaching of sharing of property (see chapter 18) was evident in the Hilfs-Verein which was established in 1928 as a vehicle for extending assistance and low interest rate loans to less fortunate members of the Gemeinde, including widows and orphans. This concludes a brief history of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde Waisenverordnung later known as the Teilungsverordnung of the Molotschna Mennonites in Manitoba.

27. Courtesy of Rev. Cornelius Penner, Kleefeld, Manitoba.

28. For additional information regarding Peter Penner (1813-1884) the reader is referred to Roy Loewen, *Blumenort, a Mennonite Community in Transition* (Blumenort Historical Society 1983).

# Chapter Nine.

## Education.

### 9.00 Introduction.

One of the first concerns of the Mennonites in the founding of any settlement has been the provision of proper schools for the religious and secular education of their children. Naturally this concern was very much present among the Molotschna pioneers in 1804 and as a result schools were established in each village in the very first years.<sup>1</sup> These settlers had brought with them from West Prussia the conviction that it was the duty of the parents and the church to provide for the education of their children and they immediately set about to fulfill that obligation. This important goal of education, both formal and otherwise, was to become one of the most divisive issues among the Russian Mennonites in the century to follow. This chapter will consider a number of aspects of education among the Molotschna Mennonites: Firstly, a description of the school system in the Molotschna. Secondly, the educational philosophy of the Kleine Gemeinde as well as their involvement in the school system. Thirdly, the larger question of the educational philosophy of the Russian Mennonites will be discussed in the later sections of the chapter.

### 9.01 The Pioneer Schools, 1804-1830.

In his book *Die Molotschnaer Ansiedlung*<sup>2</sup> H. Goertz sets out an excellent description of the Molotschna school system on which this summary is largely based. It is noted that in some respects the work of Goertz in turn is derived from *Die Molotschnaer Mennoniten*<sup>3</sup> by Franz Isaac.

For the first half of the century the Russian government took no interest in the education of the Mennonites, and consequently the settlers were not only free to develop the school system to their own liking, but were also devoid of any financial support and guidance. It was to be expected that the early Molotschna school system, established under pioneer conditions, would also be primitive. Each village was responsible for setting up its own school, hiring a teacher, obtaining teaching materials, etc. A small and primitive house (hut) was immediately erected and furnished as a school by each village or perhaps for the first few years two neighbouring villages shared a school. Frequently, the first place of formal school instruction was the home of the teacher.

The greatest problem was the matter of the hiring of a qualified teacher.<sup>3</sup> It appears that the Molotschna settlers were not as fortunate as the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde settlers 75 years later in Manitoba who had a good supply of well qualified and devoted teachers to choose from within their own ranks. In the absence of trained and qualified people the teaching role had to be born by lay people. However, the time and talents of the more capable people in such a pioneer society are invariably directed to the other pressing needs such as the provision of food and shelter. Consequently, the teaching role in the first decade or two frequently fell to those who were incapable of assisting in these other concerns. The pioneer teachers were sometimes homeless invalids not even of the Mennonite faith, or craftsmen who conducted the school in their little shops as a means of earning some extra revenue.

In the case of such a craftsman-teacher, the children sat on each side of a table on which the teacher also continued to pursue his trade, be it tailoring, carpentry, etc. The main instruction in these early days consisted of the teacher assigning a lesson for each student to memorize. Should a little scholar forget about keeping the nose in the book and instead peer inquisitively over the large table, the teacher would apply liberal doses of his cane which he kept in readiness for such interruptions to his handiwork. A similar taste of reality was also reserved for those students who were unable to recite their lesson to the satisfaction of the teacher at the end of the day. Should the teacher be called out during the pursuit of his trade, his wife, together with suckling child, would be put in charge of the training program.

Another difficulty during the first decade was the lack of textbook materials. Each student was seemingly provisioned with whatever Fibel, Catechism, or other book which happened to be available. Thus among the older students, one might have a Catechism of Lutheran origin, while other pupils would have different editions of a Mennonite Catechism. This deficiency continued into the 1830's.

### 9.02 The School At X.

A most illuminating picture of the early Molotschna Mennonite School system is the caricature of an early Molotschna school written by Johan Cornies, and circulated to the Molotschna teachers

in 1846. The purpose of the circular was to demonstrate to the teachers how a school was not to be run. Johan Cornies was the great secular leader of the Russian Mennonites referred to earlier. Here follows his description of the worst in the early Molotschna schools which was entitled, "The School at X".

... the school master is discovered sitting at a table in the very room of the miserable house which he, his wife, and his family occupy as living quarters. He wears a white linen dressing-gown; his head is decked with a nightcap. Frequently, he has his pipe clenched between his teeth. An array of smudged and grimy books, papers, and all sorts of instruments of punishment cover the table. Surrounding him we find the students who assume all manner of postures. There is no proper division into classes according to ability and rate of progress. Saws, planes, spanners, and other wood-working tools and household gadgets hang on the walls of the unventilated, gloomy room. Around the oven hang old socks, trousers, and other articles of clothing. The infant is crying in its crib so the schoolmaster asks one of the girls to rock the baby. A hen with its chicks accompanied by a few pigeons wanders in and out between the feet of the school children, who are, naturally, very much distracted by all the commotion surrounding them. In fact, no orderly instruction exists in this school. On the spur of the moment the schoolmaster changes from one subject to another, choosing according to his whim. He knows nothing at all about lesson preparation. He reads no helpful material for his own improvement. His entire library consists of one book of family devotions dating from the seventeenth century, a few fairytale books, and one 'Happy Arithmetic' workbook. And because the schoolmaster has no skills to arouse, much less hold the students' attention, these find no pleasure in studying but waste their time in a thousand dallyings. The schoolmaster blusters, curses, scolds, and bellows. He punishes students by having them kneel on hard peas or wood. He ties 'donkey ears' around the necks of some, administers punches to the heads of others, slaps mouths, and so on. And he dares to call such behavior exercising proper strictness and necessary discipline. The teaching material is dealt with as follows: at first letters of the alphabet and spelling are taught; however, both are approached in such a dry manner that the children are bored very soon. Children must learn to bear this subject for two or three years. The younger children learn nothing else except to drone out the Lord's Prayer, a few family prayers and the ten commandments. They do this by rote without any understanding before and after classes. Then reading is undertaken, a major exertion for the children who drag the reading along without any intonation, or meaningful pauses. They lack all sense of value or purpose. Since almost every student reads from a different book, the difficulty to teach reading is doubled. One after the other each child must appear before the schoolmaster to recite the assignment. With this method each student gets only two or three minutes of instruction; the rest of the school day is wasted for him. Writing actually is merely drawing the letters of the alphabet, arithmetic means to recopy mechanically the examples which the schoolmaster has demonstrated. Only the boys take both writing and arithmetic, and even they, because they learn no fundamentals and see no future application for what they study, soon forget what they have been shown. When memorization is required, those students receive recognition who can rattle off their assignment perfectly and completely. To explain the subject matter which is to be learned is beyond the schoolmaster's capability—it's all Greek to him.

"March 5, 1846. The chairman: Johann Cornies"<sup>3</sup>

The fact that Cornies found it necessary to prepare such a shocking description of the Molotschna school system as late as 1846 speaks for itself. No doubt there were teachers from the first years of settlement who were capable and devoted. Nevertheless, it seems to be generally accepted that the foregoing did exemplify the situation in the pioneer Molotschna schools. At the same time the reader should note that only a small percentage of the world population was literate at this time. Illiteracy was common even among the supposedly advanced countries in Western Europe. The accomplishments of the practical and innovative Mennonite pioneer should not be overly belittled as the fact that the providing of formal education was accepted as a duty by the pioneer society was no doubt progressive for that era.

### 9.03 The Post pioneer schools, 1830-1843.

The new settlement was slowly making progress in agricultural production and in the economic sphere in general. Consequently there were individuals to be found by the 1820's and 1830's who were interested in teaching as a career and not only because they had no other alternatives. This new class of teacher had no formal pedagogical training and little knowledge.<sup>6</sup> But he did have an honest interest in his occupation and a loyal devotion to his calling. Many of this category of teacher exemplified the best that the Molotschna school system would ever have. Their philosophy and teaching practices were firmly founded on the teachings of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith.

This new breed of teacher was familiar with the needs and individual concerns and problems

of his students, as he undoubtedly knew intimately everyone in the village in which he was teaching. A warm and trusting relationship existed between the best of these teachers and their students and, perhaps most important, with the parents. Such a teacher became an honoured and irreplaceable member of his village community. Peter Isaac in his book *Stammbuch Meine Voreltern* writes of his cousin who was married to a Brauel whose father, Jacob Brauel was the teacher in the village of Rudnerweide for some 40 years.<sup>7</sup> This teacher apparently had as his students the grandchildren of his first pupils. Peter Isaac notes that the village must have thought very highly of him. H. Goertz also mentions this Jakob Brauel, and that in 1830 his school was so renowned that it was considered to be equal to the Orloff Verein School which had been found in 1821. He was a progressive teacher and fluent in Russian, mathematics, singing, calligraphy, and other subjects. Jakob Brauel was also an extremely talented carpenter to which he devoted his talents in summer. Many a budding young teacher received his pedagogical training in Brauel's classroom in winter, and mastered the art of carpentry in Brauel's workshop in summer.<sup>8</sup> Those members of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde who made teaching their life occupation and who commenced their teaching careers at about this time were undoubtedly of the caliber and mold of Jakob Brauel.

However a cadre of talented and devoted teachers does not make up a complete school system. While one village might be blessed with an excellent teacher and consequently have an educational facility far superior to minimum standards, the next village would be far below minimum requirements. The most serious deficiency in the Molotschna Mennonite school system was the lack of a centralized and standardized leadership and administration for the individual schools.

The Mennonites in Russia were given complete autonomy and this also gave them total control of all matters pertaining to education. No specific organization was constituted by the government to take overall charge of this responsibility. Accordingly the administration of the school system fell to the church leadership by default. Although the *Lehrdienst* of any Mennonite Gemeinde would have the formal education of its children as one of its foremost concerns, their time and energy was already absorbed by the demands of their ministerial duties. Although a school regulation which was to regulate the school establishment of each village was issued in 1808, a central organ to direct the system was completely lacking. Thus leadership and improvements in the educational system had to come largely through the efforts of interested private individuals who were concerned about this area of life.<sup>9</sup>

There were great obstacles to hinder such concerned individuals. There are always individuals in any society who lack the foresight and wisdom to appreciate the benefits to the person and the community of a sound basic education. H. Goertz reports that the indifference of the Grosze Gemeinde to educational needs was supported by the majority in the Molotschna Mennonite community.<sup>10</sup> A typical Mennonite farmer (undoubtedly of the Grosze Gemeinde) is quoted as stating "that his son need not know more than he". It must also be noted here that little more could be expected from a Grosze Gemeinde which in 1805 appointed to its spiritual supervision, Jacob Enns, a man whose understanding of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith seemed to centre on beating up the brethren and the imprisonment of his opponents in the Gemeinde. It is doubtful that such a man would be able to appreciate the evangelical duty of parents to educate their children which had been expressed by Menno Simons.

As a result a large percentage of a complete generation grew to adulthood in the Molotschna who had not had the good fortune of having one of the few capable teachers themselves and who consequently had a very negative view of formal education. Historian H. Goertz goes on to state that this undoubtedly contributed to the continued cultural battle which raged in the Molotschna.<sup>11</sup>

#### **9.04 The Reforms of Johan Cornies.**

The lack of a central direction and leadership in the Molotschna school system was corrected in 1843 when the Supervisory-Committee in Odessa placed the jurisdiction for Mennonite schools into the hands of the Agricultural Society.<sup>12</sup> The Agricultural Society of course stood under the leadership of Johan Cornies. The original concept was that the school system was to be administered jointly by the Gemeinde leadership and Agricultural Society. But this was of no further significance as Cornies did not allow his plans to be interrupted by anyone.<sup>13</sup> Cornies immediately commenced with the reorganization of the school system to his liking. He already had considerable experience in matters pertaining to education, as he had been one of the main organizers of the pietist Orloff Verein School in the 1820's. Cornies dealt severely with any Grosze Gemeinde opposition to his educational reforms.<sup>14</sup>

One of the reforms which Cornies instituted was the replacement of the old school buildings, which were frequently little more than huts in which no farmer would have wanted to live with his

family. The lighting in these miserable buildings was always poor. In time, new school houses were built in each village according to a model which Cornies established. Historian H. Goerz describes this model school building:

"In time new school houses were built in every village and all in the same style and fashion. The school was located in the middle of the village on the so-called cross street. The building consisted of two parts. At the east end (most villages were more or less laid out from east to west) was located the spacious school room, which received its lighting through 6 to 8 feet high windows. Two doors lead out of the classroom, one for the children which leads through the rear of the building unto the school yard, and the second for the teacher which leads to the residence of the teacher through the front of the building. At the west end of the building was the residence of the teacher which consisted of two or three rooms with the kitchen in the rear. Usually a stable was located on the school yard for the cows of the teacher and together with a loft where the feed and heating material of the teacher was stored. Although these schools did not live up to all the demands of a later pedagogically more progressive era, they represented an enormous step forward at the time."

Even more important were the changes which Cornies instituted with respect to the quality of teachers. Each village had previously hired its own teacher on such terms as it could negotiate. Now the hiring of every teacher had to be approved by the Agricultural Society and a transfer of a teacher was only approved if it was seen that some improvement in the quality of education would occur. In 1845 Cornies divided the Molotschna into six school districts, and in January of 1846 he had two representative school teachers elected for each district. These representative teachers inspected the schools in each district. However, they changed districts each year, so that in time each school was inspected by all six pairs of inspectors. These representatives had to submit detailed reports to Cornies as to the situation and progress being made in each school and by each teacher.<sup>16</sup>

There is no doubt but that such a system would result in tremendous improvements and rapid increases in the minimum standards of education. It was essential to the success of this method that the innovations came from within and through the medium of the peers of the teachers themselves. There is no suggestion here that the improvements were to be imposed by outsiders who did not only want to educate, but also intended to propagate their own interpretation of the Mennonite faith or pietism through the school system.

Johan Cornies was a fatherly friend to his teachers and gave them wholehearted support. He represented them before the village assemblies, and it was through his efforts that the remuneration of the teachers was substantially improved so that the teachers were able to survive on the fruits of their labour. In fact, Cornies tried to impress on the village assemblies that, just as they would only entrust their sheep and livestock into the care of loyal herdsmen, they should be even more concerned that they only entrusted their children to a capable and devoted teacher.<sup>17</sup>

Cornies was dictatorial in school matters just as he was in agricultural matters. Any teacher who did not measure up to his standards found himself severely dealt with. H. Goerz relates that Cornies strictly outlawed the art of *Fraktur* which had been practiced and emphasized by most of the better teachers of the post-pioneer era. Cornies, the eternal pragmatic, had no sympathy for such sentimentality. Only practical subjects would be taught under his jurisdiction.<sup>18</sup>

Of great benefit to the teachers and the school system were the teachers' conferences organized by Cornies, and over which he sometimes presided himself. H. Goerz reports that these conferences consisted of lectures given by Cornies from his own rich experience and also of presentations given by exemplary teachers. The lectures served to enhance the knowledge and abilities of the more inexperienced teachers. It is reported that at one such teachers' conference which took place in Jushanlee in 1845, Cornies directed that the proceedings take place in Low German "in order to free the tongues".<sup>19</sup> This would indicate that Cornies himself was not engrossed in the pedantry which characterized some of the later Russian-Mennonite school teachers.

### 9.05 The School Regulations, 1846.

Another important innovation by Cornies was preparation of a set of school regulations which Cornies himself wrote and published. These were entitled the "General Regulations respecting the instruction and treatment of schoolchildren, for Schoolteachers in the Molotschna Mennonite Bezirk". The object of these regulations was to set out definite guidelines for the teachers to follow. These regulations are published in *Die Molotschnaer Mennoniten* by Franz Isaac,<sup>20</sup> from where some representative paragraphs have been extracted and included here.

"(1) The first formative experiences which the soul receives will have the greatest power in the future. Human nature, which is subject to natural and undisturbed development, is therefore supported so that its fortunes will more certainly prosper. This may be achieved by providing fitting



activity, exercising the mental processes, and the sharing of new information.

“(5) To instruct children under the age of six years in moral precepts (?) is not only useless but, in fact, harmful.

“(8) The younger the person, the more emphasis should be placed on the feelings of the person. The older the person, the more emphasis should be placed on the understanding of the individual, but only so that through either method the reasoning abilities of the student shall succeed. Therefore, everything would be banished from the work area of the teacher which could strain or tear at the nerves of the students in unnatural ways.

“(10) What can be enacted with a wink should not be implemented with a word. An admonishment shall not be given where something can be enacted with a word.

“(11) One should seek to diminish and simplify the needs of the children as much as possible.

“(13) The physical and spiritual well-being of the children shall be dear to every instructor and teacher, and for that reason one has to be careful so as not to strike fear and terror into the children in any way.

“(15) For as long as possible children in their seventh year should be spared from instruction in pictures and copper, in order that their imagination should not be irritated and exercised too early, to participate in sensual attentiveness and the facilities of self observation, which otherwise already lose quickly enough in degrees of strength and sharpness.

“(19) If children attempt something through their own motivation, they should not be disturbed through rebuke and criticism. This reinforces physical and spiritual abilities.

“(21) It is not advisable to make children aware and cognizant of human misdeeds and shortcomings through anxiety and fearfulness, for such parents and teachers make them into slaves and do not attain their goals.

“(23) The circulation and association of the children shall not be overly restricted, and such restriction shall be only of the sort and standard which is beneficial to the children. Above all it is recognized that interaction with other children, especially with others of similar age, is exceptionally necessary and beneficial.

“(24) The habits of orderliness and activity are the simple and workable vehicles of the educator, which if learnt in time will not fail in their purpose. Through self-motivation the children will increase greatly in inward development and thereby save and free much time.

“(29) One should not be too hurried with the production of general comprehension, nor should one require that the children immediately think in the greatest purity or in abstract terms.

“(33) During the teaching and instruction of the children the teacher must determine what type of person his student is, what the student is to become, and how the student can best attain that goal.

“(37) The concepts and impressions of religion must give strength and motivation to all other areas of the curriculum because no man will ever achieve true morality if he does not feel awe, love, and trust toward an unseen Being which he can regard as the Sovereign of his destiny. Therefore everything in the teaching process shall be done in the spirit of religion.

“(40) Let Jesus be commended to the children at every opportunity. In all aspects of his loving nature he is the greatest friend of children. Train the children to become friends of Christ. This is the greatest nobility one can attain for this life and the next.

“(43) The direction of true education is not only for the purpose that the person is prepared for his situation and calling in this world, but principally for a higher goal: Namely, the highest possible assimilation of God for religion. This does not belong to the religious instruction of the Mennonites which the youth receive prior to their baptism: But rather through the influences of the verses memorized from the Holy Scripture working on the hearts of the children, which at the time of reciting are briefly and simply explained to the children.

“(53) One can promote visible love for the truth if one treats gently the mistakes of the children which are openly acknowledged, and to be more a healer than a revenger regarding the misdeeds of the children. In order to train the children to be men, the teacher must first become a child. Was not Jesus himself a child among children?

“(56) Loving and friendly treatment is the rule in the process of teaching, but firmness and punishment are not lacking as frequently the youthful nature comes to understand and appreciate the one through the other. He who does not obey shall feel.

“(59) Rewards and punishments shall be meted out cautiously and sparingly as seasoning for proper training, so that selfishness and egotism on the one hand, and fear on the other, do not develop, and that the student learns to avoid all the unpunished evil and to love even the unrewarded noble deeds.

“(71) Above all one should be on guard against making promises to the children (of any rewards) which are later not kept. This robs the teacher of all love and respect.

“(77) Religious feeling is the goal towards which all education must strive, and for which all individual aspects must unite. This is the Holy Root from which all life originates, and which consecrates the development of the germinating power.

“(88) If the teachers of this region will work according to the above regulations, the schools will become institutions for training the body, heart, and mind. Indeed, true educational institutions for the community, are a blessing for the present, and blessedness for the future Brotherhood.”<sup>20</sup>

The above of course are merely samples of the points dealt with by Cornies in his **School Regulations**. A good number of the points deal with the importance of religious instruction showing that

in spite of his many arbitrary actions, use of force and strong pietist leanings, Cornies still had many evangelical principles at heart. This emphasis can also be seen in an incident where Cornies expressed himself forcefully to a teacher who was too liberal in his philosophy. He is to have stated that, "First instill the fear of God and other biblical deeds into the child. When this has been accomplished then teach the A-B-C's and other subjects. If the latter cannot be taught, then let it be, for a child with a thorough education of the heart, created from Christianity, will later be a useful member of the Gemeinde; whereas a child which is only educated in secular matters will be of no use".<sup>21</sup> By this Cornies apparently wanted to show in the clearest terms that secularization would only go so and so far under his leadership.

Cornies went even further in attempting to improve all aspects of the educational process by establishing a practical and workable curriculum and time table. These were as follows: "1) The A-B-C's on the blackboard; 2) syllabification and spelling; 3) reading; Bible reading with proper intonations; 4) orthography and penmanship; 5) Arithmetic; the first four rules, and the rule of the three, including fractions 6) mental arithmetic; 7) singing according to ciphered notation from the hymnary; 8) German language; 9) memorization; 10) letter writing; 11) introduction to geography from the atlas primer; 12) Bible studies, Geography, secular and Bible history, and writing according to dictation. Given in Juschanlee on January 26, 1846."<sup>22</sup>

## 9.06 The School at A.

The object of all the innovations and reforms enacted by Cornies was the emulation of a model school which Cornies envisioned. In order to serve as an encouragement to the Molotschna teachers, Cornies prepared a written description of his ideal, which he entitled "In the School at A". This circular was to be a positive contrast to the description of the worst possible school which has already been set out above. In this description of "The School in A" the reader will see the culmination of the individual reforms which are discussed above.<sup>23</sup>

### *"In the School at A*

"the room is comfortably dry, well-lighted, and roomy. Even the outer appearance of the building attracts the attention of the traveller and shows its lofty purpose. The classroom is entirely separated from the teacher's living quarters; consequently, the students are in his presence alone. They are properly separated into classes by sex and by ability. They sit at appropriate desks, all in neat rows and all facing the teacher's desk. In clean clothes (as he wants his pupils to dress as well), mannerly, and with a friendly firmness the teacher appears before his class. He oversees them and observes them all. At times he strolls between the rows of desks; very seldom does he sit down in his chair. Constantly active, he tries to keep the children in his charge alert too. They are not disturbed by any outside distractions. Except for a frame in which the timetable is pinned, and a blackboard for the copying down of 'wrong sentences' and a few other things, the white walls are bare. During instruction hours the subjects are dealt with in a seemly order: difficult and easy material is cleverly interchanged. For every hour of instruction the teacher prepares himself carefully and he has studied the available lesson aids for which he spends some of his salary from time to time—money that another teacher might squander in the tavern. Because of these activities he becomes more and more skillful and gains insights. His areas of knowledge expand constantly; each day he does more good, and at the same time he enlarges on his own advantages.

"When a child makes an error he reminds it in a fatherly, tender manner of the harm it is doing to itself. He warns very earnestly if the reminder is ignored, and when all else fails, he finally punishes by degrees the offender who persists in continually repeating misdemeanors. Very seldom does he use an instrument of punishment and he never punishes to the detriment of the pupil's health or insults his dignity as a human being. Through such training—or more so—through his serious and correct behavior, through his accuracy in all things, and through his lively instruction he wins over the love of his students and conquers their inhibitions. The teacher discusses issues with the students as a friend does. By coming down to their level, one might say, he engages himself with the subjects that the students are to learn. Above all, he makes an effort to excite their interest in the things round about them, and he expands that interest by encouraging the students to verify their conclusions.

"The teacher questions them as if he were ignorant of the answer and would wish to be taught by them. But his questions are so skillfully ordered that the children are gradually led from the known to the unknown, so that they believe they discovered the answers all by themselves. Thus they are led to form convictions on their own about the nature of good and evil. They are trained to think to discriminate, to judge, to conclude, what is true and what is false, what is certainty and what is superstition. Through this method understanding rather than memory is developed. They gain personal conviction about truths of religion and about the duties of a member of a congregation—worthwhile knowledge for their future lives.

"To complement this instruction there exists a natural and sensible approach to the teaching of reading. Fluency in the German language is stressed because it is a major subject and is the basis of the instruction on which all reading and listening depends. In order to render the lectures on abstract

things more tangible, the teacher uses lively, natural, proper examples available to the children on the spot. He also employs visual aids extensively. The instruction is interwoven with interesting narratives. The children learn songs with easily understood but didactic lyrics and uplifting melodies. Added to all these there is some joint instruction of all classes, guided by one set of books. What is being said to one child is being said to all—all hear the same words. This arouses a competitive spirit and the emotion of noble pride in the students. These are two characteristics through which so much is gained in teaching. And this method fosters these attitudes. Through this system of teaching, young people gain the greatest benefits that accrue from the ability to write and do arithmetic, for they become convinced that they can make use of these skills for the rest of their lives. This teaching method brings the students to a knowledge of God through natural religion, or through correctly applied intelligence. After that, the story of the Savior follows naturally and they understand the history of His Gospel. Every concept is taken up point by point, made clear, and in all respects made understandable so that mind and heart are developed. Thus the young people are helped to grasp, understand, and remember things. In this way Christian principles and attitudes are planted in the souls of children, so that they will honor and adore the almighty and gracious God, be grateful for His grace, and because of love for Him, make serious resolutions to fulfill His will.

"Instruction such as that given in School A educates each child to the level and insight of which it is capable; the child learns to develop its strengths and finally to play its part in the work of improving society.

"N.B. The fear of God is not developed in children by lectures or abstract explanations; all lengthy analysing and dissecting catechizing can never arouse a truly God-fearing spirit.

"April 6, 1846. The Chariman, Johann Cornies."<sup>23</sup>

## 9.07 The Post Cornies Era, 1847-1874.

One cannot but be amazed by the energy and insight of Johan Cornies. Undoubtedly his model school was comparable to the best in Western Europe at the time. It seems likely that the pedagogical philosophy of August Francke, the German pietist would have exerted some influence on the ideas of Johan Cornies. Cornies died in 1848, having had only 5 years to reform the Molotschna school system. Many of the educational precepts of Cornies found a warm endorsement in the Kleine Gemeinde. In fact, in years to come their own educational systems frequently utilized the best of the methodology propounded by Cornies. But it must be noted again that the Kleine Gemeinde could never endorse the harsh and despotic means which Cornies sometimes used to achieve his goals.

At his death Cornies was replaced as chairman of the Society by his son-in-law Phillip Wiebe. Wiebe lacked the dynamic energy and character of his predecessor but had a noble spirit and progressive mind. Many of the reforms of Cornies were consolidated under his leadership. The following are some of the accomplishments of Phillip Wiebe:

"The annual inspection of schools by representative teachers was made obligatory. A regular report had to be submitted to the society by the representative teachers. These representative teachers inspected a different district in every year in order that the teaching process would benefit from the greatest number of experienced teachers and from standardization. Further progress was also made in increasing the remuneration of the teachers. School attendance was made obligatory, with the school ages of the children being set at 6-14 years. Exceptions to the rule could only be made with the approval of the chairman. The parents were only allowed to keep their children at home for two weeks during the busy seeding time. Pursuant to a regulation of April 19, 1850, the teachers' Conferences established by Cornies were constituted as an integral part of the Molotschna School system. These Conferences were to serve the teachers as a forum for the mutual exchange of experiences and ideas and for advising the teachers on the progress of their instruction and school discipline, and also for the open and friendly socializing and exchanging of ideas."<sup>24</sup>

The foregoing probably represent the key features which made the Molotschna elementary school system the success it was. Although Chairman Wiebe later had to resign because of ill health, the reforms which were completed under his leadership basically set the stage for education among the Russian Mennonites for the remainder of the century. In 1869, jurisdiction for schools was removed from the Agricultural Society and placed under the authority of the Molotschna Mennonite School Board at the instigation of a group of leading teachers. In 1881 the situation was changed radically when the school system was placed directly under the jurisdiction of the Russian National Department of Education, and over the years the authority of the Mennonite School Boards was continually decreased.

## 9.08 The Secondary Schools.

The most essential requirement of a school system is competent and devoted teachers. It has already been noted that a new breed of teacher entered the Molotschna school system during the 1820's.

These were usually talented and devoted men who had the ability and energy to educate themselves. Even later some of the best teachers were of this type. Another method of training teachers was through a system of apprentice teachers. Young gentlemen who felt a desire to enter the teaching profession were engaged as apprentice teachers by experienced teachers who were approved for this purpose by the Society. In the winter these trainees would serve as the assistants of their principals, and in summer they would take courses in educational theory from them.<sup>25</sup> Prior to acceptance as a qualified teacher such a trainee also had to pass the examination of the Agricultural Society.

However, such a system was relatively inefficient and was not practiced on a sufficient scale. Therefore it apparently could not provide enough qualified people for the demands of a general school system. In the view of men like Johan Cornies, real progress could only be achieved if broad measures could be enacted. In their view this could only occur through the institution of secondary schools for teacher training. Cornies is credited with being instrumental in the establishment of the first of such institutions. This was the Orloff Verein School, which was built in Orloff in 1822. For the first 17 years its teacher was Tobias Voth, who was replaced by Heinrich Heese. We shall hear more of these teachers later. Both men were recruited by Cornies in Prussia. The school had only a single teacher at a given time. It was dissolved in 1847 when the school building was destroyed by fire. However, in 1860 a new Verein was formed and a new school built, with Herman Janzen as teacher.

In 1835 another secondary school was opened in Halbstaedt at the request of the Supervisory Committee in Odessa. The purpose of this institution was to prepare men for service in the colony offices, which required a knowledge of the Russian language.<sup>26</sup> In 1838 the Steinbach private school was founded by estate owner Peter Schmidt, who later served as the chairman of the Agricultural Society. This school was considered as a high school because the Russian language was taught and superior elementary training was given by better qualified teachers. In 1842 the Chortitz Colony also acquired such a secondary school. In 1857 a secondary school was founded in the village of Gnadenfeld by the so-called "Wuest Brethren". Wuest was a former Lutheran minister who had succeeded in spreading his style of separatist Pietism among some of the Molotschna Mennonites. The school was closed in 1863 because of differences and disputation among its sponsors. It was re-opened as a Zentralschule in 1873.<sup>27</sup>

The foregoing were the secondary schools of the Russian Mennonites during the period in which the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde had a congregation in Russia. These secondary schools or Zentralschulen, as they were called, were very modest institutions during the relevant period. They generally had only one teacher at a time. One writer's assessment of their effectiveness is as follows:

"All of these secondary schools, which were later commonly known as Zentralschulen, had to contend with all sorts of obstacles for a long time. The necessary understanding and interest were lacking among the settlers in general, and for many years there were very few students in these secondary schools. They were conspicuously not at all touched by the reforms introduced into the village schools by the Agricultural Association. P.M. Friesen says that until 1870 the Mennonite School authorities were unable to comprehend why two teachers should or could be employed at the same school at the same time! And so these schools usually had only one teacher, and the instruction in the Russian language was usually rather weak. Nor did they prove to be teacher training institutions, even though a number of successful teachers came from them."<sup>28</sup>

Of course drastic improvements were made in these secondary schools after the 1880's. The schools were enlarged and improved and more extensive teacher training courses were implemented. These developments are beyond the scope of this study.

## 9.09 General Philosophy of Education.

The foregoing provides helpful background to an examination of educational philosophy among the Russian Mennonites, and the role of the Kleine Gemeinde within the Molotschna school system. Rev. Heinrich Balzer was a leading intellectual of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. (See Part Four) In his treatise **Faith and Reason**<sup>29</sup> he states that the development of the heart and understanding were one of the main concerns of the Christian.

"As long as Christians tried to live pure and simple lives according to the teachings of the Gospel, with the view alone toward eternity, they carefully avoided conformity with the world. The development of heart and understanding was their main concern, and for that they needed no other rule and guidance than the plain Word of God, and (of course) prayer. They mutually instructed and exhorted each other, and edified each other in brotherly love. Education of the children was one of their main concerns and they observed a strict and firm discipline of the church (Gemeinde). To that end the church received plentifully the needed gifts through the Holy Spirit; that is, through the inspiration of the understand-

ing. Ample proof of this are the bold speeches and the deep insights of the poor and unlearned fishermen of Galilee, by which they defended themselves against high and low; they demonstrate that these men had actually reached a high degree of knowledge (of the divine things).'<sup>29</sup>

Rev. Balzer of course is referring to something far more extensive than simply the formal education which a child receives in the school system. His admonition to be on guard "lest the young flowers of our church become biased against our principles which later on would make it difficult for them loyally to follow our tenets"<sup>30</sup> can only be interpreted as a strict exhortation to parents to teach their children proper values and beliefs before they even commence their formal education.

Balzer goes on to warn that "knowledge puffeth up" (1 Corinthians 8, 1), an unmistakable reference to the experience of some Mennonite leaders and teachers who, after only a year or two of additional formal education, considered themselves completely qualified to reject and denounce the principles of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. In Balzer's view, this type of knowledge and training was dangerous, as it seemed to be a catalyst which destroyed evangelical faith (or spiritual wisdom) in those individuals who had undergone such training, and therefore should be avoided. "Reason gets its strength and substance from this learning, and soon simplicity is bound to be abandoned"<sup>31</sup> By this Balzer is referring to simplicity in Christ as an aspect of the Anabaptist-Mennonite (evangelical) concept of the discipleship of love.

One cannot help but sympathize with Balzer's view that a certain type of "knowledge puffeth up". This was especially relevant in the class conscious Russian Mennonite society where even a modest amount of additional formal schooling could be regarded as an important status symbol. Not everyone was able to avoid the temptations towards a shallow vanity and pride to which such a situation disposed itself. There were always some individuals who felt that: As they had experienced a year or two of secondary school or post secondary education; or as they spoke a High German which corresponded more closely with the contemporary High German from Germany; Or as they could more precisely emulate the current German culture and mannerisms: That this somehow made them superior human beings and better Christians who always knew best. This type of attitude is sometimes demonstrated in the autobiography of someone like teacher Heinrich Heese who will again be referred to later in this chapter.<sup>32</sup> It appears that a tendency to this type of disposition was inherent in a confession such as pietism which emphasize direct individual revelatory knowledge of God at the expense of evangelical doctrine. (See Section 4.03).

This type of attitude was contrary to the teachings of Menno Simons, who had expressed high regard for higher learning provided it was applied and used with reverence and humility.<sup>33</sup> Certainly the attitude of educators like Heinrich Heese would have been regarded as proof of the validity of Heinrich Balzer's view that this sort of education destroyed the "simplicity of the heart". No doubt the historical work done by some of the pietist-cultural Mennonite scholars in Russia also reinforced the Anabaptist-Mennonite scepticism of their "higher education". Comments by scholars such as Peter M. Friesen to the effect that the Kleine Gemeinde "lacked a joyous knowledge of God's grace" or that Kleine Gemeinde were "too narrow minded, too isolationist, and anit-educational to have had much impact" must have been regarded as demonstrating a considerable lack of scholarly training, methodology, and objectivity. Certainly every movement has its share of followers who are not equal to the call, but to so disparage an entire movement without qualification seems to exhibit the narrow minded and elitist attitudes above referred to.

It might also be noted that Balzer's treatise was written in 1833 when there was little evidence available to the Russian-Mennonites that this type of "higher" education in fact served any useful purpose. For example, Tobias Voth, who is generally lauded as being the first secondary school teacher among the Russian-Mennonites, seemingly had no special training. His only qualification for the job apparently was that he himself had previously served as a teacher in Prussia, and the fact that he had become converted to Pietist beliefs. His main achievement seemed to be, not in the field of pedagogy, where in fact his work came under serious criticism, but in his work at disseminating separatist or radical Pietist teachings in his classes and under the guise of Bible studies, promoting missions, etc.

By comparison the less well-known Jakob Brauel, who was the teacher in the village of Rudnerwiede for some forty years, is not known to have any "higher learning or education". However, this Brauel left a rich legacy of pedagogical achievement, to the extent that by 1830 the Russian authorities elevated his village school to equal status with the Verein School in Orloff which had been started eight years earlier with the specific object of being a secondary teacher training school.<sup>34</sup> This promotion in status seems to have been a gratuitous recognition by the Russian government authorities of the excellent work of this teacher and also of the fact that he was not creating all kinds

of unhappiness among the parents of his students by disseminating the teachings of a foreign religion, etc.

Such contrast in pedagogical achievement, coupled with the opposition of some of the Pietist-Mennonite teachers to the faith of the parents of the children they were supposed to be instructing, undoubtedly was a factor in the view held by Balzer that there was great danger in having such elements in the educational system and that these were better avoided. How different things might have been had Johan Cornies had the foresight to hire a truly educated pedagogue, with proper university credentials, who was philosophically sensitive to the religious beliefs of the community in which he was to work. It appears that the worst of the "Kulturkampf" between the "reactionary" Grosze Gemeinde and the "progressive" Orloff Gemeinde would have been avoided. Russian Mennonite history might have taken a completely different and more moderate course of development, like that of the Swiss-American branch of the Mennonite Church.

It must be noted that the Kleine Gemeinde view of education as expressed by Heinrich Balzer also contained a strong utilitarian component. Many of those who received university training during the 1970's will no doubt have some appreciation for Balzer's view that "higher education" was simply unnecessary to the average "husbandman" or farmer. The 1960's and 1970's saw post secondary education in the Arts and Sciences portrayed as an absolute necessity for success. To their surprise, many of those swept away by this philosophy later discovered that what they had in fact studied was basically irrelevant to their later life and had sometimes even eliminated them from, or overqualified them for, certain careers. In addition, there was also the tendency among some of these scholars to adopt the attitude that as they were now educated gentlemen any job which might involve manual labour or sweating was now beneath their dignity. Fortunately, such individuals were usually cured of this misconception rather quickly in American society which never developed the intensity of class consciousness that was found in Europe and in Czarist Russia.

Balzer's concern was very relevant to a Mennonite society in the Russian setting where the traditional European class consciousness eventually became quite evident. Certainly this sort of training was irrelevant to the average Mennonite farmer during the 19th century. Balzer's statement must also be understood in light of the Anabaptist-Mennonite view that, to be a Christian, the individual must imitate Christ; i.e. be converted to a discipleship of love for the master. From all available reports it is evident that there was no surplus of individuals in the Molotschna who were prepared to simply live lives of evangelical humility and piety, and thereby to spread the good news to relatives, neighbours, and friends.

Finally, consideration must be given to the historical setting in which Balzer made his statement. In the 1820's the largest part of the population of England was still completely illiterate and enjoyed little more than slave status in the clutches of the industrial revolution.<sup>35</sup> During the same period over one half of the Russian population served as serfs on the estates of a small and often cruel ruling class.<sup>36</sup> In 1855 only one percent of Russian children received an elementary education.<sup>36a</sup> Another report indicates that even in 1872, only ten percent of Russian school age children received an education.<sup>37</sup> In addition, it should be noted that the general Russian Mennonite educational system in 1830 was extremely primitive when compared to its development only 20 years later.<sup>38</sup> Balzer's statement regarding "higher education" must be considered in light of these factors. The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde would have regarded it as an unevangelical waste to expend limited resources on such "higher education" under these circumstances.

## 9.10 Education, the evangelical duty of parents.

For the Kleine Gemeinde the education and training of their children was one of the foremost concerns of a Christian. Balzer goes on to stipulate that this is not only a passive involvement of the parent in a system of formal education. In Balzer's view it was the evangelical duty of the parent to thoroughly train his child in the biblical virtues and faith so that the child could not be misled by foreign teachings later in life. This was a holy duty to be pursued by the parent from the time of the birth of the child until the achievement of adulthood and full entry into the Gemeinde.

"Therefore I counsel and implore each member of our church to make it not too difficult for his own child to find his salvation in innocence. Everybody knows by his own experience the tremendous difficulties in this denial of one's reason and intellectual autonomy (*der eigenen Höhe*), a denial so much needed for salvation, and yet rendered so hard by misunderstood education and enlightenment. Once in this way the young man can be pulled out from the craze (*Taumel*) of this world only with harm and loss, much pain and anguish, and perhaps never. I Corinthians 1:26, 27.

"The discipline of the children should be taken care of with evangelical earnestness. They should be supervised as much as possible lest they fall into all kinds of pleasures

and company at an early age; also so that at weddings and other such occasions they are not prompted into wild and turbulent doings so obviously in contradiction to our publicly confessed principles. I implore and heartily advise you not to be indifferent in these matters, as much as it is pleasing to the unregenerate man, and as much as human reason might label it harmless entertainment. Sometimes we will be required to give a strict account of all our doings.<sup>39</sup>"

The duty of education lay foremost on the parents in their own home. This obligation of the parents was not merely one of expediency and convenience, but was in fact to be accepted as a scriptural requirement and evangelical process fully endorsed and to a degree enforced by the Gemeinde.

Formal education provided by society was only one specific area of the educational experience of the child. Although children could receive harmful as well as beneficial influences in these schools, the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde participated fully and completely in the Molotschna Schools system for all the years that they had a congregation in the Molotschna. Not only did the Kleine Gemeinde children attend the village schools, it also happened that their children were sometimes the leading students in their classes.

Thus we have one report of Maria L. Plett (later the wife of Rev. Peter R. Reimer of Blumenort, Manitoba) who received a first prize in the school in Kleefeld, Molotschna, for her excellent writing ability or "Calligraphy".<sup>40</sup> A similar report comes from Abraham B. Klassen (1850-1935) who is reported to have been the first in standing of his class (probably of the whole school district) which had consisted of 100 students. The report continues that such an achievement was considered very important to the students at the time.<sup>41</sup> Such proficiency would seem quite normal given that the Kleine Gemeinde actively endorsed proper training and a sound elementary education in particular.<sup>42</sup>

## 9.11 Learning and Education in the Kleine Gemeinde.

Kleine Gemeinde involvement in education and learning was not limited to support of the school system. A good number of the early members of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde were literate articulate men. Accordingly, it can be taken that they had received a sound formal education or else were exceptionally capable self educated men. Examples of Kleine Gemeinde men who received their training in the pioneer Molotschna school system would be: Heinrich Enns (1808-1881) later the fourth Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde and Johan Friesen (1808-1872) the third Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde. Some of the writings of these men are preserved in the *Sammlung* collected by Aeltester Peter Toews and will be reproduced in a later volume. Historian Franz Isaac has also included some of the official Gemeinde correspondence of Aeltester Johan Friesen in his historical work *Die Molotschaer Mennoniten*.

Many first and second generation members of the Kleine Gemeinde had received their education in Prussia. One example would be Johan Toews (1793-1873) whose memoirs were later collected and published by his son Aeltester Peter Toews, under the title *Das Wachsame Auge Gottes*.<sup>43</sup> Another example of a literate articulate man who was a youth at the time of emigration to Russia was Heinrich Reimer (1792-1884). A sample of his writings is included in *History and Events*.<sup>44</sup> The foregoing are of special significance because both of these men lovingly endorsed the study of the Holy Scriptures and the Anabaptist-Mennonite writings. At the same time it is known that they were only laymen, thereby demonstrating that interest in this sort of study was common throughout the rank and file of the Kleine Gemeinde, and not merely restricted to the ministerial and other leaders. The fact that laymen had such an emphasis undoubtedly contributed to an attitude of intellectual awareness and learning which was prevalent among the Kleine Gemeinde in Russia.

In addition, the writings of many of the leaders of the Kleine Gemeinde are still extant and reveal that a sound educational base was common. Mention should be made of the venerable grandfather Isaac Loewen (1787-1873), who was a lad of 17 at the time of emigration to Russia in 1804 together with his parents. A number of his writings are still extant and reveal an extensive knowledge of the Holy Scripture and the Anabaptist-Mennonite literature. Loewen's writings also reveal a high degree of literacy and articulation and, above all, a similar concern for the study of the Holy Scripture and Anabaptist-Mennonite writings.

Of particular note regarding education and learning is the extended Von Riesen/Friesen family already mentioned elsewhere in this work. The whole family seems to have been characterized as educated articulate men, e.g. Abraham M. Friesen, Cornelius P. Friesen, and Johan P. Friesen (who later settled in Blumenort, Manitoba) were the sons of the Kleine Gemeinde minister Klaas Friesen (1793-1870). All three reveal a keen intelligence and are known to have received a good education. However, the ability of the Friesen/Von Riesen family is best exemplified in the work of Abraham

Friesen who was the second Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde.

Others, such as Klaas Reimer (1770-1837), who became the founding Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde, apparently had little formal education in Prussia. However, like Johan Cornies, Reimer set about to educate himself, which he achieved principally by studying the scriptures and the writings of the Anabaptist-Mennonites. His superior knowledge and learning in this area is very evident in his **Memoirs** and his formulative reasoning was well developed. This is also evident from the fact that his application of Anabaptist-Mennonite principles to practical situations was invariably sound. Reimer was also fluent in several languages and is known to have done some translation of Anabaptist-Mennonite writings from Hollandisch to High German.<sup>45</sup> Aeltester David P. Reimer (1894-1963) has commented that the extant sermons and other writings of his great-grandfather Klaas Reimer (1770-1837) reveal a good handwriting in the then current style. It has been noted that his writing style and articulation was not the equal of that of Aeltester Abraham Friesen, but of course not everyone disparages the work and quality of a man for such pedantic reasons. (See Section 10.04) From the foregoing it can be seen that it was not merely fortuitous coincidence that brilliant evangelical leaders and thinkers such as Aeltester Abraham Friesen and Rev. Heinrich Balzer would arise from among the Kleine Gemeinde.

It seems that language proficiency was highly regarded in the Kleine Gemeinde. A number of the members of the Gemeinde were involved in the translation of Anabaptist-Mennonite writings from Dutch to German. Others retained or developed a knowledge of Dutch as can be seen from references in their manuscript writings to books which were only available in Dutch at the time. This proficiency in the Dutch language was apparently passed on to younger members informally within the Gemeinde, as there is no record that Dutch was taught formally anywhere among the Russian Mennonites. Aeltester Peter Toews is known to have translated several works from Dutch to German even a century later in Canada.

This interest in languages was not restricted to Dutch. A number of the Kleine Gemeinde of the generation who emigrated to Manitoba were apparently proficient in the Russian language, as is indicated by references and notations in the Russian language in their extant writings. Rev. Abram B. Klassen has reported that his wife learned to speak Russian through contact with the numerous Russian employees which her prosperous father employed on his **chutor** north of Nikopol in the early 1870's. In fact, it is reported that she had studied Russian in school and could also read Russian.<sup>46</sup> As there were a number of Kleine Gemeinde families living on this chutor (known as Hochfeld), it is possible that Mrs. Klassen (1859-1922) obtained her education in the little settlement's own school.

Another example is school teacher Abraham R. Friesen (1846-1884), who made entries in his diary in Russian. Other examples of the use of Russian among the Kleine Gemeinde include references in Russian among the papers of Cornelius P. Janzen (1863-1941) who would have received his basic schooling in Russia.<sup>47</sup> The transcription of a petition filed with the Governor of Ekaterinoslaw Province in 1872 bears the memorial that the original was in the Russian language.<sup>48</sup> Abraham F. Thiessen, the Kleine Gemeinde social reformer, spoke to the highest government Ministers in Russian.<sup>49</sup> The foregoing, of course, only illustrate that there were individuals among the Kleine Gemeinde in Russia who were proficient in Russian, as well they should have been after having lived in the country for 70 years.

To complete these comments regarding languages, it might also be noted that some individuals such as veteran school teacher Cornelius Fast (1840-1927) had already learned the English language while still in Russia. This proved to be a great help to the Kleine Gemeinde settlers during the pioneering years in Manitoba.<sup>50</sup> Others quickly learnt the rudiments of the language so that some individuals of the generation which emigrated to Canada would have been proficient in up to five languages. It is noteworthy that Menno Simons particularly endorsed a knowledge of languages.<sup>51</sup>

## 9.12 Kleine Gemeinde School Teachers.

Teaching was viewed as an honourable occupation among the Kleine Gemeinde. This section will refer to some of the Kleine Gemeinde school teachers in Russia.

The pioneer period of education in the Molotschna commenced with the founding of the settlement in 1804 and came to an end some time during the 1820's. Naturally detailed knowledge of the educational system during this period is scarce and most sources tend to emphasize the primitive nature of the early school system. But at least one writer, John F. Harms (1855-1945), mentions that his grandfather, Johan Harms (born 1800), received a sound education in the school in Blumstein and went on to be the school teacher in that village as a young man. John F. Harms goes on to mention that his father and uncles had to work very hard on their father's farm so that by comparison they



obtained only a meager education.<sup>51a</sup> Johan Harms (born 1800) had six siblings who were members of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde and therefore it can be assumed that he came from a Kleine Gemeinde home. (See Section 10.05)

The post pioneer phase of the Molotschna School system started during the 1820's and ended in 1843. There is record of three Kleine Gemeinde pedagogues who commenced their careers during this time, namely, Gerhard Goossen (1811-1854), Gerhard S. Kornelsen (1816-1894), and Cornelius F. Friesen (1812-1892). Brief biographies of these three veteran teachers are included here:

**Gerhard Goossen (1811-1854)** was a school teacher by profession and was engaged in this occupation for his entire adult life. He is known to have been the teacher in the village of Blumstein for many years.<sup>52</sup> He appears to be the teacher in the village of Muntau in 1848 as the **Gemeinde Berichte** of that year show a Gerhard Goossen to be the teacher in that village, and also the composer of the report for that village.<sup>53</sup>

**Gerhard S. Kornelsen (1816-1894)** resided in the village of Lichtenau where a Gerhard Kornelsen is shown as being the school teacher and composer of the **Gemeinde Berichte** for that village in 1848.<sup>54</sup> Much of his extensive correspondence is still extant, and includes numerous letters from his former students in Russia as well as America, which attest to the fact that he was very much appreciated by his pupils. He settled in the hamlet of Lichtenau near Steinbach, Manitoba, in 1874. Here his descendants, including son Gerhard E. Kornelsen and grandson Gerhard G. Kornelsen, continued in his footsteps as highly esteemed members of the teaching profession. Gerhard S. Kornelsen served as the first Aeltester of the East Reserve Brandordnung in Manitoba.<sup>55</sup> Kornelson was responsible for drafting the school regulations for the Kleine Gemeinde school system in Manitoba during the 1870's.<sup>56</sup>

**Cornelius F. Friesen (1812-1892)** His teaching career was somewhat more active than his colleagues. From a record written by his daughter (courtesy of Harry S. Friesen, Winnipeg, Manitoba), we learn that he taught in the following schools: Wernersdorf (1837-1842), Alexanderwohl (1842-1843), Wernersdorf (1843-1847), Morganau (1847-1860), Elizabethal (1860-1863) and Hirschau (1863-1864). In the latter year, Friesen moved to the village of Friedrichsthal in the Kleine Gemeinde settlement of Markusland, from where he moved to Anafeld in Borosenko in 1869.<sup>57</sup> He was also a teacher for a few years in Manitoba. In his obituary, it was stated that he was a revered and respected teacher throughout his career.<sup>58</sup>

Limitations of space will restrict more than a brief mention of the known Kleine Gemeinde teachers of the Cornies and post Cornies era commencing in 1843.

**Gerhard P. Goossen (1836-1872)** was a school teacher all his life, except for the last several years after he moved to Borosenko, where he took up the occupation of farming.<sup>59</sup> He had taught in the village of Lindenau. Gerhard P. Goossen became a leading minister of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde, having been elected in 1866. He died at the young age of 36. He was the son of Gerhard Goossen (1811-1854).

**Peter L. Dueck (1842-1887)** was a teacher in the Molotschna village of Gnadenthal for some years. About 1867 he moved to the Kleine Gemeinde settlement of Friedensfeld, north-west of Nikopol, where he taught, and in 1872 he moved to the central Kleine Gemeinde village of Blumenhof, in Borosenko, where he also served as the teacher. His life story is described in considerable detail in **History and Events**.<sup>60</sup>

Little is known about the Russian teaching career of **Cornelius Fast (1840-1927)** except that he taught at a number of locations after his marriage in 1861. During the last years in Russia he taught in the Borosenko village of Steinbach. Cornelius Fast also continued in his occupation in Manitoba where he taught in a number of different schools.<sup>61</sup>

**Abram P. Isaac (1852-1938)** became the teacher in the newly established Kleine Gemeinde settlement of Gruenfeld, north west of Nikopol, in about 1868. In his memoirs Abram Isaac recalls that he received his training under Gerhard P. Goossen, who had taught for 17 years in the Molotschna colony, and who had given him great encouragement to take up the teaching profession.

**Abraham R. Friesen (1846-1884)** was a veteran teacher in the Molotschna school system. During the last years he taught in the village of Lichtenau. His diary contains valuable descriptions of the life of a Molotschna school teacher in the 1870's.<sup>62</sup>

**Diedrich S. Friesen (1849-1901)** was a teacher in the Borosenko village of Rosenfeld and later also in the villages of Gruenfeld and Steinbach, Manitoba.<sup>63</sup>

The foregoing are the known teachers of the Kleine Gemeinde in Russia, which knowledge is basically restricted to the archival material of the East Reserve Gemeinde. Obviously there will have

been more. It is noted that there will have been other teachers among the group which settled in Jansen, Nebraska, as this group included a good number of literate and well-educated individuals.<sup>63a</sup>

It is evident that the Kleine Gemeinde was very involved in the educational system in the Molotschna. The first concern of the Kleine Gemeinde groups who moved out of the Molotschna to establish new settlements always seemed to be the establishment of a school which was staffed by a competent teacher. This concern was also evident in all the areas where the Kleine Gemeinde settled in America, as one of the first community actions was invariably the establishment of a school. These Kleine Gemeinde schools were staffed from a cadre of veteran teachers who had obtained their training and experience in the Molotschna educational system. In America the Gemeinde itself established the schools and educational system and in fact stipulated that no child was to be denied an education because of the lack of financial means.<sup>64</sup>

In view of the foregoing, it is amazing that the general Russian Mennonite historiography dismisses the Kleine Gemeinde as being against education in principle. The truth of the matter is that the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia fully supported a sound education in the home, Gemeinde and formal educational system as a part of the evangelical duty of the parents. In view of the high degree of literacy among the members of the Kleine Gemeinde who reached adulthood during the 1820's and the extensive Kleine Gemeinde involvement in the educational system it must be concluded that the Kleine Gemeinde belonged to the progressive element in Russian Mennonite society with respect to educational matters.

### 9.13 The Anabaptist-Mennonite Educational Philosophy.

Education is undoubtedly one of the most important functions of any society. This includes education and training in the home and Gemeinde as well as the formal schooling received. It is understandable that the question of educational philosophy would be of the utmost importance to the Russian Mennonites.

The historical view of many Anabaptist-Mennonites was that secularization had destroyed the Anabaptist-Mennonite church in Holland. It was perceived that the process of secularization was accompanied by and was perhaps even the result of the infiltration of pietist teachings. According to this view the eroding of the faith of the fathers was exemplified by the organization of the **Doopsgezinde** in Holland, which soon discarded many of the biblical teachings of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. Although the erosion of these values was accompanied by an unprecedented advance in the wealth and social standing of the Dutch Mennonites, and by tremendous achievements in writing, art, and culture, these were seen as little more than the evidence of a dying faith. Of course, time also proved that these views were correct. After a century or more Dutch Mennonite society in the glory of its wealth and social success became largely absorbed into Dutch society, while the small remnant which remained was hardly distinguishable as Mennonite at all.

The Anabaptist-Mennonite movement had been tried and proven in the torture racks, beheadings, and the burning pyres of the Inquisition. Now it appeared that the formula for the destruction of evangelical faith were the triune factors of wealth, secularization, and pietism. The feeling among many of the Prussian-Mennonites by end of the 18th century was that the cancer which had destroyed the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith in Holland was already so well advanced that the tide could no longer be reversed. In fact, distinguished leaders such as Peter Epp, the Aeltester of the Flemish Mennonite Gemeinde in Danzig, were so overwhelmed by the conviction that the Mennonite world in Prussia was doomed that he advised his children to flee to Russia, where perhaps a new start could be made. It is essential to recognize the importance of these views because they were also held by the Anabaptist-Mennonites in Russia, including the Kleine Gemeinde.

The importance of this philosophical stance to the question of education was that, for the Anabaptist-Mennonites, it was a proven fact that the secularization process was always accompanied by a move to additional formal education which glorified the wisdom and religion of the world (war-waging Christianity). Invariably this sort of educational philosophy was promoted by those Mennonites who had come under the influence of Pietist teachings. The venerable Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe, of the Berghaler Gemeinde in Russia, expresses this view as follows:

"Now, dear reader, I shall explain how many had already accepted military service and how many held fast to the Lord's teaching, even though in weakness. The book from which I take this information was printed in Danzig in 1863. At that time the non-resistant Mennonites, counting Europe and America, numbered 123,100. Next, the vacillating Mennonites who let each member decide according to his own conscience whether to accept military service or only to take weapons to defend their own home, numbered 46,317, including those in America. Sword-bearing Mennonites in Holland numbered 39,000, and there with the apostolic teaching in the west had died out. They still have

the gospel, to be sure, but otherwise they cannot be distinguished from the world.

"Now all the non-resistant ones had settled together in Russia, but for how long? When Aeltester Toews came to our colony, that is, to Berghal, we asked him how it was that they had all had to emigrate. 'Oh, dear brethren,' he said. 'We resembled those virgins; they had become sleepy and fallen asleep. When the bridegroom came, their lamps were almost extinguished. Ours was a similar experience. All this time the enemy had observed us carefully, and when the time came he used his opportunity. This occurred as follows. The rich began to let their sons study in the advanced school of Danzig, from there they went to the Berlin university, and when they returned home and were visited by their neighbors' sons, they would say to them, 'Oh, you are only a boorish peasant'. At the same time they were so well dressed and bore themselves like military officers. The other youths did not need to be told twice and so this worldly current swept into the congregation more and more, continually causing greater indifference. Finally our teachers were chosen from this educated group and so we ourselves planted the germ of arrogance and pride into our schools, as well as into our congregations. After the teachers had gained much influence in the church, which had become lax, the congregations began to elect their preachers from these teachers. These began to speak freely from the pulpit, without reading, saying: It must come from the Spirit, or, the Spirit must speak through us.'

"But what sort of preachers were most of these? While the text came from God's Word, most of the sermon consisted of the latest news, what happened here or there, or accidents; occasionally they also included Scripture verses. But when the congregation knew which of these would be preaching the church would be filled with the curious, because these preachers brought what their ears itched to hear. But when we preached there was no eagerness to come, for they said, 'We know all that by now; they simply read a sermon.'

"Sometimes several of them preached in succession, and that really pleased them, but the hearts remained empty of God's Word. They had become fed up with the genuinely heavenly manna, and we stood by, despised and without being heard. Now our eyes were opened, but it was too late. The wicked enemy had won, because we had raised them ourselves to our destruction. It is as I said, when there was still time to watch we had fallen asleep, and while we calmly slumbered, the wicked enemy had sown weeds among us, and the worldly-wise priest had gained the upper hand. All our resistance was of no avail; we had to be silent. Arrogance and self-righteousness had completely gained the upper hand.

"Now the time had come when the enemy could prepare to attack the sleepy ones or pull them into his net, for the government had observed us closely for several years, and suddenly it was announced that the Mennonite must participate in state service. When we turned to the government in order to plead for religious freedom, we were told, 'Yes, you want freedom, but what of your conduct by now? Your youth cannot be distinguished from officers anymore,' and so on. And we had to be silent, because this was pure truth. Then they closed the door completely and we had no option left except emigration. But the majority would remain, this they knew. To be sure, these can still carry the name of Mennonite, can retain baptism and communion, but, dear reader, the humility had disappeared, and God resists the arrogant, and lets them go their own way. As long as they walked in humility and held fast to God's Word, they prevailed, but they could not prevail when they lived in pride and arrogance.

"For approximately three hundred years God had upheld the teaching of humility, but then through arrogance it sank to an animal level. The Jews foundered due to false prophets and amorous alliances with the Assyrians. Four hundred years after Christ the Christians degenerated to an animal level through worldly wisdom and false priests, yet the Lord always safely hid his own. We have seen that God's Word first came from southern France to Bohemia, and a hundred years later to Switzerland, Germany, Holland, Poland and Austria. In 1798 the Mennonites began to move to Russia, and by 1862 or 1863 the rest of the Mennonites had left Germany. Now they were all gathered together in the vast Russian empire, and nowhere else have they been able to live out their faith and principles of freedom as undisturbed as in Russia. Yet, through arrogance, quarreling and contentiousness they departed more and more from the simple life until the beast could dare to enter into battle with them."<sup>65</sup>

## 9.14 Higher Learning and Hochgelehrsamkeit.

In his articulate and moving style, Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe has summarized the secularization process among the Prussian Mennonites, and the role which was played by a particular kind of higher education.<sup>65a</sup> It must be emphasized at this juncture that Aeltester Wiebe does not blame formal education itself as the cause of decay. Rather he points out that this type of education had resulted in a shallow vanity and arrogance, which was one factor in the establishment of a leadership which departed from the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith.

In fact, it was education in the home and Gemeinde which had become deficient. Had those individuals who undertook training in secondary schools and universities been firmly grounded in the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith, they would not have fallen prey to other teachings when they undertook more advanced formal training. And even if a small percentage of those individuals selected for advanced formal training had fallen from the evangelical faith, this was still far more desirable than that whole congregations should go lost because they had fallen into religious traditionalism and,

even worse, into secular ignorance so that they were afraid to face the world.

It has been reported that the early Anabaptist-Mennonites were so fluent in their Biblical and doctrinal knowledge that even the most highly educated Inquisitor or Reform scholar could not prevail against a simple tradesman in a debate. Such a knowledge and learning could only be achieved by an intense and devoted study. Such scholarship would have to be considered as a form of "higher learning", whether this education was acquired informally or through formal theological studies. Crucial contributions to Anabaptist-Mennonite theology and literature were made by men of both educational backgrounds.

In this emphasis the Anabaptist-Mennonites no doubt felt they were fulfilling the admonition of the Apostle Paul to Timothy to "give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." I Timothy 4, 13. It was not the mode of attaining this prescription which mattered. What was important was that the knowledge and capabilities which education could provide should be applied reverently and in humility just like any other gift of God, be it property, talents in husbandry, family, etc.

The Anabaptist-Mennonites distinguished this sort of education from the type of "higher learning" discussed earlier in this chapter which they described with the German term "Hochgelehrsamkeit".<sup>66</sup> The latter form of higher learning was equated with that of Biblical scribes and pharisees, who used all manner of human reason to avoid what the Anabaptist-Mennonites regarded as being the plain and unmistakable meaning of the scripture. In the Anabaptist-Mennonite view, the legalism which had resulted from this "Hochgelehrsamkeit" was largely to blame for the non-scriptural doctrines and dogmas which were partially swept away by the Reformation and completely rejected by the Anabaptist-Mennonites.<sup>67</sup> In the Luther translation of the Bible the reference to "scribes" is translated as "Schriftgelehrten" or literally "those learned in dogma" in the sense of human reason, logic, and humanism. In the view of the Anabaptist-Mennonites, what was lacking was the Godly biblical wisdom which understood the centrality of Christ and his command to "take up the cross and follow me". Naturally Kleine Gemeinde theology as expressed by Heinrich Balzer is little more than an eloquent expression of the same concern.<sup>68</sup>

It was the formally educated scholars throughout the history of Christendom who had developed and propagated doctrines which justified the construction of mammoth cathedrals and also the pursuing of wars in the name of Christ. In the meantime millions of their fellow humans were experiencing unspeakable suffering and death by starvation. At the worst, these scholars had espoused the murder of thousands of nonresistant Christians and other "heretics" as part of the supposedly evangelical mission program of the state churches during the 16th and 17 centuries. Naturally, the suspicion which was created by the institution of such doctrinal fallacies became deeply engrained in the Anabaptist-Mennonite psyche.

Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe of Bergthal and Heinrich Balzer of the Kleine Gemeinde should not be interpreted as blaming education itself for the beguiling of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. The very conception of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith itself had been dependent on such men as Menno Simons and Dirk Philips who, through self education and the best formal education in their time, had become knowledgeable in many areas, including the Greek, Latin, and Hebrew languages, so that they could study the original texts of the Holy Scripture. The inspired understanding and exposition of the Word of God of these men was dependent on their thirst for knowledge and the fact that they had the degree of education necessary to develop and articulate their knowledge. Without the advantage of their education, the gifts of these men would have remained dormant, and the Anabaptist-Mennonite light unkindled.

The problem also lay with the individuals who undertook the additional training. According to the description of Aeltester Wiebe, it seems that many of the West Prussian Mennonites who did further their education were those who had already fallen to the outside teachings. i.e. Aeltester Wiebe describes them as the sons of the rich who were already steeped in arrogance and vanity. It seems that those who pursued formal education time and time again had adopted pietist teachings, and then returned to their home communities under the guise that they were now superior people with a superior faith who now would stoop down to impart to their former peers the "true" way to salvation. Then if someone like Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe was so unkind as to object when they attempted to carry out their mission program, they felt very offended that their benevolent evangelism had so rudely been rejected.

It is surprising that this did not become more of an issue among the Russian Mennonites. It seems that until the emigration of the 1870's the Anabaptist-Mennonites still basically constituted a majority in their home village schools, so that this process could not make any substantial inroads in the

elementary education system. Of course, the situation would have been different in the villages originally settled by Pietist-Mennonite groups eg. Gnadenfeld. What was important was that each village was largely able to control its own school in a democratic way. It has already been mentioned that most of the teachers in the Molotschna Mennonite school system until the 1870's were educated and trained on the job by apprenticeships and teachers conferences. Here the more outstanding individuals of proven caliber could share their insight and knowledge, which resulted in a tremendously essential upgrading in the rank and file. The result, from all appearances, was a rather successful educational system—considering the state of pedagogy at the time. It seems that the Anabaptist-Mennonite groups in general were reasonably satisfied with the Russian Mennonite educational system and participated fully in the same.

### 9.15 Tobias Voth. A Pietist Educator.

There are three 19th century educators who are regarded as symbolizing all that was good in the Russian Mennonite educational system. The philosophies and personalities of these three teachers were to become firmly entrenched in Russian Mennonite society after 1870. In fact, they are generally regarded as heroes of the faith by Pietist-Cultural Mennonites. The three pedagogues referred to are Tobias Voth, Heinrich Heese, and Heinrich Franz. Because of their importance to Russian Mennonite history a brief biography of each of these teachers is provided here.

Tobias Voth was born in 1791 in Mark Brandenburg, Germany, where his father was a Mennonite minister. He attended local school under teachers who had studied in Leipzig and Berlin. He taught in a local school for five years. After passing his teacher exams he taught at Soldin, where he married a Lutheran girl. In 1818 he reported in his diary that he and his wife were converted to the writings of Jung-Stilling, and that they then had fellowship with other Pietists.<sup>69</sup> In 1822 he was called to the Molotschna to teach at the Orloff Verein School which had been founded under the leadership of Johan Cornies. Voth was recruited by Aeltester Franz Goertz of the Pietist-Mennonite Rudnerweide Gemeinde. Notwithstanding that Voth attempted to propagate his radical pietist beliefs in this Mennonite community through evening classes and "mission prayer meetings", he was originally supported by the all powerful Johan Cornies. He apparently also disseminated Pietist literature and is generally regarded as the father of the faith by the Pietist-Mennonites in Russia.

However, in time, even the "great" Cornies became fed up with the emotional and "too" sentimental and idealistic teaching of Voth. In the view of Cornies, the instruction of Voth was not "manly" enough, and his discipline was deficient. Matters deteriorated to the point where Voth reported that Cornies had told him that "you have a bias against the society, and the society against you".<sup>70</sup> Although Cornies had definite pietist leanings, Voth had gone too far, and the employment of Voth was terminated that same year.<sup>71</sup> Although his efforts in using his position of trust to propagate foreign teachings were terminated, he was the first in a pattern which was to be repeated many times.

The hiring of a pietist teacher like Voth had tremendous implications for the Molotschna Mennonites. It was one of the important incidents which underlay the 1824 division of the Grosze Gemeinde into the small progressive Orloff group under Aeltester Bernhard Fast, and the majority which reconstituted itself as a culturally reactionary Grosze Gemeinde. Again it must be noted that history could have been much different had a man like Cornies been more sensitive to the religious beliefs of the majority of the Russian Mennonites at the time. No other community would tolerate for a moment a teacher, even in the lowest post, who would use his position to propagate a religion contrary to that of the host society. In any other society such a teacher would have been subject to severe punishment for misleading the minds of the youth. But such an action would not have been in keeping with Anabaptist-Mennonite philosophy. It seems the movement at its best was doomed to remain a small remnant, as it could not use the normal instruments of social organization and institution building and still remain true to its cause.

The Molotschna Mennonite community would have been much better served had a complete outsider been hired to serve as a teacher trainer. A more qualified individual could have been recruited, with university or other appropriate training, who at least respected the faith of the people he was hired to serve. Simultaneously the best of the teachers produced by a system of apprenticeships, teachers conferences, and such qualified outside advisors, (and some of the more intellectually minded ministers), should have been sent to carefully selected universities to obtain the depth of formal education necessary to maintain and upgrade the standards of the educational system in their home communities. It has already been noted that a sound secular and religious education was crucial to the relative success of the first Anabaptist-Mennonites.

The most divisive action which could have been taken was enacted by Cornies, namely, the im-

position of a teacher on a society who believed that the fundamental philosophy of the society in which he was to teach was false. This was in effect what Tobias Voth represented to Russian Mennonite society of the 1820's. This imposition resulted in the drawing of battle lines which would have been totally unnecessary had Cornies had the sensitivity to hire as a teacher trainer someone who was not biased against the evangelical faith. After all, when Cornies wanted to improve any other aspect of life among the Russian Mennonites, he did not hesitate to obtain the best qualified advisors from wherever available. Russian Mennonite history would have been very different if Cornies had hired a Greek Orthodox, Russian Catholic, or German Lutheran university trained educator who had some understanding and respect for the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith.

### 9.16 Heinrich Heese, A Loyal Patriot.

The next teacher to be considered is Heinrich Heese (1787-1868). Heese was a Prussian and Lutheran by birth. As a youth he fled recruitment by the Napoleonic armies, escaping to the Mennonite settlements in Southern Russia.<sup>72</sup> It has already been noted that Heese had somewhat of an elitist and self-righteous disposition. In his autobiography he noted with respect to the Chortitza Mennonites that "their poverty and lack of understanding had transformed them into a lower type of creature". In 1830 Heese became the teacher at the Orloff Verein School, replacing Tobias Voth. Here he was also required to serve as secretary to Johan Cornies, the principal promoter of the school. Heese noted of Johan Cornies that "With the increase of his prestige and prosperity, the hardness of his heart increased". Many sharp encounters led to a parting of ways. Although his employment with the Chortitza Gebietsamt had already been terminated twice, Heese once more returned to Chortitza in order to establish a Zentralschule based on his own ideas. Again opposition to his work was strong. At about this time Cornies was attempting to extend his influence to the Chortitza colony, and Heese used his office to oppose these innovations. This had predictable results and Heese left the Zentralschule.<sup>69e</sup> Like Tobias Voth before him, Heese now started his own private school.

The pietism of Heese has been described as red hot and boundless. It appears that the tendency of Heese to categorize also extended to his religious life. Peter M. Friesen notes that the faith of Heese was rooted in the methodological, strongly emotional "new pietism" in vogue at the time, i.e. the Separatist or radical Wuerttemberg kind. As a result, Heese did not hesitate to negate the faith of those Mennonites who had adopted a form of pietism different than his own.<sup>72a</sup>

Heinrich Heese is best known for his particular form of patriotism. Historian Peter M. Friesen has noted that the patriotism of Heese was as genuine and fervent as were his religious feelings and judgments. Friesen notes that he was inspired by the genuine civil loyalty, gratitude and love for fatherland expressed by Heese. The exaggerations and extremely pathos-laden forms of expression of Heese appeared to Friesen to be "excesses which can be found in every original, self-taught natural genius, especially where the character of such an individual had been formed through the hard struggles of life". Peter M. Friesen illustrates the foregoing with an excerpt from a letter written by Heinrich Heese during the time of the Crimean War. The words of Heese speak for themselves:

"Einlage, November 3, 1855. To Peter Isaak in Schoenau (Molotschna). . . . In the enclosed poems you will discern my views about it (the Crimean War). Herein I have faithfully followed the suggestions of the Spirit, according to which our pious Prince (the Russian Tsar) will, for the glory of God, have the final victory. Our enemies are despisers of Christ; they are slaves of the dragon. Our Prince is serving the Lord, his warriors are believers, God will intervene, and the prayers of the pious will finally have the victory. . . . In what ways . . . is Russia less advanced than those countries which boast of their civilization? With all its great liberties, the people in England are oppressed worse than cattle by the high aristocracy; the common people are neglected in education and justice is involved in shameless intrigues. In France everyone is welded to the chains of the dragon, and religion is an object of mockery. Now in Russia, on the contrary, the general welfare is growing constantly! How wise, and how righteous is its law! How it honors religion! How tolerant it is toward all denominations! . . . In Russia's wilderness the Lord will know how to protect the woman with the child against the persecution of the dragon. (Cf. the 'Exodus-Church' # 258 above.) Thus Heese wrote during the Crimean War. After the war we read as follows: 'March 28, 1856. To them that love God, all things work together for good. Russia is blessed by the Lord with a wise, pious royal family. God is its mighty fortress against all the wiles and power of the enemy of Christ. . . . God's hand of blessing was with all (Tsars) for the salvation of their loyal subjects. Our Great Lord and Tsar Nicholas I (now resting in God) diligently promoted the training of the military, and how the bravery of our armies in this murderous war has justified such wise precaution! Our enemies were very loud with their boasts and threats; the Russians responded with silence. But the French prisoners said: 'The Russians shoot well, and their artillery is superior.'"<sup>73</sup>

The reader should not be startled by the reference to France and its allies as the Dragon. In the view of the German Pietists and especially the radical separatists, revolutionary France and the subsequent Enlightenment represented the Anti-Christ. Religious leaders such as Jung-Stilling later also considered Napoleon to be the Dragon or Anti-Christ. Pursuant to the eschatological teachings in vogue at the time, Russia would become the haven of refuge where the true church of Christ would escape the tribulation. Individuals such as Heese and Voth accepted these teachings as part of revealed religious truth. No doubt this influenced their decision to emigrate to Russia. Consequently, it is only natural that educational leaders such as Heese would also propagate a very fervent loyalty to Russia, which in their view was the mighty fortress of God which would prevail against Satan.

This warm-hearted and devout loyalty is further evident in the following selections of poetry quoted by historian Peter M. Friesen:

### *Christmas Song*

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| <p>2. "Satan sends his hosts<br/>to destroy our land<br/>Eagerly they rob, burn, kill<br/>practice it with a strong hand.<br/>We are threatened by great trouble<br/>Tribulation, fear, anxiety, and death.</p> <p>3. "Hardly had into this<br/>world been born<br/>Our hold Jesus-child.<br/>[Parallel: Jesus-Russia; Herod-Napoleon]</p> <p>8. "Now Beelzebub drives with heat<br/>Unto the bloody battlefield<br/>And in its murderous vanguard<br/>Stands a real, crafty hero<br/>Again a Napoleon<br/>Fights for him with Babylon.</p> | <p>9. "Now Satan has appeared,<br/>So that the whole world is shaking.<br/>Glories and majesties<br/>Are afraid of his might.<br/>Wooing now with flattery<br/>For the favor of the spirit of lies.</p> <p>11. "Only one Prince [Tsar Nicholas I]<br/>stands immovable<br/>Firm in faith in the holy place [Russia]<br/>Against him mightily embittered<br/>are Beelzebub and Mohammed . . .<br/>[In all, eighteen stanzas of six lines.]"</p> |
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### *New Year's Song*

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|---|--|
| <p>3. "He ['the proud enemy'] was angered<br/>and jealous of Russia's prosperity<br/>He was spying with envy and bitterness<br/>Waiting for the favorable moment<br/>Nothing seems as important to him<br/>As a betrayal to a bloody deed<br/>To break Russia's greatness<br/>To surely show his own shame.</p> <p>4. "The high counsel of Albion<br/>Raised to its zenith<br/>The democrat Palmerston<br/>Full of intrigue and conceit<br/>Offered his hand, for a firm band<br/>To the son, thirsty for action<br/>On France's bloody throne. . . .</p> | <p>6. "The proud queen of Britain<br/>Counseled by lies and deception<br/>Seeks her earthly gain<br/>In warlike deeds<br/>She offers herself, with a flattering mind<br/>To serve the spirit of lies<br/>To mock Christianity.</p> <p>8. "Mohammed's son is also aroused<br/>Through boasting and noise<br/>To be inspired to action. . . .</p> <p>9. "But Russia's Tsar, in faithfulness<br/>Faced by the dragon's waves<br/>Has without fear and timidity<br/>Drawn his brave sword. . . ."<sup>74</sup></p> |
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In his analysis Peter M. Friesen has referred to the characteristics of Heinrich Heese of always seeing only one side of things. On the one hand "perfection, ideal, holiness" and on the other "Satan and hell". Peter M. Friesen goes on to explain how the exaggerated patriotism of Heese has evolved into the more balanced loyalty of the Russian Mennonites of 1910.

"It is not the exaggerated pathos of his poetic patriotism that is interesting, but the fact that he, the born Prussian and Lutheran, and now Russian Mennonite, carried over so completely the Prussian 'Crusade-Patriotism' unto Russian soil. The Mennonite community which the author knew during his childhood took the same stance as Heese toward the Crimean War and toward the Russian soldier, as described so vividly and fervently by Alabin (in P. W. Kamensky—cf. #260ff. above). The Crimean War was regarded in a certain sense as a crusade (without knowing the word), in which the soldiers, especially the wounded and the sick among them, were viewed as martyrs. Doctrinal considerations concerning nonresistance hardly surfaced; emotions decided. Where do you see here Mr. Velizyn's German patriot in the Mennonite and colonist, who is casting treacherous side-

long glances to Germany (see #260 above)? No, there were none; and not even his and his school's literary (and not only literary) propaganda has been able to produce such Mennonites and colonists. The exaggerated poetic expression of Heese's Russian patriotism of the Mennonites of Russia is gone. But the true essence of this devotion to the Russian fatherland, based on insight, sense of duty, gratitude, acculturation and deeper rootage in the soil which has been their home for over 100 years, has remained and become more self-conscious. Praise God! And from the Old Colony, the former sphere of influence of Heese, streamed the first and numerous voluntary medical orderlies (from the ranks of young Mennonites) to the field of battle in Manchuria. And in civic and congregational meetings their parents (with one stroke) pledged thousands of rubles for their support.<sup>75</sup>

### 9.17 Heinrich Franz. A pendantic pedagogue.

Heinrich Franz is the last of the three pedagogues who are regarded as symbolizing the epitome of the Russian Mennonite educational system. Heinrich Franz was born in West Prussia in 1812 and died in 1889. Franz was educated in a local school system similar to the one in the Molotschna. For three years he had attended Verein School in Prussia where he was taught by F. W. Lange, who later emigrated to Russia as part of the Pietist Mennonite Gnadenfeld Gemeinde. He taught from 1835-1844 in the Gnadenfeld village school, where his Pietist-Mennonite background was no doubt appreciated. From 1846-1858 Franz taught in the Chortitza Zentralschule.

Like Tobias Voth and Heinrich Heese, Heinrich Franz apparently lacked any University or other special training for his position as a teacher-trainer. Nevertheless, Franz was also an extremely talented and capable pedagogue. Franz became known for his outstanding work in German and arithmetic. With his "150" tables in arithmetic and their key, Franz dominated arithmetic instruction for over half a century. His influence also dominated religious music in the home, school, and church through his *Choralbuch*, with notes, of 1860.<sup>76</sup> Peter M. Friesen provides the following assessment of the character and achievements of Heinrich Franz:

"That he took the course in the Russian language in Ekaterinoslav [in the interim between his service as village school teacher in Gnadenfeld and secondary school teacher in Chortitza] shows—we have also observed this in Heese—his great energy and also his deep understanding of the needs of the colonists. Franz never really acquired an adequate command of the Russian language, especially in practical terms. It would appear that he also never was wholeheartedly devoted to it, and that it was more difficult for him than for Heese to learn to feel in Russian. Heese, in his day, had composed long poems [see above] in which in a very patriotic spirit he presented Russia's history, especially the battles against foreign powers. These would hardly have been according to Franz's taste. The instruction of the Russian language was also emphasized less by Franz than by Heese, and the latter is supposed to have stressed with satisfaction that he might be inferior to Franz in all respects, except in Russian. German writing and arithmetic [along with elementary algebra and geometry] may have been given preference by Franz. Heese, whose relationship to his successor was not the best, says that the latter was childishly in love with his artificial style. Concerning instruction in arithmetic, all living students of Franz remember it vividly; it was also decisive with regard to the student's sympathy or antipathy towards the teacher; for during these lessons, primarily, Franz revealed himself as he was: in his complete dedication to teaching, but also in that he became easily and intensely excited, etc. One thing is clear: from 1846 to 1858, the Chortitza Secondary School had in Franz an extremely competent teacher for that day. His enemies confirm this."<sup>77</sup>

Naturally Heinrich Franz was also human and possessed of several character weaknesses which would adversely affect his effectiveness. Regrettably he became known for his pedagogical severity and egotism. Peter M. Friesen goes on to explain some of the difficulties encountered by Franz.

"This is also confirmed—in spite of his draconian severity (which must not be measured against present-day demands, but which must be explained in terms of the views of the people of that time) and in spite of the mass of anecdotes, partly funny and partly cruel in background, as told by them from their school life—by most students of Franz. [Even the later 'Brethren' from the ranks of his students, Gerhard Wieler, Johann Wieler and others—were in spite of the severe religious tension, always proud to have been 'students of teacher Franz.'] The administration also recognized his achievements as being exceptional, and the Ministry of Crown Lands awarded him [upon recommendation of the committee] a certificate of Honor for long, conscientious and faithful service in 1852. Like Heese, Franz did not restrict his activities to actual instruction either, even though his interests were not as diverse. Thus he had already prepared constitutions for the community schools of Chortitza in 1846. In 1851, with his assistance, directives for the educational system were prepared—something required, and indeed, for that time, indispensable for instruction in matters of the internal administration of the settlers in South Russia at that time and later. Franz also had many friends and disciples in the congregations,



so that Heese, for instance (1862), writes: 'Believing in God only, not in Franz; he is a capable teacher in his lessons—but his egoism, which he also instills in his pupils—what poison!?' Initially, Franz was also on good terms with leading circles and men; but suddenly this changed. Franz was as much to blame for this as his opponents, since, in the final analysis, the cause was to be found in his cruel punishments, which occasionally also involved the child of a powerful person. In all probability, however, there were matters of a purely personal nature which forced him in 1858 to give up his position. He was a difficult character who found it impossible to humble himself or always to adapt to conditions. . . ." (Thus far Neufeld.)

"A violent polemic between Franz and the Area Administrative Office brought his services to an end. After a twelve-year ministry he parted from the Chortitza School 'deeply hurt.'" <sup>77a</sup>

From the foregoing it is evident that Russian Mennonite society at the time was not always able to fully appreciate men such as Franz. Like Tobias Voth and Heinrich Heese before him, Franz had found it difficult to work with Gebietsamt and school officials. Although the work of Franz was limited by a tendency to pedantry, his educational methodology was superior to that of his predecessors. Peter M. Friesen sums up his view of Heinrich Franz with the following statement;

"Franz's education consisted of an extraordinary, generous measure of higher elementary school knowledge: firmly, surely and without wavering he would re-capitulate on occasion, if the need was there, matters from every part of the designated area. His language was an elegant, grammatically correct High German of the educated classes in Prussia; pedantically restricted, however, to boundaries that could not be crossed: thus, and not otherwise! He was the ideal of an elementary school teacher as desired by the Prussian school directives of that day, and as expressed in the 'Regulations'. A higher, academic education for our people, however, he did not desire—unless it were purely religious or directly practical. His personality was imposing; the impression at a first meeting with him was almost stately. The stamp of genius was clearly visible."<sup>78</sup>

## 9.19 A Comparative View.

Deeper insight regarding the significance of this pedagogical troika comes into focus from a comparative analysis of these men. Historian Peter M. Friesen refers to the different forms of pietist faith adhered to by Tobias Voth and Heinrich Heese as follows:

"It is also true that, for Cornies, T. Voth's religious manner had been somewhat too 'pietistic' in its outward form. Although Cornies adhered to the same principles of faith as Voth, and appreciated and promoted missions, Bible society, etc., he was nevertheless much more the sober, somewhat dry 'Mennonite,' suspicious of the overt religious expressions, while Voth in his manner resembled more the 'evangelical pietist.' We concede that for us also there is somewhat too much sentimentality in Voth, whereas in Cornies, 'manliness' all too often expressed itself as despotism, which Heese had later to experience as Voth before him. After all, Heese's kind of faith was also rooted in the warm-hearted, methodologically strongly emotional (in its extreme form, too sentimental) orthodoxy of that time which had begun, even then, to displace the cool, intellectual Protestant rationalism. The former is called the 'new Pietism'. We find Heese especially emotional in his earlier period in Ohrloff, the best period of his entire life."<sup>79</sup>

Regrettably the schismatic tendency inherent in the radical pietism of the day also became evident in these men. This sectarianism was especially evident in Heinrich Heese, who was often quite ready to negate the faith of fellow pietist believers who differed from his own understanding of experiential truth. In the following quotation, Heese set forth his views of some of his co-confessionists among the Russian Mennonites.

"Those of Gnadenfeld will soon run again into their own snares. . . . They were always barren [Wuest] in their wisdom, even before their namesake [Pastor 'Wuest'] was promoted in their vicinity. Fritz Lange . . . managed to bring such wisdom out of his agitated breast that one had to marvel: the depth of the deity, the sanctification through the Spirit, the righteousness in Christ—these he enumerated on his fingers. He was so perfect in his faith that the door to heaven had to be opened for him at a slight hint. When I, in response, countered that I could never get further with my justification than that bowed-down publican, he replied with a look of derision: 'Such a state of the soul is miserable; true faith must always be founded on a sure conviction.' The whole exchange shows a presumption."<sup>80</sup>

Peter M. Friesen apologetically refers to the harshness of some of the views of Heese and warns against the dangers when such charismatic judgments are coupled with emotional immaturity:

"In a private conversation, Lange had boldly expressed his personal assurance of salvation, which had greatly annoyed Heese (cf. the letter which follows). He was just as harsh in his judgment about Pastor Wuest, whom he knew only on a hear-say basis. All the shameful and absurd things which the foolish and anti-faith gossipers (P. Dobbert,) were spreading

about these two men and their movement, he accepted as firmly established and he believed firmly. The illustration for this he found in the unfortunate aberration of the 'Kronsweide-Awakening' where he saw only the aberrations. It would appear to us that when he wrote the copied letter he did not have an adequate knowledge of self and sin and, therefore, had not experienced the abundant forgiveness of sin. When, in our enthusiasm, we mentally raise ourselves one degree higher in the spiritual sphere we always sink at least a degree and one half if we are not spiritually mature in our knowledge and emotions. It is also possible that Heese might have been disappointed by the discrepancy between word and being of many who boldly gloried in their forgiveness of sins and their assurance of salvation. Moreover, we also believe that God has not imparted to all His children the same kind, depth or breadth of spiritual insight and Christian experience, but that the limitation of knowledge and revelations has a varied distribution. Has not one and the same Gospel been written by four evangelists in different tonal expressions; do not Paul, Peter, John and James speak in their letters of the one faith, with formal variations in picture and expression? This may suffice. Heese, firm and immovable in his faith, later proved to be a rude opponent of the brotherhood (described by us as Pietism in Gnadenfeld, the one with Wuest, and especially of that of the Kronsweide group and of the 'secessionists' of the sixties.<sup>81</sup>

Nevertheless Peter M. Friesen regarded Heinrich Heese as one of the three educators who symbolized the best in the Russian Mennonite educational system and who laid the groundwork for later pedagogical triumphs. Peter M. Friesen assesses and compares these prominent fathers of the Russian Mennonite school system as follows:

"If tradition has ascribed to Voth primarily a reputation for piety, to Heese Russian patriotism and to Franz a great thoroughness and a great success in the impartation of knowledge—the three have together produced this three-fold ideal (without their having stood together in a personal and intimate relationship). Each one of them was immovably firm to the end in his love for work, and in his faithfulness to duty and principle. All three were truly and earnestly pious, and differed only more or less in their understanding, in their temperament and in character—whether more inward or more practical. They are no less worthy of grateful memory, of enthusiastic respect and imitation than the two men whom we have described as our greatest: Johan Cornies and Bernhard Harder. If we today acquire a considerably higher education with relative ease, and know better didactic and pedagogical methods—this does not make up for the genial depth and strength of those others. In the five men mentioned here we have five proposals for as many popular belletristic life-portraits for the inspiration of our youth and the instruction of our people—life-portraits without the prosaic, critical objectivity that binds the 'historian', but not the 'story-writer'. The latter is only bound to idealize truth, and may present realities in a poetic and idealistic garb. For our own more restricted world, such life-portraits in the form of short stories would be no less valuable, profitable and popular, than the products of Jeremias Gotthelf (Albert Bitzius) Polack's 'Brosamen' and the works of Otto Funke and the like are for the larger circles.

"We are indebted to a certain degree to the first three secondary school teachers discussed here for a proper public and religious education, even though a consistently satisfactory, pedagogically trained teaching staff, as well as a theologically trained clergy and a special 'educated class', are still lacking."<sup>82</sup>

From the foregoing it is evident that in spite of their human weaknesses, Peter M. Friesen regarded Tobias Voth, Heinrich Heese and Heinrich Franz as representing the spiritual and cultural ideal of Russian Mennonite life in 1910.

## 9.20 Conclusion.

To the Anabaptist-Mennonites these three men, in their own way, each represented one aspect of what was going wrong in Russian Mennonite society. Tobias Voth was a blind adherent of Pietism, which he promoted under the guise of education and mission work. Heinrich Heese represented a slavish and militant nationalism which the Kleine Gemeinde and other Anabaptist-Mennonites could never have endorsed. Although Franz represented solid pedagogical achievement, his excessive severity and pedantry were to some extent adopted by the later Russian Mennonite pedagogue. One certainly does not want to belittle the accomplishments of these devoted and capable men. Nevertheless, the thinking and philosophy they represented must be understood if one is to understand the issues which divided the Russian Mennonite community during the 19th Century.

There were also others who were concerned about the direction which the educational system was taking. Among these we find Johan Harder (1811-1875), the Aeltester of the progressive Orloff Gemeinde, who was sympathetic to the Anabaptist-Mennonites. When the new Orloff Verein School was opened in 1860, Aeltester Harder addressed the assembly as follows:

“ . . . That . . . through this school efforts be made not only to impart earthly knowledge (which, though somewhat useful, is of little profit, according to the statement of the Apostle), but much more and above all, true godliness, which is profitable for all things . . . and that this school become a seedbed for the knowledge and true worship of God and that it might contribute to the kindling and spreading of that holy fire, concerning which the Savior wished, with great yearning, that it were already kindled! . . . O that the Lord would only give us teachers at all times who, as poor, pardoned sinners, out of personal experience and through personal example, might in this way be proper models for their little flock, so that the fruit of their labors might be a rich blessing for our children and children’s children. . . .

“ . . . Woe unto those educational institutions and school teachers who in their efforts do not only restrict themselves solely to the knowledge and sciences of this world, but attempt to give to this knowledge and these sciences a direction which brings them into contradiction with the Word of God. . . .”<sup>83</sup>

Franz Isaac, the Orloff minister and advocate of the landless, was another proponent of a more traditional evangelical educational philosophy. He addressed the opening of the Orloff Verein school with the remark: “. . . let no one change your goal”. He then referred to point four of the constitution of the School Society which says: “The goal which this Society School shall try to attain is not only to instruct prospective students as thoroughly as possible for this present life, but also, and primarily, to train them for their eternal destiny. . . .”<sup>84</sup> Regrettably, the views of Aeltester Johan Harder and minister Franz Isaac were too much ignored by some of the Pietist-cultural Mennonites. Peter M. Friesen simply dismissed these views as giving vivid expression to the “exaggerated Mennonite fear about the ‘too much’ of learned knowledge”. In the view of Peter M. Friesen, it was the spirit of Tobias Voth which was renewing the Russian Mennonite schools.<sup>85</sup>

The Anabaptist-Mennonites were not fooled by the logic that education was merely another area of human endeavour which was equally prone to excess, pride and vanity. These philosopher farmers knew that the question of education was far more important than achievement in any other area of life, as the very soul of the individual and the spirit of the community was at stake. However, their failure to evolve a definite program of having members of their faith obtain university training with the purpose of returning to upgrade and maintain the standards of their home community would prove to be disastrous for many Anabaptist-Mennonite groups.

In concluding this chapter on education among the Molotschna Mennonites, it must be noted that the rash actions of men like Cornies in engaging teachers who would use their positions to propagate radical pietist teachings had resulted in the formation of extremist positions. On the one hand were those who decided that if education, and particularly pietistical forms of “higher education”, had these results, then they simply wanted no part of it. At the other extreme were those who lauded any movement away from what they regarded as “narrow minded Mennonitism” and to whom this form of education was to be glorified. For others, the educational system was a convenient tool for the propagation of their new faith. Through the resulting religious and social tension, battle lines were drawn which were to bedevil the Russian Mennonite church for decades to come, first in Russia and later in the Americas. Through all this turmoil the real educational issues as well as the teachings of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith were frequently forgotten.

## FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER NINE. EDUCATION

1. Dr. D.G. Rempel *op.cit.*, 299.
2. H. Goerz. *op.cit.*, 91-118.
3. Franz Isaac, *op.cit.*, 273-291.
4. H. Goerz. *op.cit.*, 91.
5. Peter M. Friesen. *op.cit.*, 775-777.
6. H. Goerz. *op.cit.*, 92.
7. Peter Isaac, *op.cit.*, 47.
8. H. Goerz. *op.cit.*, 94. For further information about Jacob Brauel (1803-1866), see John P. Dyck. **Brauel Genealogy (1670-1983)**. (Self-published, Springstein, Man., 1983), 97 pp.
9. P. Braun, “Education among the Mennonites in Russia” ME, Volume Two, page 154.
10. H. Goerz. *op.cit.*, 95.
11. *Ibid*.
12. P. Braun, *op.cit.*, 154.
13. H. Goerz. *op.cit.*, 95.
14. Franz Isaac, *op.cit.*, 278.
15. H. Goerz. *op.cit.*, 100.
16. *Ibid*, 95-96.

17. **Ibid**, 95.
18. **Ibid**. One young teacher is to have related how terrified he was to have been when he presented himself to Cornies for the first time. For Cornies promptly seized the button of his overcoat as if he would tear it off, and would not release him until he promised that he would not teach Fraktor as all the other teachers at the time were doing. It is noteworthy that the Art of Fraktor was not completely eradicated by Cornies as it was later stressed and practiced by Manitoba Kleine Gemeinde teachers such as Cornelius P. Friesen in Blumenort.
19. H. Goerz, *op.cit.*, 96.
20. Franz Isaac, *op.cit.*, 280-289.
21. H. Goerz, *op.cit.*, 99.
22. **Ibid**.
23. Peter M. Friesen, *op.*, 792-794.
24. H. Goerz, *op.*, 101.
25. P. Braun, *op.*, 155.
26. **Ibid**.
27. H. Goerz, *op.cit.*, 106-107.
28. P. Braun, *op.cit.*, 155.
29. Rev. Heinrich Balzer, *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, Volume XXII, April 1948, Number Two, 88.
30. **Ibid**, 99.
31. **Ibid**.
32. Heinrich Heese "Autobiography" Translated by Cornelius Krahn, *Mennonite Life*, April, 1969, Volume 24, Number 2, 66-73.
33. J.C. Wenger, editor, **The Complete Writings of Menno Simons**, (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, Herald Press; 1956) 790.
34. H. Goerz, *op.cit.*, 94.
35. Will and Ariel Durant **The Age of Napoleon** (New York, Simon and Shuster; 1975) 339-351.
36. **Ibid**, 373.
- 36a. A Giesinger, *op.cit.*, 178.
37. Abraham F. Thiessen, **Die Lage Der Deutschen Kolonisten in Russland**. (Leipzig, Im Selb-verlag, in Commission bei Robert Hoffman, 1876), 6.
38. P. Braun, *op.cit.*, 155.
39. Heinrich Balzer, *op.cit.*, 91-92.
40. **Plett Picture Book**, *op.cit.*, 64. In his **Lebenreise**, (See Footnote 51a) John F. Harms reports that the Kleefeld school, which he also attended, has about 100 students.
41. Abraham B. Klassen, **Lebens Erfahrung**, Unpublished Memoirs, Swallow, Alberta (Courtesy of Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg/Mr. Dick B. Eidse, Roseort) 8. He was the son of delegate David Klassen.
42. Aeltester David P. Reimer and Rev. Peter J.B. Reimer, editors; **The Sesquicentennial Jubilee** (Steinbach, Manitoba, Evangelical Mennonite Conference, 1962), 95.
43. Aeltester Peter Toews, **Das Wachsame Auge Gottes** (Printed by Mennonite Publishing House, Elkhart, Ind; Self-published 1908).
44. **History and Events**, *op.cit.*, 128-130.
45. See item #22, **John E. Friesen Collection**, Courtesy EMC Archives/Roy Loewen/Rev. Jac P. Friesen/Blumenort, Manitoba.
46. Abraham B. Klassen, *op.cit.*
47. **Cornelius P. Janzen Collection**. Courtesy of Mennonite Village Museum, Steinbach/Klaas F. Janzen, Blumenort.
48. Deleted.
49. Abraham F. Thiessen, **Die Agrarvirren** (Berlin, Selbsverlag, 1887) 17.
50. Margaretha Reimer, **Familien Register von Witwe Peter P. Reimer** (Blumenort, Manitoba, self-published 1965) 38.
51. J.C. Wenger, *op.cit.*, 790.
- 51a. John F. Harms, **Eine Lebensreise**, (Selbsverlag, Hillsboro, Kansas, 1943), 3.
52. Peter Isaac, *op.cit.*, 55.
53. M. Woltner, *op.cit.*, 96.
54. **Ibid**.
55. Peter F. Unger, **Memoirs**, Unpublished Manuscript, Blumenhoff, Manitoba Volume 3, Page 9, Courtesy of Rev. Abe Unger, Landmark, Manitoba. Recent research by Henry Fast, Steinbach, would indicate that Kornelsen was the second Brandaeltester and not the first. Accord to Mr. Fast, the first Brandaeltester was Peter W. Toews (1831-1922) who settled in Blumenort, Manitoba in 1874.
56. John C. Reimer, ed., **75 Gedenkfeyer** (Steinbach, Manitoba, Festkomitee der Mennonitischen Ostreserve, 1949) 73.
57. Helena Jahnke, **Stammbuch der Grosse Eltern Klaas Friesens**, Unpublished Manuscript, Herbert, Saskatchewan, 1929, page 3, and an unpublished study of the Cornelius F. Friesen Family, by Harry S. Friesen, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1981.
58. From **Gerhard S. Kornelsen Collection**, Courtesy of John K. Schellenberg, Steinbach, Manitoba.
59. Peter Isaac, *op.cit.*, 55.
60. **History and Events**, *op.cit.*
61. Margaret Reimer, *op.cit.*, 36.
62. Courtesy of Harry S. Friesen/**Mennonite Heritage Centre**.
63. His diary will be referred to in a later volume.
- 63a. The fact that the Kleine Gemeinde fully participated in the Molotschna school system where it was only a minority with little voice in its operation, also explains why the Kleine Gemeinde could more readily accommodate itself to the district schools of the Manitoba government during the 1880's and after WWI. In contrast, the Berghthaler and Fuerstenlaender were used to a territorial block settlement in Russia with only one Mennonite church. Consequently the Berghthaler and Fuerstenlaender had a century long history where the church had operated and totally dominated the school system.
64. John C. Reimer, **75 Gedenkfeyer**, *op.cit.*, 73-75.

65. Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe, **Causes and History** (Chortitz, Manitoba 1900, Self published). English translation by Helen Janzen, published by the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, Winnipeg, 1981, 13-15.
- 65a. The influence of the Spener/Halle tradition at the university of Berlin may have been a crucial factor.
66. Dr. Robert Friedmann, **Mennonite Piety through the Centuries**, *op.cit.*, 81 & 82.
67. Harold S. Bender "Anabaptist-Mennonite Theology" ME, Volume 4, 704.
68. For an example of such writings see, Peter Peters, **Ausgewählte Schriften** (Printed by Mennonitische Verlagshandlung, Elkart, Indiana, 1901) 78-82.
69. Dr. Cornelius Krahn, "**Tobias Voth**", ME 4, 859.
70. Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 695.
71. **Ibid.**, 699.
72. D.H. Epp, **Heinrich Heese** ME 2, 686.
- 72a. H. Heese, *op.cit.*, Mennonite Life, April, 1969, pp 66-73.
73. Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 702-703.
74. **Ibid.**, 703-704.
75. **Ibid.**, 704-705.
76. B.H. Unruh "**Heinrich Franz**" ME 2, 380.
77. Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 711-712.
- 77a. **Ibid.**
78. **Ibid.**
79. **Ibid.**, 699.
80. **Ibid.**, 701.
81. **Ibid.**, 701.
82. **Ibid.**, 712.
83. **Ibid.**, 715.
84. **Ibid.**
85. **Ibid.**

# *Part Three.*

## *The Founding of the Kleine Gemeinde*

### **Chapter Ten. The Prussian Roots**

#### **10.00 Introduction.**

Part Three deals with the founding of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. Chapter Eleven will set forth the account of the founding and early development of the Kleine Gemeinde and chapter Twelve will provide an assessment of Aeltester Klaas Reimer and his reform movement. Chapter Ten will consider the Prussian roots of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. First, the spiritual heritage. Second, the formative years and early life experiences of Klaas Reimer. Third, the socio-economic roots of some of the founding families of the Kleine Gemeinde.

#### **10.01 The Spiritual Heritage.**

The founding of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde was an attempt to recapture the Anabaptist-Mennonite vision. The Kleine Gemeinde understanding of this vision was shaped largely by the theology and faith of the Flemish branch of the Mennonite church. The most immediate spiritual heritage of the Kleine Gemeinde was the Flemish community in Danzig which was one of the oldest Gemeinden in Europe. Anabaptist-Mennonite refugees from Holland are believed to have found their way to Danzig as early as the 1530's. Menno Simons left his personal influence on the Danzig group through a journey of spiritual visitation<sup>1</sup>. Until the end of the 18th century many of the most prominent Anabaptist-Mennonite leaders and theologians came from the Danzig Flemish Gemeinde.

It is helpful to consider some of the men who shaped and gave life to this Gemeinde. The teachings of Dirk Philips (1504-1568) were undoubtedly the most influential in setting the course of the Prussian Church. Philips had sided with the Flemish wing of the Anabaptist-Mennonites when the division with the Frisians occurred in 1566<sup>2</sup>. He was regarded as a well educated man with a command of Latin, Greek, some Hebrew, and also French, in addition to his native languages. According to tradition Dirk Philips also served as the first Aeltester of the Danzig Gemeinde which was established on an organized basis in 1569.<sup>3</sup> The Kleine Gemeinde eagerly read and studied the writings of Dirk Philips whom they regarded as one of the key spiritual fathers of the evangelical Church.

George Hansen was another Anabaptist-Mennonite leader who had a profound influence on the development of the Flemish Mennonite church. He served as the Aeltester of the Danzig Mennonite Gemeinde from 1690 until his death in 1703. Hansen was a cobbler by trade but was very widely read and gifted as a speaker and writer. The contents of his major work **The Foundation of Christian Teaching**<sup>3a</sup> had been approved and agreed upon by all the Prussian Aeltesten in 1680 indicating the wide base of his theological authority. During the time of the religious cross examination of the Prussian Mennonite church by the Catholic Archbishop, George Hansen spoke so successfully that the Flemish church was completely absolved of all charges.<sup>4</sup> The Kleine Gemeinde in Russia frequently referred to the writings of the beloved Aeltester George Hansen.

Another leading figure in the history of the Danzig Mennonite Gemeinde was Hans von Steen (1705-1781). Steen had been sent to Amsterdam for business training and was distinguished for his education and for the vigor with which he defended and promoted the interests of his faith. Steen served as Aeltester of the Danzig Mennonite Gemeinde from 1754 until 1779. The survival of the Danzig Mennonite Church during the difficult years from 1748-1760 is largely attributed to his very able leadership and defense of his Gemeinde<sup>5</sup>. Aeltester von Steen practiced a ministry of visitation and letter writing in the missionary model of the Anabaptist-Mennonites<sup>6</sup>. No doubt some of the older members of the Kleine Gemeinde personally remembered this venerable leader. His writings are frequently referred to by the Kleine Gemeinde. The Confession of Faith written in Dutch by Aeltester George Hansen in 1671 and translated and published in German by Hans von Steen in 1768<sup>7</sup> was highly regarded among the Prussian Mennonites<sup>8</sup>. In 1779 Hans von Steen retired from his office and held an election for a new Aeltester. He died in 1781.

His successor was Peter Epp (1725-1789) who lived as a farmer in Neunhuben near Danzig. Peter Epp was elected as a minister of the Gemeinde in 1758. He was the first Werder or rural resident ever to serve as the Aeltester of the Danzig Gemeinde when he was elected in 1780. After his election he moved into the territory of the city in order to be closer to the church<sup>9</sup>. He was to become the most immediate spiritual forefather of the Kleine Gemeinde. This is evidenced by the fact that the writings of Aeltester Peter Epp were treasured and cherished among the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde throughout their three-quarter century sojourn in Russian and even into the second and third generation in Manitoba.

For example, a letter written by Aeltester Peter Epp to Ohm Cornelius Wall of March 30th, 1782, was transcribed by David L. Plett (1863-1953), who then made copies of this letter as a part of a collection of historical writings which he bequeathed to each of his thirteen children. The same letter was apparently considered as an important guide in setting policy in 1897 by Rev. Peter Baerg of the the East Reserve Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. Then in 1931 Klaas F. Penner of Blumenort, Manitoba published this letter by Aeltester Epp in a booklet entitled **Zwei Briefe zur Frage der Lehrerwahl**<sup>10</sup>. Both letters dealt with the question of the election of someone as a minister who had been wanted among God. The epistle by Aeltester Peter Epp demonstrates the spiritual heritage of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde and therefore a translation of the same is included here.

“Worthy Ohm Cornelius Wall” Danzig, the 30th day of March 1782.

“Beloved Brother and faithful co-worker for the gospel of Jesus. Firstly, I extend to you my heartfelt wish of holy contentment and peace for your precious soul, in our crucified, died, and newly arisen, sovereign of heaven over heaven, and triumphant Jesus. May we enjoy the might and support of his full salvation here for this temporal life as well as eternally up yonder. May this be granted through the grace of God. Amen.

“Further my beloved brother. I have received in good order your agreeable writing of the 28th of this month, and recorded on the 29th. From the same I perceive your reason, and believe I understand the question put to me with respect to the matter of your newly elected minister (Lehrer). I will answer briefly.

“If indeed, the facts of the matter are as you yourself have advised: That he openly hit the servant, who after all is a human being with a free will. Then he is not only incapable of serving the Gemeinde. but has earned the punishment of the Gemeinde. For hereby he has clearly and unequivocally conducted himself contrary to the teaching of Christ and his apostles, who have taught us to love our enemies, and to pray for them, and to do good for them and not to beat them.

“Since time immemorial this article has always been firmly entrenched with us, and it has been perceived to be completely prohibited and punishable for a Christian. Should we make an exception for this man, then this article of faith for nonresistant Christians would soon fall by the wayside. Firstly among you where it is currently faltering, and subsequently in general. And further on we would become the equal of the world around us in the matter of revenge, from which God in His Grace wishes to protect us.

“And therefore my beloved brother, we should be more watchful with respect to this fatal infraction against the Gemeinde, for not everything shall be desolated. And should anyone harbour thoughts or perhaps even make the remonstrance that this Cornelius Klassen was not only elected to his office by a majority of votes, but also through the casting of lots? And that they therefore consider the matter to be that much more Godly? To this I would answer firstly: That our abundantly loving Savior Jesus Christ is love and truth, and would never act contrary to his own nature. For this would not be in accordance with the glory and perfection of God. Therefore, would not the one who is powerful enough to awaken children out of the stones, also be powerful enough to arouse and give us righteous teachers (Lehrer)? I still have faith.

“But should man prefer to be clever and not submit himself to the all wise leading of God in deepest humility and holy trust in His gracious help? And rather rely on honour, the esteem of others and his own miniscule talents, and not on virtue and an exemplary life and conduct, modeled on the holy life of Jesus. Then, it is no wonder that God does not hear us and instead allows nature to take free rein at such an election so that the whole procedure miscarries. This is how matters have been with us and with you. Consequently there is no choice left for us but that we are to be true heroes. We are to watch and pray in everything, so that we do not allow a hindrance to be placed in our way which we might regret later on when it is too late.

“If matters will dispose themselves that we will be able to come together, then with the help of God, I wish to speak somewhat further regarding all these matters. In closing I wish to commit you to God and to the rich words of His grace, who is mighty enough to save us all. And further with additional greetings I remain your loving co-worker, brother-in-law and brother in Christ.”

“Peter Epp”

Aeltester Peter Epp symbolizes the spirit and tradition of the Flemish branch of the Anabaptist-Mennonite church. He was the last in a chain of strong Aeltesten and writers who had lead the Flemish Gemeinde in Danzig and through whose inspired efforts the Danzig Gemeinde had always maintained a position of prominence and leadership among the Mennonites in Prussia. Aeltester Peter Epp was a most capable and devoted successor to his spiritual ancestors.

### 10.02 The Emigration Movement.

Aeltester Epp was much more than merely a spiritual father to the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. He also was the most important Prussian Mennonite leader who favoured the emigration to Russia. To this end he used his good offices as Aeltester of the important and leading Danzig Mennonite Gemeinde to further the cause of emigration to Chortitza in 1788.

The emigration of Prussian Mennonites to Russia was inspired by the 1763 Manifesto of Katherina, Empress and autocrat of Russia. The Manifesto represented a skillfull propaganda effort which appealed to the war-scarred and often oppressed people of western Europe<sup>11</sup>. During the first half of the 18th century the southern boundaries of the Russian empire had been extended until they included the fertile lands north of the Black Sea. These acquisitions were a constant source of trouble as a homeland for bandits and other troublesome sectarians. The colonization effort initiated by the Manifesto was an attempt to settle and civilize these areas with skilled and productive pioneers<sup>12</sup>. These settlers were to act as a model and inspiration for the mass of Russian peasantry who were deemed to be incapable for the task<sup>13</sup>. The fact that Russia at the time was ruled by Katherina the Great, who was a German princess by birth, no doubt contributed to the success of her appeal among the people of Germany.

In his 1889 history of *Die Chortitzor Mennoniten* historian D. H. Epp has reported that when George Trappe, the emissary of the Russian government, came to Danzig he was naturally unable to go to the city council with a proposition which would excite some of Prussia's most industrious citizens to emigrate. Instead he directed himself to Aeltester Peter Epp to whom he then revealed the overture of his Monarch, Katharine the Great. Aeltester Epp was quickly convinced that the proposal to emigrate to Russia was the correct decision to make and became a zealous promoter of the movement. The value of this assistance was far beyond calculation because of the esteemed position of Epp in the Danzig Gemeinde. Thanks to the united efforts of these two men the news of the Czarina's favourable proposal spread among the Prussian Mennonites<sup>14</sup>.

There were three main reasons which motivated the Mennonite emigration to Russia. First, the political situation. Since the time of the Reformation western Europe had been plagued by one war after another. On several occasions the members of the Danzig Mennonite Gemeinde had lost everything they had to the devastation of an invading army<sup>15</sup>. The accession to the throne of Frederick the Great of Prussia in 1740 initially heralded greater toleration and a limited guarantee of religious liberty. The Mennonites were generally pleased when the Danzig and Delta regions were united under his rule with the First Partition of Poland in 1772. But the growing spirit of militarism in western Europe boded no good for the peace loving Mennonites. Frederick the Great was an aggressive and military minded leader who was concerned that large areas of his domain were inhabited by nonresistant Christians. "The example of such a special privileged class in the midst of a reluctant people made the task of recruiting officers as well as impressment gangs more difficult"<sup>16</sup>.

The government as well as the Lutheran clergy became concerned when the Mennonite land holdings increased 300 per cent during the years 1774 to 1777<sup>17</sup>. The result was the edict of 1789 which prohibited the acquisition of any more land by the Prussian Mennonites. This gave the emigration movement a very strong economic dimension. A large landless class of day-labourers, craftsmen, and artisans already existed among the Prussian Mennonites. The dream of becoming independent, land-owning farmers was very much alive among them. The complete prohibition of land acquisition in Prussia coupled with the offer of fertile farmland in Russian was a message which could not be ignored by many Mennonites<sup>18</sup>. Especially when the offer of free land was combined with a **Privilegium** which guaranteed religious freedom and perpetual exemption from military service. The first Mennonite emigrants would tend to be the landless artisans and labourers to whom these opportunities were a siren call.

Religious reasons also played an important part in the emigration movement. For the earnest Anabaptist-Mennonites the proffered freedom from the bearing of arms was undoubtedly a major factor. Others such as Aeltester Peter Epp hoped and prayed that such an emigration would accommodate and inspire a regrouping and renewal of nonresistant Christianity. D. H. Epp summarizes the situation as follows:



“And indeed, was it not the voice of the Lord, which in view of the oppressed state of his children again revealed a safe haven to which they could flee and with them thereby to preserve the peace of their conscience? Complete freedom of religious practice in accordance with the fundamentals of their forefathers. Recognition of ‘yes’ and ‘no’ instead of the oath. Exemption from military service, and so on. In addition all manner of concessions and entitlements with respect to the pioneer settlement. The best outlook with respect to the future regarding the material world. This was what they were now being offered. Whoever could still avoid seeing the leading of God in this matter, would also be incapable of seeing the gracious providence of an all loving God”<sup>19</sup>.

At the suggestion of George von Trappe the Mennonite church in Prussia decided to send Jakob Hoepfner and Johann Bartsch as delegates to spy out the land. These devoted men left in 1786 and returned with a very favourable report the following year. By the fall of 1788 the first group of 228 families had left Prussia. By 1789 the first group of emigrants had already settled in Chortitza. Tragically these pioneers initially encountered severe internal strife as has already been mentioned in chapter five. For some reason this group of pioneers who had left their homeland largely for religious reasons did not include a single minister<sup>20</sup>.

In a desperate effort to achieve a peaceful resolution of these difficulties the Chortitza pioneers made a plea to Aeltester Peter Epp in the hope that he would come to Chortitza. Surely he would be able to resolve the difficulties through his tremendous influence. Epp was not the man to reject such an entreaty. Although his health was failing he resolved to undertake the arduous journey and made the necessary preparations. But the sovereign ruler of life and destiny had other plans for Aeltester Peter Epp whom he called from his mortal abode before he had embarked on his journey<sup>21</sup>. Thus the man who had done so much to bring the emigration to Russia into being was not to see the promised land himself. His decision to support the movement with the prestige and reputation of his office was one of the vital factors which assured that settlement in Russia would come to pass.

Subsequently Aeltester Cornelius Regehr (1743-1794) of the Flemish Heuboden Gemeinden in Prussia was summoned to Chortitza in the place of Aeltester Peter Epp<sup>23</sup>. Aeltester Regehr was an earnest Anabaptist-Mennonite and his autobiography was later read among the Kleine Gemeinde in Russia<sup>24</sup>.

### 10.03 Klaas Reimer, Origins and Character.

A young man was growing up in the midst of these events whose name would be inseparably intertwined with the founding of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia: namely Klaas Reimer (1770-1837), who was to become one of the most important Russian Mennonite leaders of the 19th century. Klaas Reimer was born on October 16, 1770 in the Prussian village of Petershagen near Tiegenhoff<sup>25</sup>. This village was located within a few miles of the Frisches Haff on the Baltic Sea and between the Nogat and Vistula Rivers. The city of Danzig, now known as Gdansk, was located some twenty-five miles to the west on the Baltic Sea.

Petershagen itself was located near a little tributary which flowed into a small bay of the Frisches Haff several miles distant. According to the 1776 census records,<sup>26</sup> the village of Petershagen consisted of fifty-six families of whom approximately two-thirds were independent farmers. The other one-third were engaged as servants or employees. At least one-half of the farmers in the village are listed as being quite well-to-do. It seems that Petershagen was one of the larger and more prosperous Prussian Mennonite villages. Although almost nothing is known of the upbringing and childhood of Klaas Reimer it is evident that the physical surroundings were attractive and favourable for the upbringing of a gifted and inquisitive child.

Through his extensive research, Winnipeg genealogist Glenn Penner has been able to determine that the parents of Klaas Reimer (1770-1837), were Heinrich Reimer and Agatha Reimer of Petershagen<sup>27</sup>. With respect to his parents Klaas Reimer recorded only that his father had always warned very much against the dangers of the smoking of tobacco. He also indicates that his mother's (Meumes) parents were quite well-to-do. Otherwise little is directly known of the parents of Klaas Reimer. Glenn Penner has also been able to determine that the maiden name of the mother of Klaas Reimer was Agatha Epp. Although the names of the parents of Mrs. Heinrich Reimer (nee Agatha Epp) are presently unknown, it should be noted that the Epp family was one of the leading Prussian Mennonite families. Certainly the fact that the mother of Klaas Reimer came from a prominent family is of considerable significance. Through his gifted research Mr. Glenn Penner has solved a research problem which has stumped Kleine Gemeinde genealogists for decades.

Considerably more is known about the youth and early adulthood of Klaas Epp Reimer through his own writings. In his autobiography Klaas Reimer makes reference to the way in which God often

prepares people for the task or mission for which they are destined.

“God draws people to himself. Yes, and often persuades them to take on a particular endeavour for which he hath ordained them in ages past. In Romans 8 the Apostle Paul says, ‘For whom God hath foreknown, he hath also chosen for the work for which they have been called.’

“Ever since my youth I was very much inclined towards a life of freedom in the world. At the same time such freedom came to be more and more acceptable according to the teachings of the Mennonites. Card playing at every opportunity came to be a common practice. On one occasion while on the road work (Scharwerk) it occurred that my comrades and I, together with the teamsters, also wanted to play cards at noon. An elderly man then approached and stood beside me saying that if I was still unfamiliar with the playing of cards I should not bother to learn, because it was an evil practice. This struck my conscience and from that time on I did not play cards again. This is the manner in which the gracious God convicted me on many occasions, although I remained full of impurity and sin continued to cling to me in spite of his gracious leading.

“Similarly when I was engaged with the carpenters early one spring only a few years later. Nothing good was brought forward from the time that we awoke in the morning until we again went to sleep at night. Only perishable vanity was evident. During the very same year I committed myself to the Gemeinde. Now the good and evil within me came into a tremendous spiritual conflict with each other. It seemed hopeless for I partook of many things which were an abomination to me and I did not go back to the carpenters. But I very much remained full of impurity. It was at this time that I allowed myself to be baptized which occurred in 1790. Nevertheless I frequently attended at weddings and took part in roadwork (Scharwerk) where I far too light-heartedly took part in personal pleasures. Later in my solitude at home, the spirit of God directed my conscience that I had not done right in this or that. I became more penitent and desirous of bettering myself and of taking greater heed.

“Through all of this I did not search enough in the word of God which he requires of his people. Many things remained unclear to me because of my indifference and the concerns of this world which were too dear to my heart and in which I was too much involved. Indeed, I was far too deeply immersed in the works of creation, and had not sufficiently searched for the Creator himself. Nor had I honoured him nor sufficiently reflected upon what he required of us. I frequently read in the *Martyrs Mirror* and was always glad when I was able to listen to the elderly discuss the Holy Scripture. Especially when they talked of the wonderful works of God. In spite of all this, much remained hidden which really should have been known to me<sup>28</sup>.

The steadfast character and hunger for spiritual truth for which Klaas Reimer would become known are evident in the foregoing. Through prayerful study of the scripture and the Anabaptist-Mennonite writings, and through visitation with the elderly who continued earnest in their faith, Klaas Reimer was drawing nearer to his God. At the same time his employment on roadgangs and training as a carpenter provided a background of dealing with various sorts of people on different levels which would later stand him in good stead.

Naturally a young man of Klaas Reimer's proven secular abilities and his demonstrated interest in spiritual matters would not remain unnoticed among the eligible women in the vicinity. In his autobiography Klaas Reimer has reported that he moved from his ancestral village Petershagen to the village of Neunhuben about three years after the death of Aeltester Peter Epp who died in 1789. Neunhuben was located just east of the city of Danzig, about 40 werst or twenty-five miles from the birthplace of Klaas Reimer.

It was here in Neunhuben that the relatively carefree bachelorhood of Klaas Reimer would come to an end. In January of 1798 Klaas Reimer and Maria Epp the daughter of the deceased Aeltester Peter Epp, were wed. Maria Epp was born on April 13, 1760, which made her some ten years older than her husband who was twenty-eight years of age at the time of his marriage. His father-in-law Aeltester Peter Epp had been a farmer in Neunhuben<sup>29</sup>. At the time of their marriage Maria Epp was employed as the householder or steward (Verschafferin) for the aged Ohm Cornelius Epp who was her father's brother. After the wedding Cornelius Epp sold one-half of his Wirtschaft or farm to the young couple<sup>30</sup>.

The couple then farmed together with their uncle for six years. Financially this was a very beneficial move for the young couple as at that time only a small fraction of the Mennonites in Prussia could ever dream of owning their own farm. Klaas Reimer describes this enterprise by modestly stating that “the Lord granted his peace and blessing to this endeavour”. With the birth of a daughter Aganetha in 1801 it seemed as if the Klaas Reimer family had everything they might wish for. Economic security and a peaceful farming life in a pastoral Prussian village. Through the Epp family connections, the

Reimers were also assured of an eminent standing in the Menonite church and society of the time. This was the heritage of Klaas Reimer. As shall become evident, other forces were at work which would deny Klaas Reimer and his family such an idyllic life.

#### 10.04 The Danzig Flemish Gemeinde.

At about this time changes of great significance were becoming evident in the Flemish Mennonite Gemeinde in Danzig. Since time immemorial the Danzig Mennonite Gemeinde had had members living in the Danzig Werder to the east of the city. They were a minority in the Gemeinde consisting of some 120 baptized souls. Frequently they found it difficult to attend the worship services in the city because of poor roads. For this reason the rural group had requested and was granted permission to conduct their own worship services in private homes in 1768. This was easily carried out at the time as two ministers were among those living in the Danzig Werder.

In 1791 the rural Gemeinde was granted a measure of independence when it was constituted as a branch of the Gemeinde in the city. They immediately elected two ministers and a deacon from among their midst and constituted a treasury for the support of their own poor. They were bound to the city Gemeinde only through having a common Aeltester who performed their baptism and who came twice yearly to conduct the communion services.<sup>31</sup> The worship services of the rural Danzig Werder Gemeinde were held every second week in the home of Ohm Cornelius Epp and Klaas Reimer. Cornelius Epp was the leading minister and Assistant Aeltester of this Gemeinde. In addition there were three other ministers and one deacon.<sup>31</sup>

But the differences between the "Kleine Gemeinde" in the Werder and the Grosze Gemeinde in the city went far beyond the obvious geographic factor. Peter Epp had been a gifted, God-fearing man of great wisdom. He was not afraid to chastise and admonish his Gemeinde to remain steadfast to the faith.<sup>32</sup> The successor of Aeltester Peter Epp in Danzig was Jakob Defehr (1739-1807) who was elected as Aeltester in 1790.<sup>33</sup> The members of the Werder Gemeinde felt that Defehr lacked in wisdom and tolerated everything.

It appears that the formal separation of the Werder Gemeinde in 1791 occurred as a response to the growing theological differences between the two groups.<sup>34</sup> Aeltester Peter Epp had fought a valiant but losing battle against the infiltration of pietist teachings and spiritual decline. By organizing as a separate Gemeinde, the Werder group hoped to be better able to withstand these forces. Klaas Reimer has illustrated the foregoing with the case of one of the rural ministers who had wrongfully instituted legal proceedings against someone. When this minister was severely chastised by Ohm Cornelius Epp as the Assistant Aeltester, the errant minister simply left the group instead of repenting for his wrongdoing.

The incident had one important effect in that the rural group now needed another minister. After a time a ministerial election was held with the result that Klaas Reimer was elected as a minister on February 1, 1801. Klaas Reimer describes his reaction to this completely unexpected turn of events.

"After a time a ministerial election was held on February 1, 1801, and as unskilled and untrained for the ministerial as I was, the choice fell on me. This was completely unexpected by me as I was totally unsuited for the task. At the same time, I was only a novice and newcomer to the Gemeinde. But what was the use? I could not refuse the election, even though I did not know how or what I was going to teach (preach). For the Holy Scripture was unfamiliar to me as I had never attended school. Even though I was a fast learner I had not read very extensively, and I was too weak or too ready to give up with respect to memorization.

"But I decided that as God had led me thus far I would carry out the undertaking in so far as God would grant me power for that cause. For in as far as I knew, I wanted to seek to cling steadfastly to the truth. Nevertheless it was a very heavy burden for me, so that frequently my courage failed me; and the words spoken by Paul were fulfilled thereby, 'God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise'. As I was so lowly I could not but think to myself that it was the will of God, and in addition I was minded to cling firmly to the truth in so far as I was capable."

From the foregoing it is evident that Klaas Reimer undertook his obligations very seriously. He felt very deeply the burden of spiritual responsibility which was now entrusted to him. Although he had little formal schooling he was a fast learner and now intensified his own study of the scripture and the Anabaptist-Mennonite writings. He prepared his own sermons which he read from the pulpit.<sup>35</sup> This was quite progressive for a time when many Prussian and Russian Mennonite ministers relied on sermons which had been handed down for generations, or simply read from a book of sermons written by Reformed or radical pietist ministers.<sup>36</sup> (See Section 9.11).

In his earnest desire to pursue spiritual truth Klaas Reimer was extremely disappointed to find

that falsehood had also infiltrated amongst the ministers in the small Werder Gemeinde. In his autobiography he describes the pastoral methods of the senior ministers in dealing with a case of adultery

“There was a young, prosperous and handsome man by the name of Franz Fast who had an elderly wife and a mature step-daughter. Soon it got to the point where her foolishness would come to light. When the step-daughter gave birth the child was immediately brought to the orphanage in the city. We ministers then had two brethren summon the young mother for us. We asked her to name the father of the child. With tears she replied that she did not know which satisfied all the senior ministers. The aged Ohm was very sick and did not respond at all. Nor could he hear our conversation. But I found it to be an abomination that the doer of the deed would remain uncovered. While they were speculating and talking that it might have been the step-father I proceeded to admonish her that she should not heap one sin on top of the other. When it became very evident that she would soon confess, one of the other brethren started to speak against me in such a loud voice that they perceived nothing of my presentation. Consequently I fell silent. It was clearly evident that she would soon confess if only the punishment for sin would be explained to her. But this did not happen. Later I admonished the senior minister Johan Toews. He was not favourably inclined but I did not concede. Some of the brethren later became upset that the matter was to remain concealed in this manner. Indeed, the brother of the adulteress almost lost his sanity on this account.”

Unfortunately this was not an isolated incident. Klaas Reimer goes on to state that this matter had hardly been concluded when another evil made its appearance in the group.

“Our neighbour Isaac Toews was a man over 60 years of age. When his wife became sick he hired her sister as his housekeeper. After his wife had died he wanted to marry his housekeeper. As the aged Ohm was still very sick Toews asked us three ministers if such a marriage would be allowed. The minister Toews replied that he had complete freedom to do so. Janzen did not prohibit him, nor did he give him the freedom to go ahead. But I completely prohibited him from such a marriage and presented to him what our forefathers had written and spoken about such a marriage.

“On another day Toews came to us and I read to him the teaching regarding such a marriage which had been practiced in the olden days. Namely that this amounted to incest. He then returned to his home and proceeded with his plans, and the minister Toews performed the marriage for them without any further inquiries. When the wedding was over and I remained opposed to the same, Toews made a complaint against me with the Aeltester in the city.

“The Aeltester together with the ministers then came to our place. The Aeltester asked me why I was so opposed to the marriage of Toews. I replied to him, ‘We need not even discuss the scriptural grounds for my position, but I will ask you a question. My father-in-law found this practice to be an abomination. The Aeltester Regehr from Heuboden had said to a man who also wanted to marry his sister-in-law that ‘if he did such a thing they would be put out of the Gemeinde and not be reaccepted for so long as they both should live.’ I pointed out that he himself was very well aware of the debate in this regard between Gerhard Wiebe of Ellerwald and Peter Dyck. If the three Aeltesten were wrong then I was also wrong. But if in accordance with the Holy Scripture they were correct then I was unable to concede. I received no answer to this question and the matter was not discussed any further. The matter was left as it was.’”

The Anabaptist-Mennonite position against the marriage of a sister-in-law or brother-in-law was merely a continuation of the Roman Catholic teaching on the point. The doctrine of affinity grew out of the canonical maxim that marriage makes husband and wife one. As a result a sister-in-law was deemed to be a sister by canon law. The point of interest here is not the fact that the Flemish Mennonites adopted this position, but rather the thorough manner in which Klaas Reimer defended his views. First, by reference to Scripture. second, by reference to the writings of the spiritual forefathers. And third, by reference to the positions held by the leading Anabaptist-Mennonite Aeltesten in Prussia at the time.

It is evident that there was a growing rift between the Gemeinde in the city of Danzig and the rural Danzig Werder Gemeinde as well as the other Flemish Gemeinden in the Vistula Delta. The Gemeinde in the city had been much exposed to the influence of pietist teachings. The effects of this exposure became very evident with the death of Aeltester Peter Epp. The new leaders did not take a particular stand on doctrinal issues which automatically resulted in the influx of alien theology. These changes are quite evident in **Die Danziger Mennonitengemeinde** written by H. G. Mannhardt. The book contains the story of the Flemish Mennonite Gemeinde in Danzig. Until the end of the 18th century the account is one of a valiant struggle to preserve and practice the evangelical faith. The consequences of this struggle included social stigma, economic restrictions, pecuniary fines, etc. With the commencement of the 19th century it seems that the problems of the Danzig Gemeinde

are mainly centered on the construction of better church facilities, the hiring of a gifted pastor, the adoption of a written constitution, etc. The move towards pietism and increasing secularization continued unabated so that by 1836 Jakob Mannhardt (1801-1885) took over as Aeltester of the Danzig Gemeinde. Mannhardt was particularly noted for guiding the Danzig Gemeinde through the difficult transition from the teachings of nonresistance to the unreserved acceptance of military service.<sup>37</sup>

Scholar Robert Friedmann has also commented on these trends which eventually afflicted the entire Prussian Mennonite Church. He notes that the emigration of so many stalwart proponents of the faith in turn weakened the ranks of the Mennonites remaining in Prussia. Robert Friedmann asserts that the emigrants eventually included the strongest and most active members of the Mennonite church in Prussia and that those who remained were often the ones "who were more inclined to efface the distinction between the Mennonites and their protestant neighbours. Consequently there was little aggressive spirit left among those who stayed behind. They did not want to offend anyone by conduct or action. In short they had become the **Stillen im Lande**."<sup>38</sup>

These trends in the Prussian Mennonite church were already evident in 1801 when Klaas Reimer was elected as a minister. Naturally, considerable religious tension was created when some groups and individuals adopted various forms of pietism. In his autobiography Klaas Reimer refers to the disputation caused by the growing differences.

"And then the King in Berlin issued the restrictive edicts regarding the Mennonites. As a result all the Aeltesten and ministers from East and West Prussia held a general conference in order to work for an improvement in the spiritual situation. I attended three of such conferences. But what was the use? It was clearly demonstrated that the temple would not be cleansed nor the portals closed. For there was much freedom among the Danziger who then came into disputation with the others who were not in agreement in these matters. In the midst of all of this the pride, arrogance and unrighteousness was increasing rapidly. Yes, when the Mennonites for their part had all the freedom which was unopposed by the government. Certainly no improvement in spiritual matters could be expected in Prussia and particularly in the Danziger Gemeinde. This led to the decision to follow the brethren in the faith who had already emigrated to Russia. Consequently some 30 adult souls of our 'Kleine Gemeinde' on the land (Danzig Werder) departed for Russia on the 23rd of August, 1804."

From the foregoing it is evident that the increasing religious tension among the Prussian Mennonites was a direct inspiration for emigration for some. Aeltester Peter Epp had admonished his loved ones from his deathbed! "Children, you must go to Russia as the Mennonites here are doomed". To his dying day, Klaas Reimer referred to this admonition as a great source of encouragement and inspiration for the difficult decisions which lay ahead.

## 10.05 The 1808 Revisions-Liste.

The Klaas Reimer family joined some 400 Prussian Flemish families who emigrated to the Molotschna colony in 1803-1805. A good number of these must have shared the views of Klaas Reimer as they later joined the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia. Through the research and published work of Benjamin H. Unruh a very incomplete listing of Kleine Gemeinde emigrant families can be attempted at this time. The work of Dr. Unruh concentrated on the eastward emigration of the Dutch and West Prussian Mennonites. In his major work **Die Niederlaendisch-Niederdeutschen Hintergründe der Mennonitischen Ostwanderungen Im 16., 18., und 19. Jahrhundert** he has published much valuable information pertaining to those emigrating from West Prussia to Russia.

Unruh also includes a **Revisions-Liste** from October 27, 1808, which lists the various families who settled in the Molotschna colony in 1804 to 1808<sup>39</sup>. Included in this record is the amount of property owned by each family and the names and ages of the children of each family as of 1808. This record has been shortened somewhat by omitting the reference to the amount of grain on hand, the amount of grain on hand in unthreshed schocks (sheaves) and the number of loads of hay on hand. All of these pioneers were farmers in Prussia except where otherwise noted. A brief comment has been made respecting each family with the hope that the reader will be able to make a connection to many of these families. Reference will be made in the footnotes to the **Genealogy Register** of Aeltester Peter Toews where he has listed the Kleine Gemeinde families who emigrated from Russia to Manitoba in 1874-1876<sup>40</sup>. Here follows a partial listing of Kleine Gemeinde families (as of 1808) which can be identified on the **Revisions-Liste**:

- 1) Durck Reimer, age 26, from Plattenhof, Amt Tiegenhoff. Wife Susanna 45. Family Number 5 in Muntau. Children - Aron 19, Heinrich 16, Catarina 14, Duerck 13, Sara 8, and Anna 5. Owns 1 wagon, ½ plow, 1 harrow, 3 horses and 6 cattle. He is believed to be the father of Heinrich Reimer (1791-1884) of Muntau, Molotschna, who settled in Gruenfeld, Manitoba

- in 1874<sup>41</sup>. His son Heinrich Reimer (1818-1876) settled in the village of Blumenhoff north of Steinbach, Manitoba in 1875<sup>42</sup>.
- 2) Johann Koop, age 42, from Waldorf, Amt Elbing, Family Number 14, in Muntau. Wife Elisabeth 35. Children - Anna 8, Johan 6, Abraham 1. Owns 1 wagon, ½ plow, 1 harrow, 4 horses and 9 cattle. He is believed to be the grandfather of Johan Koop (1831-1897) who settled in Neuanlage near Blumenort, Manitoba and also the Grandfather of the widow Martin Rempel, (nee Katharina Koop), (1826-1900) who settled in Rosenort, Manitoba in 1876.<sup>43</sup>
  - 3) Johan Friesen, age 45, from Reinland, Amt Tiegenhoff, Family Number 5 in Schoenau. Wife Margaretha 24. Children - Helena 15, Catarina 12, Sara 10, Elisabeth 8, Abraham 1, Johan ¼. Owns 1 wagon, 1 plow, 2 harrows, 8 horses and 18 cattle. Johan Friesen was the senior minister of the Grosze Gemeinde in 1824 when the split with the Orloff Gemeinde took place. His second wife was the sister to Abraham Friesen, the second Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde. His son Johan Friesen (1808-1872) was the third Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde. His son Abraham Friesen (1807-1891) served the Kleine Gemeinde as minister and his son Klaas Friesen (1817-1873) served as a deacon. His grandchildren and further descendants are very well represented in the Manitoba and Nebraska Kleine Gemeinde<sup>44</sup>.
  - 4) Peter Wiebe, age 53, from Marienburg, Amt Marienburg, No occupation stated. Family Number 21 in Schoenau. Wife Maria 48. Children - Elisabeth 26, Maria 20, Peter 17, Heinrich 14, Johann 12, Jacob 9, and a grandchild Gerhard 5. Owns 2 wagons, 1 plow, 2 harrows, 10 horses, 14 head of cattle and 8 sheep. Through his son Jakob Wiebe (1799-1856) he was the grandfather to Heinrich Wiebe (1851-1876) and Peter Wiebe (1835-1902), who were both deacons of the Kleine Gemeinde at the time of emigration in 1874.<sup>45</sup>
  - 5) Cornelius Eidsen, age 38, from Neuteicherwald, Amt Neuteich, Family Number 10 in Fischau. Wife Helena 32. Children - Cornelius 7, Helena 2, Catarina 1. Owns 1 wagon, ½ plow, 1 harrow, 6 horses and 12 head of cattle. He is believed to be the father of Abraham Eidse (1811-1893) who settled in Rosenhof, Manitoba in 1874.<sup>46</sup>
  - 6) Cornelius Enns, age 26 from Lackendorf, Amt Elbing, Linen Maker, Family Number 13 in Fischau. Wife Maria 25. Children - Heinrich 1, Brother Johan 15, Mother Catherina 54, brother-in-law Jacob Kraus 34 and wife Catarina 21. Owns 1 wagon, ½ plow, 1 harrow, 5 horses, and 10 head of cattle. He was the father of Heinrich Enns who was the fifth Aeltester of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. His daughter Anna Enns (1817-1864) was married to Abraham Eidse (1811-1893) above. Another daughter was married to Gerhard S. Kornelsen (1816-1894) the Kleine Gemeinde school teacher from Lichtenau, Molotschna.<sup>47</sup>
  - 7) Isaac Loewen, age 49, from Elbing, Cabinet Maker, Family Number 6 in Lindenau. Wife Ewa 48, Children - Isaac 21 and Jacob 5. Owns 1 wagon, ½ plow, 1 harrows and 7 cattle. Through his son Isaac Loewen (1787-1873) he is the forefather of all the Kleine Gemeinde Loewens. From 1837-1848 Isaac Loewen (1787-1873) served as a deacon of the Kleine Gemeinde.<sup>48</sup>
  - 8) Cornelius Toews, age 42, from Tiegenhagen, Amt Tiegenhoff, Cabinet Maker. Family Number 10 in Lindenau. Wife Margaretha 41. Children - Johan 17, Elisabeth 12, Cornelius 5, Jacob 3, and friend Cornelius Toews 26. Owns 1 wagon, ½ plow, 1 harrow, 5 horses, and 9 cattle. Through his son Johan Toews (1793-1873) he is the grandfather of Aeltester Peter P. Toews (1841-1922) and the delegate Cornelius P. Toews (1837-1908). Through his son Jacob Toews (1805-1873) he is the grandfather of Peter W. Toews (1831-1922), who settled in Blumenort, Manitoba in 1874.<sup>49</sup>
  - 9) Klaas Friesen, age 24, from Fuerstenauerweide, Amt Elbing, Family Number 13 in Lindenau. Wife Elisabeth 32. Children - Anna 4 and Elisabeth ¼. Owns 1 wagon, ½ plow, 5 horses and 6 cattle. He is the father of Cornelius Friesen (1812-1892) the veteran Molotschna school teacher.<sup>50</sup> The daughter of his son Klaas Friesen (1813-1856) was the first wife of Cornelius P. Toews (1837-1908) who served the Blumenhoff (Gruenfelder) Kleine Gemeinde as a delegate to North America in 1873.
  - 10) Abraham Kornelsen, age 38, from Tiegenhoff, Linen Maker, Family Number 6 in Lichtenau. Wife Agatha 30. Children - Agatha 5, Abraham 2 and Johan ½, Brother Johan 26. Owns 2 wagons, ½ plow, 1 harrow, 6 horses and 13 head of cattle. His son Gerhard S. Kornelsen (1816-1894) was a veteran Molotschna school teacher.<sup>51</sup> Through his son Abraham S. Kornelsen (1806-1880) he was the grandfather of Abraham E. Kornelsen (1845-1893) who was a Kleine

Gemeinde deacon in Manitoba<sup>52</sup>.

- 11) Johann Harms, age 37, from Ellerwald, Amt Elbing, Linen Maker, Family Number 12 in Blumstein. Wife Anna 24. Children - Catarina 12, Johan 10, Peter 2, Anna ½. Owns 1 wagon, 1 plow, 1 harrow, 6 horses and 12 cattle. They appear to be the parents and grandparents of the Harms families of Rosenort, Manitoba and Jansen, Nebraska.<sup>53</sup>
- 12) Johann Harder, age 44, from Koldau, Amt Marienburg, Linen Maker, Family Number 16 in Blumstein. Wife Helena 52. Children - Abraham 21, Johan 18, Isebrandt 16, Maria 12, Elisabeth 8. Owns 1 wagon, 1 plow, 1 harrow, 3 horses, 10 cattle and 2 sheep. Through his son Johann Harder (b 1789) he was the grandfather of Johan Harder (1811-1876) the Aeltester of the Orloff-Halbstaedt Gemeinde from 1860 to his death in 1876. Daughter Elisabeth Harder (1816-1834) married Johann Toews (1793-1873) and whose son Johan Toews (1829-1885) settled in the village of Gruenfeld, Manitoba in 1874.<sup>54</sup> Through son Abraham, Johan Harder (1765-1847) was the grandfather of Bernhard Harder (1832-1884) the famous Russian Mennonite evangelist and poet.<sup>55</sup>
- 13) Martin Warkentin, age 44, from Ruechenau, Amt Tiegenhoff, Linen Maker, Family Number 6 in Blumstein. Wife Aganetha 43. Owns 1 wagon, ½ plow, 1 harrow, 8 horses, 9 cattle and 2 sheep. In his memoirs Aeltester Klaas Reimer has identified a Martin Warkentin of Blumstein as a member of the Kleine Gemeinde. This is the only Martin Warkentin family listed in Blumstein by Benjamin H. Unruh. In fact no other Martin Warkentin is listed in the Molotschna. Therefore this identification could be accepted as relatively definite. How this family fits into the numerous Kleine Gemeinde Warkentin families, if at all, is not known. As families also left the Kleine Gemeinde from time to time it does not necessarily follow that any of the Warkentin families listed in the **Genealogy Register** would be descendants of the Martin Warkentin family. In order to assist anyone doing genealogy research on the Kleine Gemeinde Warkentin families the listing of the children of Martin Warkentin as recorded in the **Revisions-Liste** of 1808 is included here. Peter 19, Johan 18, Cornelia 16, Elisabeth 13, Gerhard 12, Heinrich 10, Anna 8 and Martin 2.
- 14) Aron Schellenberg, age 38, from Tiegenhoff, Family Number 18 in Blumstein. Wife Catarina 38. Children - Gerhard 11, Helena 9, Aron 3, Catarina 1. Owns 1 wagon, 1 plow, 1 harrow, 4 horses and 12 cattle. Through his son Gerhard Schellenberg he was the grandfather of Kleine Gemeinde minister Gerhard Schellenberg (1827-1908) who settled in Rosenfeld, Manitoba in 1874. Through his granddaughter Katharina Schellenberg who married a Heinrich Friesen (1827-1877), he was the great-grandfather of Jakob S. Friesen (1862-1931), the founder of the **Steinbach Post**. It appears that Mrs. Abraham Cornelzen (nee Agatha Schellenberg) listed here in Family Number 10 is a sister to Aron Schellenberg the head of Family No. 14.<sup>56</sup>
- 15) Daniel Wiens, age 44, from Fuerstenau, Amt Elbing, Family Number 8 in Blumstein, Wife Catarina 41. Children - Justina 17, Peter 14, Catarina 7, Franz 5, Daniel 1. Owns 1 wagon, ½ plow, 4 horses and 9 cattle. They were the parents of Franz Wiens (1802-1881) who emigrated to Manitoba in 1874. In 1876 the Franz Wiens (1802-1881) family moved to Nebraska.<sup>57</sup>
- 16) Klaas Reimer, age 38, from Neunhuben, Amt Danzig, Family Number 4 in Petershagen. Wife Helena 21. Children - Aganetha 7, Abraham ½. Owns 2 wagons, ½ plow, 1 harrow, 5 horses, 10 cattle and 9 sheep. He was a young minister in Prussia and became the founding Aeltester of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. He must have been a capable and attractive young man as he married very well. His first wife was the daughter of the widely respected Peter Epp, the Aeltester of the Danzig Mennoniten Gemeinde, who died in 1789. Klaas Reimer's second wife was Helena von Reisen, the sister to Abraham Friesen (von Reisen), the second Aeltester of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. They were the parents of Abraham F. Reimer (1808-1892) who settled in Blumenort, Manitoba in 1874.<sup>58</sup>
- 17) Cornelius Jantzen, age 28, from Muensterburg, Amt Tiegenhoff, Family Number 13 in Petershagen. Wife Aganetha 30. Children - Gertrude 8 and Johan 2. Owns 2 wagons, ½ plow, 1 harrow, 4 horses, 9 cattle and 2 sheep. He appears to be the co-founder of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. He was elected as a Minister of the Grosze Gemeinde in 1805 during a stop-over in the Old Colony. According to the **Gemeinde Berichten** the Petershagen settlement consisted largely of young couples except for the family of Johan Jantzen (age 56) who settled in Petershagan together with his three married sons, one of whom undoubtedly was the young minister Cornelius Jantzen.
- 18) Johann Jantzen, age 56, from Schoensee, Amt Tiegenhoff, Family Number 8 in Petershagen.

- Wife Maria 50. Children - Peter 22, Durck 18, Maria 15, Anna 11, Franz 9, Catarina 5. Owns 3 wagons, 1 plow, 2 harrows, 8 horses, 15 cattle and 24 sheep. According to the **Gemeinde Berichte** he is considered very well-to-do.<sup>59</sup> He is apparently the father of the young Kleine Gemeinde minister Cornelius Jantzen. His brother Abraham Jantzen (age 61) was another prosperous farmer who settled in Petershagen in 1805.
- 19) Daniel Fast, age 56, from Neuteichterwald, Amt Neuteicht, Family Number 14 in Tigenhagen. Linen Maker. Wife Catarina 57. Children - Berend 22, Gerhard 19, Jacob 16, son-in-law Aron Warkentin and wife Catarina. Owns 2 wagons, 1 plow, 2 harrows, 8 horses, 10 cattle and 5 sheep. Through his son Peter Fast (1780-1852) he was the grandfather of Bernhard Fast who was a Kleine Gemeinde minister for a short time in the 1840's. This Bernhard Fast in turn was the grandfather of Martin B. Fast the former editor of the *Rundschau*. Peter Fast (1780-1852) was also the father of Mrs. Johann Krause (nee Elisabeth Fast) who settled in Jansen, Nebraska in 1874.<sup>60</sup>
- 20) Cornelius Sawatzky, age 26, from Heuboden, Amt Marienburg, Family Number 3 in Orloff. Wife Anna 22. Children - Abraham 1, Margaretha ¼. Owns 1 wagon, 1 plow, 2 harrows, 6 horses, 8 cattle and 3 sheep. He is married to Anna von Reisen the sister of Abraham Friesen, the second Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde. Through daughter Anna Sawatzky (1809-1877) who married Isaac Harms (1811-1891) Cornelius Sawatzky is the grandfather of Mrs. Klaas Wiebe, Johann and Peter Harms who settled in Jansen, Nebraska in the late 1870's having first emigrated to Manitoba.<sup>61</sup>
- 21) Abraham Friesen (von Reisen), age 52, from Kalteherberg, Amt Danzig. Family Number 10 in Orloff. Wife Margaretha 54. Children - Johann 19, Davit 17, Classz 15, Regina 14. Owns 4 wagons, 1 plow, 2 harrows, 7 horses, 14 cattle and 1 sheep. This was the patriarch of the extended von Reisen/Friesen family. His son Klaas Friesen served the Kleine Gemeinde as deacon and minister for some 40 years. Their daughters were married to Rev. Johann Friesen of the Grosze Gemeinde and Aeltester Klaas Reimer of the Kleine Gemeinde respectively. The youngest daughter Regina Friesen later married Heinrich Neufeld who was a minister in the Grosze Gemeinde. The oldest son Peter von Reisen remained in Prussia and later translated the **Fundamentabuch** of Menno Simon. The daughter of Peter von Riesen was married to Consul Cornelius Jansen who was exiled from Russia for his efforts in the emigration movements during the 1870's. Through his son Johan Friesen he was the grandfather of Jakob K. Friesen who drowned in the Red River in 1875.<sup>62</sup> The sons and many of the grandsons of Abraham Friesen (von Riesen) were known as talented and articulate individuals.
- 22) Abraham Friesen, age 26, from Kalteherberg, Amt Danzig, Merchant. Family Number 11 in Orloff. Wife Catarina 26. Owns 1 horse and 2 cattle. He was the second Aeltester of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. His son Peter Friesen (1815-1892) was a minister of the Kleine Gemeinde and his son Jakob (1808-1889) was a deacon of the Kleine Gemeinde. Through his son Jakob Friesen he is the grandfather of Abraham L. Friesen the Aeltester of the Heubodner Kleine Gemeinde which emigrated to Jansen, Nebraska in 1874. Through his daughter Margaretha (1810-1877) he is the grandfather of Abraham F. Thiessen, the champion of the landless Mennonites in the 1860's and 1870's who was banished to Siberia for his efforts.
- 23) Peter Isaac, age 28, from Berwald, Amt Tiegenhoff. Family No. 10 in Tiede. Wife Margaretha 27. Children - Margaretha 2, Anna 1, Johann ¼. Owns 2 wagons, ½ plow, 1 harrow, 5 horses, 13 cattle. Their daughter Justina married Bernhard Fast who was a Kleine Gemeinde minister during the 1840's. (See Family 19 above). Another daughter was married to Johan Fast a school teacher in Schoenau, Molotschna.<sup>63</sup> Another son Franz Isaac (1816-1900) compiled the historical work **Die Molotschnaer Mennoniten** which is frequently referred to in this book.
- 24) Franz Isaac, age 22, from Berwald, Amt Tiegenhoff, Family Number 13 in Tiede. Wife Margaretha 20. Owns 1 wagon, 2 harrows, 3 horses and 5 cattle. He was the father of Johan Isaac whose sons Johan, Peter and Abram settled in the area of Gruenfeld, Manitoba in 1870's. Another son Peter Isaac (1812-1888) was a school teacher in the village of Groszweide. Franz Isaac was a brother to Peter Isaac, No. 23 above.
- 25) Johann Warkentin, age 49, from Elbing, Grit Miller. Family Number 3 in Blumenort. Wife Maria. Children - Justina 19, Abraham 16, Agatha 12, Anna 9, Aganetha 7, Elisabeth 5, Heinrich 3, Johan 22 and wife Maria 20. Owns 2 wagons, 1 plow, 5 horses, 9 cattle and 13 sheep. Their daughter was the wife of Franz Isaac (Family No. 24 above). Another daughter married Cornelius Fast whose son Cornelius Fast (1840-1927) was a school teacher who



emigrated to Steinbach, Manitoba in 1874.<sup>64</sup> Another daughter was married to minister Peter Enns of Neukirch whose son Peter Enns (1822-1896) also settled in Steinbach, Manitoba, in his retirement years.<sup>65</sup> The younger Warkentin sons Diedrich and Cornelius served as school teachers in Russia. Son Peter Warkentin served as municipal secretary and died at a young age in 1834. This family was considered well-to-do and also owned a double farm in the village of Blumenort.<sup>66</sup>

- 26) Peter Brandt, age 28, from Ellerwald, Amt Elbing, Family Number 11 in Blumenort. Wife Elisabeth 20. Children - Catarina  $\frac{1}{4}$ . Owns 2 wagons,  $\frac{1}{2}$  plow, 1 harrow, 4 horses and 8 cattle. This is believed to have been the father of Klaas Brandt<sup>67</sup> who was the father of Peter Brandt, Klaas Brandt and Heinrich Brandt who settled in Manitoba in 1874.<sup>68</sup>

## 10.06 The Socio-Economic Roots.

A review of this partial listing of early Kleine Gemeinde families quickly indicates that most of the families originated from the older, more established Mennonite congregations in West Prussia. Of the 26 families listed only 9 do not have farming recorded as their occupation. These nine included 1 merchant, 1 grits miller, 2 cabinet makers and 5 linen makers (weavers). According to the research of Dr. Benjamin H. Unruh these charter families originated from the following Prussian districts: Amt Tiegenhoff - 9 families, Amt Elbing - 8 families, Amt Marienburg - 3 families, Amt Neiteich - 2 families, and Amt Danzig - 3 families. These were the more established "Hollaender" settlements in the Vistula river delta or Werder area east of the city of Danzig. These facts raise some interesting questions about the Prussian socio-economic roots of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde.

A brief examination of the economic status of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde families listed indicates that they are of average or above average wealth. Thus a look at the number of wagons owned by the Molotschna pioneers shows that the majority of the approximately 400 families listed owned one wagon. A minority owned 2 wagons. Eight families owned 3 wagons. Only 2 families own 4 wagons and one of these was the family of Abraham (von Riesen) Friesen in Orloff. (Family No. 21 above). The average family seems to own anywhere from 3 to 6 horses while a minority own from 7 to 10, with the odd farmer owning more than 10. A farmer like Klaas Wiens in Altonau, later the Gebiets vorsteher and founder of the estate Steinbach, owned 3 wagons, 2 plows, 13 horses, 36 head of cattle and 175 sheep. He was one of the wealthier men among the Molotschna settlers. The number of cattle owned would obviously be a good indicator of economic standing. The average number of cattle owned by the villagers in Lindenau was 6.8. The average is slightly higher in Tiege with 9.75. The average number of cattle owned by each villager in Blumstein is 11. Of course these are only a few of the indicators of economic status. For example, Peter Isaac reports that his great-grandparents, Johann Warkentins, Family No. 25 above, were considered well-to-do because they owned a double farm in the village plan of Blumenort.<sup>69</sup>

Another comparison of interest would be the Johann Cornies family in Orloff which owned 1 wagon, 1 plow, 2 harrows, 4 horses and 13 head of cattle. This was the father of the Johann Cornies (1789-1848) who was to become the great secular leader of the Molotschna Mennonites. The young Johan Cornies (1789-1848) in his time became one of the most well-to-do farmers and businessmen among the Russian Mennonites even though his parents were of average wealth. This indicates that at this early stage in Molotschna Mennonite society upward mobility was not yet as restricted as it later became. The Molotschna settlers in general appear to be relatively equal in wealth. The differences in wealth and class conscienceness which plagued Russian Mennonite society only fifty years later is not yet in evidence.

According to the socio-economic information provided by **The Revisions-Liste**, the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde represented a good cross section of Molotschna Mennonite society in 1808. They were of no particular socio-economic status or age group among the Molotschna settlers. A number of families are quite well-to-do. The above records include only those Kleine Gemeinde families who were also pioneers of the Molotschna Mennonite Colony. Only those families who can be identified and who are also recorded in the **Revisions-Liste** of 1808 have been included. Other individuals referred to in the **Sammlung** or elsewhere as members of the Kleine Gemeinde have not been included. It is specifically stated that the list is only a sampling of Kleine Gemeinde families e.g. A thorough study of the Nebraska Kleine Gemeinde would result in a good number of additional families being listed.

In some families no genealogy work has been done. Hopefully this incomplete listing will be an encouragement for others to pursue such research. Aspiring young historians are frequently discouraged by the attitudes that a family study is of little significance. Quite the contrary is the case as modern historiography places a much greater emphasis on social history which includes family history.

A genealogy-family history is an ideal starter project for someone interested in historical research and writing.

### 10.07 The Second Prussian Emigration, 1816.

A second wave of Mennonite emigration to Russia took place after the destruction and havoc left in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars. The quartering and billeting of soldiers, repeated requisitions of scarce materials to supply the needs of hostile armies and the entrapment of the press gangs, served as a renewed stimulus for the eastward emigration. This emigration peaked during the years 1817 to 1820 and continued as a trickle until the 1860's.

One factor must be added to the underlying causes of emigration which have already been referred to. A form of radical pietism known as Wuerttenburg Separatism was a major inspiration for many German emigrants. The mild renewal pietism of Spener and Francke found a particular stronghold in the Wuerttenburg area. The greatest influence was wielded by Albrecht Bengel (1687-1752) and disciples such as Oettinger and others. Through the Stundist movement the faith of Spener and Francke took its flight "out of the cold churches into the warm Stunde (hour)".<sup>70</sup> Eventually these teachings became more radical and separatist in nature i.e. Its adherents now regarded the Lutheran church and older renewal forms of pietism as fallen and the agents of the devil. In some instances these separatists were arrested for their fanatical behavior but this only strengthened the movement against the State and Lutheran Church.<sup>71</sup>

Of particular interest were the radical millennial teachings of pietists such as Jung-Stilling (See Section 4.03 and 9.16). "Jung-Stilling proclaimed that the thousand year kingdom of peace would appear in the east either in 1833 or 1836." The adherents of Jung-Stilling attached great significance to the fact that the Russian czar himself was a sincerely religious person.<sup>72</sup> Professor Karl Stump, who spent his lifetime in the study of the German people in Russia, explains how these premillennial teachings came to have such a great influence upon the eastward emigration of Germans.

"After his victory over Napoleon, he (Czar Alexander I) had granted the Evangelical Bible Society of Russia permission to engage in activity. He himself was in communication with Frau von Kruedener who regarded Russia as the 'haven of refuge of the faithful of the last days'. In Heilbrun, Alexander even met this strange but influential woman. Many of the faithful also looked upon the Russian czar as the 'White Eagle' just as they regarded Napoleon as the 'Black Angel' or the incarnate Anti-Christ. In wide circles there arose an intense longing to go to the East, the land of refuge, to the sacred Mount Ararat where Noah's Ark was believed to have landed. From Wuerttenburg the so-called 'Harmonies' comprising thousands of people migrated to Russia."<sup>73</sup>

It is noteworthy that the radical pietist movement which placed great emphasis on the literal interpretation and "inerrancy" of scripture, at the same time based individual actions and faith on such mystical and symbolical interpretations of certain verses of scripture. Over the centuries such hermeneutics have frequently resulted in a very distorted and bizarre view of the gospel of Christ and His church.<sup>74</sup> Deuteronomy 18, 22.

The teachings of radical pietism and millennialism inspired many Germans to emigrate to Russia where they expected to find a refuge from the coming tribulation. As a result thousands of Wuerttemberg separatists settled in Russia where some of their members exerted much influence upon the Russian Mennonites. The most prominent of these was a separatist Lutheran pastor by the name of Edward Wuest. The teachings of Wuerttemberg separatism also became popular among many of the Prussian Mennonites after the commencement of the 19th century. By the end of the Napoleonic Wars these teachings had an important influence on the decision of many Prussian Mennonites to emigrate to Russia.

The influence of separatist pietism was particularly strong among some of the later Mennonite settlements in southern Poland. The first Mennonite pioneers in Prussia had established the "Hollaender" villages in the Werder triangle between Danzig, Elbing and Marienburg. It was in this region that most of the 1804-1806 Molotschna settlers originated. As the Werder area became occupied some descendants and newcomers made their way south along the Vistula river settling in the Schwetz, Graudenz and Culm areas.<sup>75</sup> Some of these later Mennonite settlers had a High German and Lutheran background. Therefore it was natural that they would have a very "pietistical" interpretation of the teachings of Menno Simons.

Of special interest is the Przechovka or Kleinsee Old Flemish congregation near Culm and Schwetz. From time to time Mennonites left the Schwetz settlement organizing daughter colonies. In 1765, 35 of these Przechovka families founded the villages of Brenkenhoffswalde and Franzthal in Driesen in the German province of Brandenburg. This settlement was very much influenced by the pietist

teachings of the nearby Moravian Brethren settlement who also protected the Brenkenhoffswalde settlers for a time.<sup>76</sup> In 1821 the families remaining in Przechovka emigrated to the Molotschna colony in Russia. Here they settled the village of Alexanderwohl under the leadership of Aeltester Peter Wedel.<sup>77</sup> In the meantime a Lutheran teacher by the name of Wilhelm Lange had joined the congregation at Brenkenhoffswalde and in 1810 he became the Aeltester of the group. In 1834 Aeltester Lange together with 40 families from his congregation also emigrated to the Molotschna colony where they founded the village of Gnadenfeld.<sup>78</sup>

In 1836 a closely related group of 68 Old Flemish families from Volhynia under their Aeltester Cornelius Wedel followed the Gnadenfeld group to the Molotschna and founded the village of Waldheim.<sup>79</sup> Rudnerweide was a fourth Molotschna settlement of special note. It was founded in 1819 by 100 Frisian Mennonite families under Aeltester Franz Goerz. Most of these families originated in the Prussian village of Rudnerweide and hence the name of the settlement. Another 24 Rudnerweide families originated in the Prussian district of Stuhm.<sup>80</sup>

### 10.08 The Later Kleine Gemeinde Emigrants.

The second Prussian emigration also included a number of families who joined the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. This would indicate that their emigration was not inspired by the millennial teachings of the radical pietists and/or that they were converted to the gospel after their arrival in Russia. This would also indicate that there were still many earnest nonresistant Christians left in Prussia even after the emigration of 1804.

The record of families who emigrated from West Prussia to Russia during the years 1817 to 1837 and then joined the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde is very incomplete. In many cases the Kleine Gemeinde patriarch who was also a Molotschna pioneer can only be identified by the sheer mass of descendants he left in the Gemeinde. Thus the children of someone who joined the Kleine Gemeinde in its first years were of the same generation as some of the families joining this Gemeinde after 1817. In addition no detailed census exists of these later arrivals as is the case with the 1808 **Revisions-Liste**. Nevertheless, a partial listing of these families is attempted here.

- 1) Klaas Dueck, age 76, from the West Prussian village of Fuerstenuerwiede, emigrated to the Molotschna in 1819, where he settled in the village of Muntau. He was the father of Johan Dueck (1801-1866) a leading minister of the Kleine Gemeinde in his time. Johan Dueck (1801-1866) was the father of Johan L. Dueck, Abraham L. Dueck, Jakob L. Dueck and Peter L. Dueck, who emigrated to Manitoba where they settled in the village of Gruenfeld (Kleefeld), Manitoba.<sup>81</sup>
- 2) Jakob Barkman, age 24, from the West Prussian village of Nuestaedterwald emigrated to the Molotschna in 1818, settling in the village of Rueckenau. In 1836 the family is still recorded as resident in Rueckenau. Jakob Barkman lived to experience a second emigration to Manitoba in 1874. He was the father of Peter K. Barkman who settled in the village of Steinbach in 1874.<sup>82</sup> His daughters were married to Peter W. Toews (See Family No. 8 above) and to Johan Koop (1831-1897) (See Family No. 2 above). Jacob Barkman (1794-1876) was a brother to Martin Barkman (1796-1872).
- 3) Martin Barkman, age 22, from the West Prussian village of Neustaedterwald emigrated to the Molotschna in 1818, settling in the village of Rueckenau where he is known to have owned a "wirthschaft".<sup>83</sup> His son Jakob Barkman was a minister of the Kleine Gemeinde who died a tragic death in 1875 by drowning in the Red River. Through his daughter Martin Barkman (1796-1872) was the grandfather of Martin B. Fast at one time the editor of the "Rundschau". Another son Peter M. Barkman (1845-1904) emigrated to Kansas settling in the village of Gnadenau, in 1874.<sup>84</sup>
- 4) Peter Enns, age 27. Emigrated to the Molotschna colony in 1818 and in 1820 he settled in the new plan in the village of Neukirch.<sup>85</sup> Peter Enns was a preacher.<sup>86</sup> His son Peter Enns later settled in Steinbach in his old age. Son Peter Enns only had one daughter who was married to Johan T. Barkman (1862-1900) of Steinbach, Manitoba.
- 5) Heinrich Balzer, from the West Prussian village of Schwengrube emigrated to the Molotschna in 1819 and settled in Groszweibe. According to Benjamin H. Unruh he was elected as a minister in 1800. This is believed to be Heinrich Balzer the minister and intellectual of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. Heinrich Balzer was a minister of the Orloff-Halbstaedt Gemeinde of Aeltester Bernhard Fast who came over to the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in 1833. Heinrich Balzer died on June 1, 1846. Regrettably he left no descendants in the Kleine Gemeinde.
- 6) The widow Jakob Thielmann (Helena Kroeker). Emigrated from Prussia to the Molotschna

colony during the 1820's together with her three sons Jakob (1810-1862), Johan (b.1809), and Martin (b.1812).<sup>87</sup> The ministerial election records of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde for 1846 show a Johann Thielmann to be resident in the village of Neukirch. In 1857 son Jacob Thielmann and his family moved from the village of Neukirch to the village of Alexanderkron to take up a full farm in the village plan. Only a small number of the Thielmann descendants remained in the Kleine Gemeinde after 1874. One daughter of Jakob Thielmann (1810-1862) is known to have come to Manitoba. She was the wife of Johan L. Dueck. (See Family No. 1 above.)

- 7) Heinrich Esau, age 36, emigrated from Prussia to the Molotschna colony in 1828 where he settled in the village of Sparrau. He was the father of Heinrich Esau who emigrated to Manitoba in 1874.<sup>88</sup>
- 8) Johan Plett, age 63, emigrated from West Prussia to the Molotschna colony in 1828 where he settled in the village of Blumstein. He was originally from the West Prussian village of Fuerstenwurder where his parents Johan Pletts are listed as well-to-do farmers in the 1776 census. He was the grandfather of Johan Harder (1811-1876) who served as the Aeltester of the Orloff-Halbstaedt Gemeinde. He was also the grandfather of Peter Toews, the Aeltester of the Blumenhof (Gruenfelder) Kleine Gemeinde at the time of emigration to North America. His only son to reach adulthood was Cornelius Plett (1820-1900) who settled in the village of Blumenhoff, Manitoba, in 1875 together with 6 of his sons.<sup>89</sup>
- 9) David Klassen, age 34, from Susewald, West Prussia, emigrated to the Molotschna in 1837 eventually settling in the village of Margenau where he owned a full village farm. In 1873 David Klassen served as the delegate to North America of the Heubodner Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. In 1874 he settled in Rosenhoff, Manitoba.<sup>90</sup>
- 10) Dietrich Wiebe, from Ellerwald, Elbing, Prussia. He emigrated to the Molotschna in 1818 where they settled in the village of Neukirch where they took up a village farm. They were the grandparents of Jakob A. Wiebe who joined the Kleine Gemeinde in 1864 and who became the Aeltester of the Crimea Kleine Gemeinde in 1869.<sup>91</sup>
- 11) Peter Unger, from Lakendorf, Prussia. Emigrated to the Molotschna in 1818 where he settled in the village of Franzthal. Through his son Peter (b.1815) he was the grandfather of Peter H. Unger (1841-1896) who settled in Blumenhoff, Manitoba in 1875.<sup>92</sup>

Hopefully the publication of a partial record will encourage others to pursue the necessary research in order that their forefathers can be added to this listing. A number of the charter families of the Kleine Gemeinde and those who joined the Kleine Gemeinde in subsequent years were already the children of the Molotschna pioneers. Consequently the complete listing of these pioneers who had some Kleine Gemeinde descendants could easily total to some 50 or more families. Similarly the number of families who joined the Kleine Gemeinde after emigrating from Prussia in 1817 or later could quite possibly total 25 or more.

### 10.09 Prussia, Some Poetic Reflections.

Reference has been made to the spiritual tradition and heritage which the members of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde had derived from their strong Prussian roots. No doubt they also had fond memories of a sometimes pastoral and tranquil land. Some of these recollections also referred back to the harshness and brutality of the Weichsel delta land during the first decades of the Mennonite settlement in Prussia. But with the help of God, Mennonite perseverance and ingenuity was eventually able to triumph over the treacherous elements. Nevertheless the battles with the savage seas remained indelibly imprinted upon the Mennonite psyche for centuries to come. Some accounts of these heroic struggles, of manning the dikes and of fighting the relentless sea, have been preserved by members of the Kleine Gemeinde.

Jakob L. Plett (1864-1934) was one of these historically conscious individuals. One of the poems included in his poetry collections is entitled **Ein Bruchlied Aus Pruszen**.<sup>93</sup> This poem illustrates the strength of the Prussian roots of the Kleine Gemeinde. Especially when one considers that this particular collection of poetry was assembled in 1919. In reading this poem it must be remembered that Johan Plett (1765-1833), the grandfather of Jakob L. Plett, had grown up in the village of Fürstenwurder which was located only a few miles from the Baltic Sea. The poem is also of special interest as an example of the venerable Goethe era High German vocabulary and diction which the Mennonites used in Prussia. This poem was composed to be sung to the melody number 10, "Die Seele Christi Heilge Mich". Here follows **Ein Bruchlied Aus Pruszen**:

1. "Ach Gott wie grosze herzeleid,  
Begegnet uns zur Winterzeit,  
Ein Grausam Flut and Eis,  
Schickt Gott das uns der Dam zerreiszt.
2. "Den Donnerstag ins neue Jahr,  
Da sah man erst nur die gefahr,  
Das Wasser wuchs noch immer mehr,  
Das Jeder man erschreket sehr,
3. "Des Abends war es um Sechs Uhr,  
Das Wasser ueber den Dam fuhr,  
Da Kasten wir mit allen fleisze,  
Bis an den morgen allermeist,
4. "Der Teich geschworne wohl bedacht,  
Schreibt eilends hin zur andre Wacht,  
Das Volk das kam im starken Lauf, .  
Zu helfen den betreibten hauf.
5. "Am Fritage war um Sechsuhr,  
da kamen alle Leut hervor,  
Mit haender ringen angst geschrei,  
Ach was es fuer ein jammer sei.
6. "Das Wasser lief vierviertel hoch,  
Auch mitten durch den Dam hindurch,  
Der Teich geschworne eilends auf,  
Lies arbeiten in vollen lauf.
7. "Da scheint alle hilfe aus,  
Das Wasser fiel in vollen Lauf,  
Da treibt man alles in der Eis  
Weib, Vieh, and auch die Kinderlein.
8. "O weh und jammer grosz gefahr,  
Schrei Mann and Weib noch immerdar,  
Das arme Vieh das Lit gefahr,  
Da war der Tod vor Augen gar.
9. "Am neuen Jahr den ersten Tag,  
Da Kriegt der Dam ein groszes Loch,  
Wir Arbeiten mit grosz und Klein  
Bis das der dam auch Fiel hinein.
10. "'Da braust das Wasser grusam sehr,  
Wie ich auch jetzt noch melden werd,  
Fuenf Heuser nahm er mit sich fort,  
Und bracht sie hin am andern Ort.
11. "Ein Bauer hof vom gleichen Ort,  
Die Pblaunei muszt auch hinfort,  
Das Pharhaus und die Roemsche Schul,  
Ein Kat die muszt auch un den sub.
12. "Fuenf mal fuenf Ruten ist er lang,  
Die tief ist allmal nicht bekannt,  
Zwelf ellen ist die hoeh,  
Viel Menschen riefen ach and weh.
13. "'O weh des Foerster werder land,  
Das ist verschommen und versand,  
Gedenken wird es Kindes Kind,  
Wie Grausam unser Land verrint.
14. "Dem Ungluck kont nicht ungefaehr,  
Es ruehret von den hoeschsten her,  
Was Fuer ungluck geschiehet hier  
Es mach auch nicht geschehn sein dir,
15. "Treibt dich Wasser und Wellen fort,  
Ja gae an einen andern Ort,  
Sei unverzagt sei wohl gemuth,  
Gott hat ein herz das immer ruth."94

These poetic reflections conclude our consideration of the Prussian roots of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde.

## FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER TEN. THE PRUSSIAN ROOTS

1. H.G. Mannhardt, "Danzig Mennonite Church", ME 2, 9-11.
2. Neff/Van der Zijpp, "Flemish Mennonites", ME 2, 337-340.
3. Van der Zijpp, "Dirk Philips", ME 2, 65-66. See also H. G. Mannhardt, *Die Danziger Mennoniten Gemeinde*, (Selbstverlag, Danzig, 1919), 40-44.
- 3a. George Hanson, *Ein Fundamentbuch der Christliche Lehre* (Mennonite Publishing Co. Elkhart, 1883), 336 pages.
4. Neff Van der Zijpp, "George Hansen" ME 2, 654-654. See also H.G. Mannhardt, *op.cit.*, 77-81.
5. Cornelius Krahn, "Hans von Steen", ME 4, 623, See also H.G. Mannhardt, 99-103.
6. Hans von Steen, "Ein Danziger Brief, 1769." From a German Mennonite Calendar. 73-89. Aeltester Peter Toews Letter Collection, Courtesy of Milton Toews, Neilburg, Sask.
7. H.G. Mannhardt, *op.cit.*, 105-106.
8. A copy of his *Confession Oder Kurtzer und Einfaeltiger Glaubens-Bericht, der Alten Flaemischen Tauf-Gesinnten Gemeinden in Preussen, 1768* was part of the library of Abraham Rempel (d.1878) formerly of Margenau, Russia. It is noteworthy that this book itself does not identify the author which is established by a memorial in the title pages of the book written by John Esau, a son-in-law of Abraham Rempel.
9. H.G. Mannhardt, "Peter Epp", ME 2, p.237. See H.G. Mannhardt, *op.cit.*, 103.
10. K. F. Penner, ed., *Zwei Briefe zur Frage der Lehrervahl* (Steinbach, Manitoba, Klaas F. Penner, 1931), 8 pp. His booklet also included a letter written in 1868 by Peter Toews who became Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde in 1870. This letter has already been translated and published. See Aeltester Peter Toews, "Anhang No. One", *History and Events, op.cit.*, 43-47.
11. Giesinger, *op.cit.*, 1.
12. D.G. Rempel, *op.cit.* 1-2.
13. Giesinger, *op.cit.* 1.
14. D.H. Epp, *Die Chortitzer Mennoniten* (Rosenthal bei Choriza, Im Selbstuerlag, 1889), 2-4. This work was republished by the *Mennonite Post* in Steinbach, Manitoba in 1984.
15. H.G. Mannhardt, *op.cit.*, 90-92.
16. Cornelius Krahn, *Smith's Story of the Mennonites, op.cit.*, 177-178.

17. **Ibid.**, 178.
18. Karl Stump, **The Emigration From Germany to Russia in the Years 1763-1862** (AHSGR, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1978), 25-27.
19. D.H. Epp, **op.cit.**, 2-4.
20. C. Krahn, **op.cit.**, 252-253.
21. D.H. Epp, **op.cit.**, 63.
23. Otto Regier, "Cornelius Regier", ME 4, 273-274.
24. John E. Friesen, **op.cit.**
25. Klaas Reimer, **Ein Kleiner Aufsatz**, Manuscript Journal in the possession of E.M.C. Archives, Steinbach, Manitoba. 52 pages.
26. Reproduced in Horst Penner, **Die Ost und West Preussischen Mennoniten** (Mennonitischen Geschichts Verein, E.V. Weirhof, Deutschland, 1978), 414-468.
27. Letter by Glen Penner to the author dated August 3, 1982. (Source **Zweites Danziger Familienbuch**, seite 300).
28. Klaas Reimer, **op.cit.** 1-3.
29. H.G. Mannhardt, "Peter Epp", ME 2, 237.
30. Klaas Reimer, **op.cit.**, 3-4.
31. H.G. Mannhardt, **op.cit.**, 130-131.
32. Klaas Reimer, **op.cit.**, 3-4.
33. H.G. Mannhardt, **op.cit.** 131.
34. Klaas Reimer, **op.cit.**, 3.
35. A.H. Unruh, **Der Geschichte der Mennoniten Brudergemeinde**, (Christian Press, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1954) 17-18.
36. Evangelist Bernhard Harder quoted in Peter M. Friesen, **op.cit.**, 253. See also Peter M. Friesen, **op.cit.**, page 57 for a somewhat cynical view of the stereotype Russian Mennonite minister.
37. E. Goettner, "Mannhardt", ME 3, 467.
38. Robert Friedmann, **Mennonite Piety Through the Centuries**, **op.cit.**, 40.
39. Benjamin H. Unruh, **op.cit.**, 304-355.
40. Aeltester Peter Toews, "Genealogy Register of the Kleine Gemeinde families who emigrated to Manitoba in 1874-1876." Unpublished Journal, Courtesy of Milton Toews, Neilburg, Sask.
41. This is based on the research and opinion of genealogist Edward Brandt of Minneapolis, Minnesota.
42. See Family No. 63, 64 and 65 in **The Genealogy Register**. These Reimers were often referred to as the Blumenhoff Reimers. See also **History and Events** for additional information regarding many of the families referred to.
43. See families No. 61 and 141 in the **Genealogy Register**. Further information regarding any families which settled in Blumenort, Blumenhoff, and Neuanlage in Manitoba, will also be found in the history of the Blumenort Community by Roy Loewen, **op.cit.**
44. See Family No's. 23, 37, 86, 87, 88 and 89 in the **Genealogy Register**.
45. See Families No. 21, 54, 76, and 83.
46. See Family No. 134.
47. See Family No. 125.
48. He is the forefather of all the Loewens listed in the **Genealogy Register**. Additional information will also be found in the **Plett Picture Book**, **op.cit.**, 8-11.
49. All the Toews families listed in the **Genealogy Register**, except No. 28 are descendants of this family.
50. See Family No. 56.
51. See Family No. 122.
52. See Families No's. 109 and 110.
53. A daughter Anna Harms (1808-1874) was married to Heinrich Ratzloff. They were the parents of Heinrich Ratzloff who settled in Rosenort, Manitoba in 1874. See Family No. 80.
54. See Family No. 44.
55. Johan Harder, **Family History and Genealogy**, Unpublished transcription, 10 pp. (Courtesy of Dr. Leland Harder).
56. See Jacob Z. Wiebe, **Schellenberg Genealogy**, Unpublished, page 2. (Courtesy of David K. Schellenberg, Steinbach, Manitoba) and Abraham K. Friesen, **Family Record**, Unpublished, 9, (Courtesy of Harry S. Friesen, Winnipeg, Manitoba).
57. See Family No. 9.
58. See Family No. 31.
59. Woltner, **Gemeinde Berichte**, **op.cit.**, 106-109.
60. Johan Fast, Family Records, Unpublished (Courtesy of Dr. Leland Harder, Goshen, Indiana).
61. See Family No's. 83, 92, and 93.
62. See Family No. 102.
63. See Peter P. Isaac, **Stambuch Meine Voreltern** (Rosenort, Manitoba, PrairieView Press, 1981) 7-8.
64. See Family No. 34.
65. See Family No. 20.
66. Peter Isaac, **op.cit.**, 8-14.
67. This is the conclusion of genealogist Edward Brandt, Minneapolis, Minnesota.
68. See Family No's. 18, 32, 33.
69. See Benjamin H. Unruh, **op.cit.**, 304-330.
70. Karl Stump, **op.cit.**, 17-18.
71. **Ibid.**
72. **Ibid.**
73. **Ibid.**
74. See Marlin Jesckke, "Pop Eschatology". Hal Lindsey and "Evangelical Theology" in **Evangelism and Anabaptism**. Edited by Norman Kraus, (Herald Press, Scottsdale, PA. 1979), 125-147.
75. Cornelius Krahn, "Poland", ME 4, 199.

76. Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 100-101.
77. Cornelius Krahn, "Alexanderwohl", ME 1, 48-49.
78. H.G. Mannhardt, "Brenkenhoffswalde und Franzthal", ME 1, 416-417.
79. M.H. Schrag, "Volhynia", ME 4, 845.
80. H. Goerz, *Die Molotschnaer Ansiedlung*, *op.cit.*, 25-26.
81. See **Geneology Register**, Families No's. 49, 67, 117 and 118.
82. See Family No. 15.
83. See M.B. Fast, **Reisebericht** (Scottdale, Penn, 1910) page 68 for a picture of this Wirtschaft.
84. J.R. Fergeson, **The Barkman Family** (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1982), 325 pp.
85. Jacob D. Barkman, et al, "Seelenregistrar fuer Johan and Susanna Barkman", Unpublished Family Record. (Courtesy of Mennonite Geneology INC., Winnipeg and Walt Barkman, Steinbach.)
86. Peter Isaac, *op.cit.*, 14.
87. Courtesy of Alfred Redekopp, **The Jacob Thielmann Family**. Unpublished Research Project by Alfred Redekopp, Winnipeg, Manitoba.
88. Additional information about this family is recorded by son, Johan K. Esau, **The Family Of Johan Esau**. Unpublished manuscript. (Courtesy of Abe Schmidt, Halstaedt, Kansas.)
89. See **Plett Picture Book**, *op.cit.*.
90. See Gertrude Klassen, **David Klassen Family Book**. (Family Book Committee, Rosenort, Manitoba, 1974), 357.
91. See Joel A. Wiebe, **Groening/Wiebe Family, 1768-1974**, (Hillsboro, Kansas, Self-published, 1974).
92. Edward Brandt, "Direct Ancestors of Peter H. Unger", in **Peter H. Unger 1841-1896**, Jac U. Klassen, co-editor (Book Committee, Steinbach, Manitoba, 1983, at 18.
93. One of the poems written by Jakob L. Plett has recently been translated by Margaret Penner Toews, of Neilburg, Saskatchewan and published in the **Blumenort History Book**, by Royden Loewen, *op.cit.*, 190-191. The poem is entitled "When I Recall the Yesteryears".
94. Jakob L. Plett, **Poetry Book**, Unpublished. (Courtesy of Mrs. Jacob J. Plett and Mr. & Mrs. Simon Isaac, Steinbach.)

# Chapter Eleven.

## The Early Years, 1804-1824

### 11.00 Introduction.

The founding and early evolution of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia can be divided into three aspects or phases. First, a seven year battle for renewal in the Molotschna Flemish Gemeinde which culminated with the expulsion of the reform group in 1812. Second, a subsequent period of struggle to establish an existence as a separate Mennonite Gemeinde in the Molotschna. Third, a theological development as the renewal movement earnestly sought to found itself on the sound evangelical teachings of nonresistant Christianity. The exposition of these developments will be based primarily on the autobiographical writing of Klaas Reimer who was the founding Aeltester of the movement.<sup>1</sup>

### 11.01 The Plight of the Molotschna Mennonite Church 1804-1807.

A group of 30 adult souls under the spiritual leadership of Klaas Reimer left their homes in the Danzig Werder on August 24, 1804, and arrived at the place of the brethren in the Chortitza colony on November 27th after a journey of some nine weeks. Here they found that economic circumstances were meagre which seemed to be a good sign from the spiritual viewpoint. It was here in the Chortitza colony that Cornelius Janzen, the co-worker of Klaas Reimer, was ordained as a minister.<sup>2</sup> The Chortitza colony in 1804 was bursting with the bustle of the building and settlement activity which was taking place in the infant Molotschna colony some 70 miles distant.

But all was not well in the pioneer Molotschna colony. The fertile physical setting and closed settlement conditions would not cure the spiritual problems already present in the Prussian Mennonite church. In some instances the situation was aggravated because the emigration itself constituted a social upheaval which disrupted the fabric of the stronger Anabaptist-Mennonite groups in Prussia. Within these groups such as the small Werder Gemeinde near Danzig, Anabaptist-Mennonite leaders had been able to ward off increasing secularization and apostasy from the faith. When such groups were unable to regroup and reorganize in Russia their destiny reverted into the spiritual care of leaders who were indifferent and even opposed to the teachings of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. Klaas Reimer describes the situation in the early Molotschna Mennonite church:

"On the 27th of November, 1804 we arrived in Chortitza the place of our brethren in Russia. The circumstances of our brethren here appeared to be rather meagre which I found to be very acceptable. But the second emigration which had occurred during the years 1803-1804 had brought along much evil. After we had settled in our quarters Aeltester Johan Wiebe unexpectedly received a notice from the Molotschna requesting his presence as they were experiencing a great deal of strife.

"Immediately upon the arrival of spring the four of us, namely, Aeltester Johan Wiebe, Jakob Enns, Jakob Dueck and I travelled to the Molotschna. Upon our arrival we found that there was much disputation which had originated between the minister David Hiebert of Lindenau and the Oberschulz Klaas Wiens in Altona. The matter had arisen on account of a piece of lumber with respect to which the minister was to concede. Indeed, it was his responsibility but he refused to do so. Nor was he admonished towards that end. We were called together three times on this account and discussed the matter from noon to midnight. But the matter was not yet conceded.

"In the meantime a ministerial and Aeltester election was held. O what wretchedness! For on such occasion they had every cause to commit themselves unto earnest prayer to the Lord of the Harvest that he would send true workers for the harvest. Instead there was nothing but unadulterated disputation and strife.

"The lumber dispute between Hiebert and Wiens was again the subject of conversation during the last evening but no concession was made. Wiebe then made a powerful presentation to Wiens even though he did not have fault in the matter. Wiebe was unable to achieve a reconciliation because he did not persuade Hiebert to give in. Wiebe, Enns and Dueck then said farewell as we wanted to be on our way home.

"Wiens now cried bitterly. For me it was a terror to depart in this manner and to leave them in such a deplorable state. Consequently I firmly remained where I stood. After the others had left Wiens said to me, "O what shall happen now?" I counselled him to give in even though he did not have fault in the matter for it would not harm him even if he suffered wrongfully. Wiens became agreeable to this and the others were summoned back. The matter was then conceded and we departed for home at day break.<sup>1</sup>"

Klaas Wiens later returned the favour of this loving admonition by Klaas Reimer when he in-



terceded for the Kleine Gemeinde before the Supervisory-Committee in Odessa, where he was highly respected. It is noteworthy that Oberschulz Klaas Wiens was a monumental figure among the Molotschna Mennonites during the pioneer years. He was not only the wealthiest man among those of the Mennonites who arrived in the Molotschna prior to 1808 but was also highly regarded by the Russian government authorities. He founded the large private estate called Steinbach near the Molotschna where he pioneered the planting of trees which inspired Alexander I to create the Agricultural Society after his visit there in 1818<sup>3</sup>.

Klaas Wiens could be regarded as a forerunner of Johann Cornies and his progressive Orloff Gemeinde. Thus three of the forces which were to inspire much of the history of the Molotschna colony were already present in the new settlement in the year of its founding: The cultural reactionaries represented by Aeltester Jacob Enns; The cultural progressives represented by Oberschulz Klaas Wiens, and those who sought a renewal of the Anabaptist-Mennonite vision represented by Klaas Reimer. Within a decade a fourth factor entered the scene when new Mennonite groups emigrated from Prussia who had already adopted the teachings of separatist pietism.

The occurrences in the Molotschna colony had certainly not made a positive impression on Klaas Reimer and his associates. The Molotschna Mennonite church, which at this point consisted solely of the Flemish Gemeinde, had been organized in a very questionable manner. The disputation over trivial matters and the lack of resolve to settle the strife in a brotherly way was a cause of great concern. During the course of their stay in the Chortitza colony the newly arrived immigrants decided that they did not want to settle in the Molotschna colony and that they would rather purchase a separate property for their own settlement. Klaas Reimer explains this as follows:

"After we, the second group of immigrants, had settled into our quarters in the Old Colony and shortly after I myself had arrived there, they had discussed and inspected the large estate of a nobleman which included a forest, kiln, and many Russians. It was our intention to purchase this estate together although we had only barely enough money for the down payment. The remainder of the purchase price was to be generated by the kiln, and we came to be united in this objective. We certainly did not wish to go to the Molotschna. In December we traveled to see the authorities in Ekatherinoslaw with respect to our proposition. Here we met with the Archduke and Lord of South Russia who was the brother-in-law of the seller who traveled to Petersburg. We discussed the matter with him, namely, Johann Warkentin, Jakob Schellenberg and myself. The Archduke then inquired as to the manner in which we intended to purchase the estate, i.e. With people and everything included? Yes, was our reply. The Archduke then said to us, 'but you are Mennonites, surely you are not able to purchase people?' Then I stood very ashamed and thought to myself, behold this Lord of the world has come to know us through our Confession of Faith. And this is how the matter was left.

"When we returned from the Molotschna that spring (1805) they informed us that a writing issued by the Kommettaet (Kontor) had arrived which required that we settle in the Molotschna. This was a difficult matter for many. We were so blind and naive when we arrived in Russia. For had the rulers of the land not been wiser than we were, we would blissfully have sold ourselves to the Czar as his slaves. However, God directs all our destiny, and has convicted us in so much and sought to draw us nigh unto himself."

Consequently Klaas Reimer and his like minded compatriots had no choice but to settle in the Molotschna colony.<sup>3a</sup> Preparations were completed and on June 5, 1805, Klaas Reimer and eighteen other families arrived on the banks of the Molotschna River where they founded the village of Petershagen. Here a pioneer settlement was established and founded subject to all the primitive conditions inherent in such an undertaking. Through the perseverance and weary toil of the pioneers, villages such as Petershagen quickly bloomed into prosperity.

But matters in the spiritual sphere had not started off as they should have. Reference has already been made to the deplorable conditions under which the Molotschna Mennonite Flemish Gemeinde was organized. Jacob Enns had been elected as the Aeltester of the newly formed Gemeinde in the midst of serious disputation and strife. The difficulties caused by the indifferent leadership of Jacob Enns are illustrated in an incident which occurred shortly after the arrival of the second group of settlers in 1805.

"The votes for Aeltester had fallen upon Jakob Enns and he was ordained to that end. According to all appearances he wanted to institute good regulations for the Gemeinde but without much success for he was too rash and had tarnished his reputation. In the spring of 1806 he held a meeting with us ministers at the place of Jacob Dueck in Orloff in order to discuss certain matters. After his presentation was completed he asked if anyone else at the meeting had anything to present. In response, the deacon Johann Huebert from Halbstaedt, advised that people had come to blows and were fighting with each other in

Muntau which could not be tolerated among us. To this Enns replied that he had already referred this matter to the Gebietsamt.

"Then I spoke out and stated that according to the Holy Scripture it was incumbent on us to rectify the situation and not on the Gebietsamt. The others all remained silent. Notwithstanding all my great weakness I was convinced, for Jesus so earnestly speaks 'Verily I say unto you, that ye resist not evil', Matthew 5. I could not remain silent and talked with Enns at great length from the Holy Scripture, after which it could clearly be seen that this had struck the conscience of the Aeltester. After this incident Enns frequently called us ministers together and on most of these occasions we also discussed the secular regulation among us. But it seems that we became increasingly divided".

At this point one might reflect on how easy things would have been for a man like Reimer to simply sit back and remain a part of the safe silent majority. He could cheerfully have drifted along criticising the Aeltester in a low keyed manner so as to remain a leading and popular minister, all the while spending his time in furthering the affairs of his prosperous farm in Petershagen. Generations later his descendants could also have hurled epithets at those obstinate and narrow minded Kleine Gemeinder who couldn't compromise with a little bit of moral decay and spiritual decline. After all, the brothers in the Gemeinde who were beating up each other were only hurting themselves and no one else. Klaas Reimer explains his feelings on exactly this point:

"From this time on the struggle among us became always more difficult. The majority did not recognize the schism as beneficial but neither did they earnestly work against it, for they seemingly loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. John 12, 43. But God did not allow me to surrender to the situation even though the thought frequently came to me that it would be better to do so. Nothing could be changed. I should simply preach as well as I could and that was all that I could do. But when these ideas came to me I studied the Holy Scripture and the writings of Menno Simons after which all thoughts of surrender left me. Instead the spirit said, 'Behold I come quickly. Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown' Revelations 3, 11."

Another incident which illustrates the indifferent leadership and doctrinal vacillation in the Molotschna Mennonite Gemeinde occurred in 1807. Napoleonic France was at war with Czarist Russia. The Imperial authorities were badly in need of material and funds to wage their defense. Consequently a gathering of Molotschna Schulzen and ministers was held in Takmak where they were asked for a show of loyalty to their new homeland.

"In 1807 (1812) it occurred that the French invaded with a mighty army in order to wage war against Russia. The Czar then issued an edict requesting voluntary contributions of war material, be it rifles, swords, money or food. The Schulzen and Aeltester (Jakob Enns) then had to appear in Takmak. Here the manifesto of the Czar was read to them after which they returned home. The Aeltester Jakob Enns then instructed the Schulzen to be careful in the matter as it was not appropriate for us to make voluntary contributions for this purpose. After a little while the Inspector forwarded a record book (Schwurbuch) which he was to circulate among the villages. Everyone was to write into the book the amount which they were willing to contribute for the war.

"Aeltester Enns had instructed the Schulzen that it was not appropriate for us to help in the war effort and we ministers frequently came together to discuss the matter. Often the Oberschulz also attended and asked us whether or not he should circulate the Schwurbuch. Most of us ministers almost always replied that it was not right for us to make voluntary contributions for war. But the Aeltester had remained silent and the Oberschulz (Klaas Wiens) insisted that he hear this from the Aeltester.

"Finally Enns confided separately with the Oberschulz asking him why he raised so many questions if he wanted to circulate the book. Wiens then sent the Schwurbuch around. By the time it came to our village the book had been nearly everywhere else. We were all summoned to appear before the Schulz where the same was read to us and inspected. It was evident that David Hiebert in Lindenau had subscribed for 10 rubel and that Jakob Fast in Halbstaedt had subscribed for 25 rubel. At this the neighbours in Petershagen became very concerned and we had to travel to the Oberschulz and Aeltester in this regard with the result that a meeting was called. We were responsible to notify the ministers at our end of the colony and for this reason I found it necessary to call upon Jakob Fast from Halbstaedt. I advised him that a meeting had been called in order to revoke what had been subscribed for the war. Then he started to weep and admitted that he was also one of the signatories. The matter was put to right at the meeting and the Inspector advised accordingly. Observe dear reader. This is what can happen when the spiritual house is built on sand and not firmly grounded on the word of God. Such a one is like a reed which is bent to and fro by the wind."

From the foregoing it is evident that the infant Molotschna Flemish Gemeinde had a number of serious inherent weaknesses and deficiencies. First, because of doctrinal indifference in the Prus-

sian Gemeinden, many of the Molotschna pioneers were not properly grounded in the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. Second, the disruption of the emigration and the privations of a new frontier settlement created unlimited opportunities for socio-economic and religious strife. Third, and perhaps the most serious, was the lack of loving and earnest leadership at a most crucial time in the development of the Molotschna Mennonites. History would prove this to be a fateful choice in light of the social and theological tendencies already referred to. Jakob Enns was certainly lacking in the spiritual qualities necessary to the establishment of a large Gemeinde of some 400 families under such trying pioneer conditions. One writer has provided a rather candid description of the new Aeltester:

“However his housekeeping in the House of God was very shallow and very unskilled. Thus brethren were forced to compromise themselves and they were to be brought to obedience through the use of force. Such domineering leadership, and the transfer of evil doers to the Gebietsamt, with Holy Communion being celebrated at the same time, eventually led to the point where the fellow ministers Klaas Reimer and Cornelius Janzen refrained from attending the Communion service. Many people recognized the unspiritualness of Enns but did not leave him and rather remained with the majority. Apparently these preferred to have honour among men rather than with God.”<sup>14</sup>

The result of this choice of leadership is already well-known. Where a strong spiritual leader like Peter Epp, firmly grounded in the evangelical faith, would have established the Molotschna Flemish Gemeinde on a sound spiritual and moral footing, the opposite now happened. In his autobiography Aeltester Klaas Reimer has provided numerous details pertaining to the early spiritual developments in the Molotschna. In fact it is surprising that no recognition has been given to Reimer for having the foresight to preserve a historical account as his record seems to be the only one addressing itself to the development of the early Molotschna Gemeinde.

### 11.02 Struggles of the Reform Movement.

By now it was certainly evident that serious religious problems existed in the Molotschna colony. By speaking out on behalf of a restitution of nonresistant Christianity, Klaas Reimer had inseparably identified himself with the reformers in the infant Gemeinde. Indeed there were indications that a general renewal was not impossible. Klaas Reimer relates of an incident where a member of the Gemeinde in Blumstein had severely beaten the Tschumaken (teamsters) who drove their ox carts through the Molotschna colony with their loads of freight. At the instigation of the reform ministers, the matter was brought before a brotherhood meeting which resulted in a defeat for Aeltester Enns. Klaas Reimer explains what happened next:

“Then it occurred that a brother in Blumstein had severely beaten the Tschumaken. Because of reminders from us that this was not right, Enns put the matter to a brotherhood meeting held at the place of Huebert in Lindenau. He then made general inquiries but the brethren all disagreed with him. Enns appeared to be terrified by this reaction and replied loudly: ‘Brethren, are we making a correct judgement?’ And then he stated further that such an incident should never happen again.

“Subsequently we had many discussions with him for this reason, that the use of force was not proper for a Christian. As a result Enns became furious with me and prepared a sermon from Matthew 22, 19-20, and as he was speaking of the superinscription on the coin, he compared the matter in a light similar to verse 12 and 13 of the Epistle of Jude and spoke at length and very dreadfully about me. In addition he stated in closing ‘And will we allow this menial foreign servant to stand?’ All the while I was sitting right beside Enns. But by this time these statements no longer bothered me as this was not a matter where conceding could even be considered”.

It appears that when Enns realized that the complete brotherhood would take the side of Reimer and the reformers instead of supporting his leadership he made sure that such an opportunity where he could be defeated by the whole brotherhood would not occur again. In addition Enns now set about a strategy to defuse the theological and spiritual issues—in which he was clearly and unequivocally wrong—by attacking Reimer personally. This tactic appears to have been successful as the forces of Aeltester Enns now came even more into the open and consolidated their power around the Aeltester. Klaas Reimer explains these developments as follows:

“After the worship service we were discussing the matter of the use of force at Hueberts when Huebert in his zeal against me stated, ‘that on one occasion he also had hit his servant after which the servant had behaved much better’. Then we departed but Enns accompanied us to the street. After much discussion he asked us to follow him as he wanted to show us the measuring stick which he had broken across the head of one of his brethren. All of this seemed to be quite acceptable to him and the others. Aeltester Peter Epp in Danzig had written regarding this to the Heuboden Gemeinde that such a brother who

struck another adult person was not only completely unqualified to remain as minister, but should also not remain as a brother in the Gemeinde."

It is interesting to note here the reference by Klaas Reimer to the writings of his father-in-law the former Aeltester Peter Epp. It seems that by now the situation had deteriorated to the point that the forces led by Enns were secure in their position as another incident reveals.

"After this it occurred that one of the Brethren from Ladekopp had committed an evil deed (crime). The offender was taken to the Schulz and held by two men while another beat him. Because the majority considered the beating to be an offence and as we ministers admonished and reproached the Aeltester about this he stated that, 'We will hold a brotherhood meeting' but did not tell us what he had in mind. When the brethren were all assembled he presented the matter to them and after finishing his presentation he closed his book and said to Janzen and myself, 'I now turn the matter over for you to discuss'.

"We then presented to the brethren the scriptural basis why this was unacceptable whereupon they became indignant as they knew the position of the Aeltester with respect to the matter. Several brethren became very upset and loudly talked about each other so that they were divided and the meeting was completely disrupted. They also talked offensively to Janzen and myself. Now the Gemeinde was very much divided. As the matter could not be allowed to remain in this state another brotherhood meeting was called shortly thereafter where somewhat of a reconciliation was achieved. But that is how the matter was allowed to remain."

One is impressed with the patience and restraint with which Reimer gently battled the forces which were infiltrating because of the lack of earnestness and sincerity on the part of Enns. Klaas Reimer goes on to describe an incident involving the Oberschulz Klaas Wiens in Altonau. This dispute arose because of arguments between the Oberschulz and his neighbours with respect to cattle. Apparently Aeltester Jakob Enns was already unfavourably inclined against Wiens because of an incident which had occurred years earlier in Prussia when Wiens because of his honesty had refused to bring a nobleman into temptation. Therefore Enns was very harsh with Wiens who then simply left. Enns responded by sending four men after Wiens who seized him and brought him back to appear before the Aeltester. This was done forcibly and so roughly that Wiens became very sick and was confined to a sick bed. When questioned about this Enns stated that he would employ eight men if necessary to discipline an offender. Klaas Reimer describes this incident in some detail:

"Subsequently it occurred that Klaas Wiens in Altonau had arguments with his neighbours regarding the cattle. Aeltester Enns then drove to Altona and held a meeting with the parties involved. Enns had already become prejudiced against Wiens in Prussia because of a certain incident. Because of his honesty Wiens had refused to lead a mighty nobleman into temptation. Consequently Enns had apparently been very severe with Wiens on account of which Wiens had left. Enns then sent four men after him with the instructions to bring Wiens back regardless of what happened. The men forcefully picked him up and roughly carried him through the doors and as a consequence Wiens lay in bed sick. Later we ministers talked to Enns that this was not right. On one occasion when we had referred to this somewhat too much he became angry and said 'That if it ever occurred again and Wiens could not be carried by four men, then he would be carried by eight men'.

"In the meantime the strife in Altonau involving Wiens had not been solved by all of this as there was fault on both sides. After some time Enns had presented the matter to the brotherhood and because Wiens had not made his appearance he was given his leave and excommunicated. Wiens was given written notice of this action. The dispute now intensified and spread throughout the entire Gemeinde. The majority sided with Wiens and believed that the four who had carried Wiens had earned the punishment much more than Wiens. As a result the dispute among the ministers and brethren became more and more serious.

"Many of the Ministers and brethren continued in full fellowship with Wiens, particularly in Lindenau, where it included almost everybody as Wiens was supposed to help them as their advocate before the rulers with respect to the land between Lindenau, Lichtenau and the Dukkobours. And so the uproar became ever more intense and Enns was seemingly unable to do anything to resolve the situation. In the meantime the bans were announced for two young couples in Lindenau. Although there was no hindrance, Enns forbade their marriage."

The measures instituted by Enns merely intensified the dispute. As a last resort Aeltester Jacob Enns called a brotherhood meeting in the hope that he would be able to defuse the opposition of Wiens and his supporters as he had done previously in the case of the reform group. Klaas Reimer describes the tactics employed by Aeltester Enns and the resulting brotherhood meeting in his vivid style. One transcription refers to the commotion caused by the clash between Enns and Wiens as being like the swarming of a hive of angry bees:

"The situation had not improved through these measures and so Enns called a general brotherhood meeting regarding the matter of Wiens in the house of worship in Orloff. Wiens also came to the meeting. While we were in the 'Stuebchen' (Ministerial room) in the morning Enns became aware that Wiens had also come to the meeting. He became dreadfully angry and said to us all, 'Ohms, do not allow that man into the Church, or I will grab the first thing I may put my hands on, be it an ax or a spade, and strike at him at once.' In his rage he grasped a cap from the table and threw it down on the floor with all his might. Enns then put a guard at the door without our knowledge. We only discovered this later. While we were inside the church Wiens went around the building and in front of the windows during the entire period that Enns was preaching. Later, Enns wanted to question the brethren whether they supported him or Wiens, so that the ministerial again returned to the 'Stuebchen'. Each of the brethren came through the room and had to record their vote, whether they supported Wiens or Enns.

"Because of this the sentries had not given enough attention to their post and Wiens entered the church seating himself in the assembly area. All this time the brethren were proceeding through the electoral procedure one after the other. When Enns became aware of Wiens he angrily proceeded into the assembly area and screamed loudly and said, 'get this man out of here but do him no harm'. Then everyone at the meeting jumped up. There was such a frightful uproar that it looked as if a terrible fight would result. In view of this, Janzen and I quickly took our caps and made our exit.

"The aged minister Christian Schmitt from Ruckenuau then went over and talked to Wiens in a friendly manner, after which Wiens went back outside. When we saw this we returned into the Church. Note my dearest reader. Had God allowed the matter to progress to the point that Wiens had been forcefully ejected, I do not know which party would have won the battle, as the situation looked ominous."

Although they were not directly involved the reformers were nonetheless deeply saddened by the dispute between the Aeltester and the Oberschulz and their respective forces. Klaas Reimer laments prophetically with respect to what similar trends had brought for the people of Israel.

"My dearest reader. God governs all things. This was certainly evident here. This can likewise be observed in manifold ways with the people of Israel for when God perceived in Israel that they would change their ways and would heed his will he gave them Judges who then had to help them out of the clutches of evil. Sometimes the situation was almost without hope and then God also gave them evil and despotic rulers as we can see in the case of King Ahab. And even though it was a horror for the majority of the people that the King was so ruthless only a few converted themselves earnestly to God. Even these few were then ridiculed as is also the case with us here. For God directs everything and always does so in such a way that the people should become aware of their own destruction and should direct themselves to him."

Klaas Reimer then describes how this terrible division between the two powerful forces of Gebiet-samt and Gemeinde was finally resolved. In the end the settlement of the dispute could only be negotiated with the aid of the ministerial from the Old Colony:

"Now there were still the two bridal couples who have already been mentioned. Permission for them to be wedded had not yet been granted by the Aeltester even though there was no other impediment. With all of this it seemed as if Aeltester Enns had finally brought matters to the point where he no longer knew which way to turn. He then summoned the Aeltester and ministers from the Old Colony to come to the Molotschna. They came and discussed the matters with many. They tried to persuade Enns and Wiens to concede to each other. They also saw that it was important that the two bridal couples were married. For in the meantime these couples had become indignant and had talked of having themselves married in Prischib as they had already waited for two months. Consequently these couples were married without the consent of Enns. The Old Colonier then left for home. With the passage of time, Enns conceded sufficiently to Wiens, so that Wiens was again accepted as a brother in the Gemeinde."

The foregoing incident is of special significance as it contradicts the view that the schism which resulted in the formation of the Kleine Gemeinde was only a personality clash between Reimer and Enns. It is evident that the despotic Aeltester was able to keep the Anabaptist-Mennonite reformers and the culturally progressive forces of Oberschulz Klaas Wiens firmly in line only by resorting to whatever ruthless tactic was necessary to achieve his ends. It is noteworthy that only three decades later the tables would be turned when Johan Cornies would employ the same philosophy in his attempt to destroy and eradicate the culturally reactionary Grosze Gemeinde. After the death of Cornies the spirit of Enns was again revived in the person of Oberschulz David Friesen who used the identical tactics to deal with the cultural, socio-economic and religious problems of the Molotschna colony during the 1860's.

Thus the reins and balance of power in the Molotschna seesawed back and forth between the

spiritual and philosophical descendants of Oberschulz Klaas Wiens and Aeltester Enns. Each group took every opportunity to subjugate the other and whatever other group seemed to threaten their hegemony. The Kleine Gemeinde did not seek a turn in this power struggle for in their view such activities were not in accordance with Anabaptist-Mennonite principles. The fact that the absolute correctness and truth of this position has never been acknowledged and recognized in Russian Mennonite historiography merely follows the philosophical and theological patterns which were instituted at the founding of the Molotschna settlement in 1804-1806.

### 11.03 Threats of Siberia and Excommunication.

The struggle between Klaas Wiens and Jakob Enns had resulted in a humiliating defeat for the Aeltester. In the meantime the tension between the Aeltester and the reformers was steadily increasing. The reverses of the Aeltester at the hands of the more powerful Oberschulz did not hinder his continuing effort to keep the small but growing reform movement within its place. The tactics which the Aeltester employed for this purpose eventually escalated to include the threat of banishment to Siberia and excommunication from his Gemeinde.

The movement led by Klaas Reimer did not have any inherent separatistic tendencies but eventually the members of the movement had a desire to meet separately for prayer meetings, Bible studies and worship. These activities developed in order to meet the spiritual needs of the reformers and did not constitute a withdrawal from the Gemeinde. Klaas Reimer describes the opposition which developed over the founding of one of these groups.

“So we were a small group who were unable to conform ourselves to this dreadful Aeltester by releasing ourselves completely (from our faith) in obedience to him. Then a group of men from Muensterburg came and insisted that we accept them and that we should hold worship services in their village every fourteen days. Consequently we rotated the services between Muensterburg one Sunday and Petershagen the next. All this was done without the consent of Aeltester Enns. Then others in Muensterburg threatened that they would keep me away with physical blows if necessary and when these threats were unsuccessful they filed a complaint against us with the village Schulz and the Gebietsamt. Cornelius Janzen and myself were then summoned to the Gebietsamt and when we arrived Herman Neufeld, the Schulz in Muensterburg who had accused us, was also there. They then asked us why we were having worship services contrary to the wishes of the Aeltester. We explained the whole situation by reference to the Word of God and his will. Then they fell silent and the complainant Neufeld went to the door and wanted to leave.”

The reader should note that it was quite common during the early years in the Molotschna for groups to meet in private residences for worship. The Orloff church building was constructed in 1809 and the Petershagen church building in 1810.<sup>5</sup> A third church was constructed in Lichtenau in 1826. The Molotschna settlement was spread out over some 30 miles and it was difficult for everyone to attend in these central locations.

But Aeltester Enns was not prepared to permit the continuation of any forum through which the efforts of the reformers might be reinforced. His attempt to employ the forces of the Gebietsamt against Klaas Reimer and his group had been refused so that Enns now employed a different tactic. He pretended to have been persuaded by the reformers and suggested that he would yield his office of Aeltester to them in the belief that this would scare and sober them:

“As nothing had succeeded against us Aeltester Enns had written to us ministers appointing a day for a meeting with him at which time he was going to surrender his office as Aeltester to us. This troubled me a great deal so that I was unable to eat. But when we came to him all my anxiety vanished. We immediately realized his deceit as he had wanted to bring us to him by this trickery. When this did not help he sent two men to us, namely, David Huebert, Lindenau, and Abraham Wiebe, Muensterberg, the senior ministers. They spoke to us in a friendly way and were soon in agreement with us. They suggested that we go to Enns as they believed that we would then achieve a reconciliation. We were not prepared to do this as we felt that Enns should call a brotherhood meeting for this purpose, but they would not do this as they felt we should go to Enns.

“After much discussion we four ministers drove to Enns as I had committed myself to make every effort to achieve a reconciliation. But by now we were far apart as it was not the will of God. When we arrived at the home of Enns and started to speak he became dreadfully angry and lashed out with terrible words. He repeatedly hammered his fist on the table and grabbed his cap from his head and threw it on the floor with all his might. I was not able to unite myself with such a spirit but the two men Huebert and Wiebe remained completely silent and at about midnight we left for home.”

It seems that Aeltester Jacob Enns was prepared to employ any tactic to break down the sincere efforts of the reformers in order to trap them into compromising their beliefs. Perhaps his defeat at the hands of the Oberschulz made him anxious to act even more strictly against the reformers to insure that another rival would not become established. Reimer relates two more incidents where the Aeltester tried to ensnare the renewal movement.

“Later Enns again wrote us requesting that we should come to him as he wanted to surrender his office as Aeltester to us. But by this time this made no impression upon us and was of no interest for it was not the will of God. Thereafter Aeltester Enns had another idea. Namely he persuaded some brethren from several villages who were of one mind with him to come to admonish us in the presence of the Schulz. One of them approached me without my knowing what they had in mind and notified me and Janzen to attend at the Schulz. When we arrived at the Schulz there were about 25 men gathered there in order to discuss with me if I would not be able to support the Aeltester. Then we presented the word of God to them whereupon they fell silent except for three men. These three were: Klaas Rempel from Schoensee, Isaac Wall from Tiegenhagen and Hans Heide from Halbstaedt. Heide sat in front and led the discussion. I think that many will still remember what kind of man he was. For me it was a wonder that the Word of God was proven and discussed at the home of the Schulz by such careless people.

“Indeed, they addressed me earnestly to concede or else I would be removed from my office. Rempel then stated how he would beat the evil doers. Whereupon we left. About a week later several of the Brethren and two ministers again came to the Schulz. A minister then came to see me and said that I should go there as the matter had not been properly dealt with at the previous meeting and that they wanted to rectify the matter. To this I replied that everyone was welcome in my house and that whoever wanted to talk to me could come to my place. I would not again go to the Schulz to discuss spiritual matters. This was properly done with the Aeltester or at the meeting of the brotherhood. Then the minister left and the brethren dispersed.”

It appears that Aeltester Enns was besetting and harassing the reformers in the hope that they would make a mistake by reacting in anger to his own outbursts or else by expressing themselves unlovingly before their brethren, etc. Later Aeltester Reimer expressed thankfulness to his Lord and Savior for keeping him from falling into such temptation thereby disgracing the renewal movement. From the patient resolve displayed by Reimer one might conclude that this one-sided battle might have continued indefinitely had not other events intervened.

The incident which finally sparked a separation occurred when Aeltester Enns had a serious dispute with the minister David Huebert. Reimer and Jansen discussed the matter with David Huebert who stated that Enns had deeply humiliated him and had not made any explanation nor had Enns made any attempt to stop in to see him. In the meantime Enns was proceeding with a communion service without being reconciled with his brother which was contrary to the principles of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. In essence the communion service was to be a celebration of the unity and purity of the body of Christ and therefore only those who had cleansed themselves of impurity were to take part. 1 Corinthians 11, 27-29. Matthew 23-24. This principle of faith was now being disregarded and mocked by the Aeltester himself and therefore Reimer and Janzen could not partake in good conscience. Klaas Reimer explains what happened:

“After a long time it occurred that Enns had a serious dispute with the minister Huebert. In the meantime Enns held communion services in Orloff without first being reconciled with Huebert. On the following Sunday communion service was to be held in Petershagen. When we heard about this we drove to Huebert in Lindenau in order to discuss the matter with him. Huebert stated that Enns had deeply insulted him. Enns had not conveyed any apologies nor had he stopped by in order to be reconciled, and was proceeding with communion services in spite of this. Consequently we refrained from attending the communion services and as this made no difference to Enns we held back completely from the worship services.

“Now the time had come where God wanted to inspire us with power. So many evil works emanated from the Aeltester that it was necessary for us to leave their fellowship. It was impossible for us to acquiesce to the manifest evil works of the Aeltester and to be reconciled with the same. I could not even do so merely for the sake of good appearances for then my conscience would have condemned me. This would have made me a hypocrite before God. I had to preserve what God had bestowed upon me and not merely safeguard my pound in a handkerchief. For I would then be deserving of that which Christ speaks in Luke 19, 20-23. Without false appearances I clung firmly to that which he had given unto me. I did so only through the power of God for otherwise I was a very weak person. Indeed, in many respects I was completely unknowledgeable and in error.

“And my beloved reader. To leave the Gemeinde when there is no hint of a refuge in another is not within human power and in this regard the honour of men is held too highly. For Menno Simons writes that there is nothing more misfortunate for the devil than when people leave a church and then earnestly discipline themselves with the ban in accordance with the scripture and profess the Word of God to the world. I know what it has cost me, in Prussia as well as here, to leave the Gemeinde. What other choice is there for a teacher (minister) who seeks to save his soul from eternal punishment? It is impossible for such a one to be a hypocrite to the Gemeinde and his fellow brethren. You may refer to this in John 12, 42.”

The outright repudiation of Anabaptist-Mennonite principles by Aeltester Jakob Enns made a showdown with the reformers inevitable. The die was cast, and it seemed that neither party would concede. The reformers had responded to the wrongful treatment of their fellow minister by refraining completely from the worship services of the Gemeinde of Enns. For his part, Enns gave no thought to the necessity of a reconciliation with Huebert. Instead he summoned Aeltester Johan Wiebe and the ministerial from the Old Colony in the hope that they would be able to persuade the reformers to compromise their evangelical principles. Klaas Reimer explains:

“We had now refrained completely from their fellowship. Jakob Enns then constituted another meeting for which he also notified the Aeltester and ministers from the Old Colony. After we arrived we were asked if we were already prepared to concede. When we did not consent Aeltester Johan Wiebe called us aside by ourselves and admonished us in many things. When this presentation was unsuccessful we went back inside where Wiebe said to us both as follows: ‘Both of you men are completely correct according to the Holy Scriptures but we are unable to practice these things. Aeltester Enns has also asked me to tell you that if you continue to stand unyieldingly upon your principles then it can also come about that the matter will not be resolved before you have been sent to Siberia. I am informing you of this in order that it will not be a surprise to you at that time.’

“O what a pity and sorrow! For such a thing to be stated by an Aeltester. Instead of saying to me ‘according to the Holy Scripture you are completely correct, hold firmly to you faith so that no one will take your Crown,’ Revelations 3, he wanted to scare us with the threat of exile to Siberia.

“We now perceived that there was little hope left among the ministers of the nonresistant Christians for these are the very means which false teachers have employed over the ages. First, they try to subvert the true Christian through manifold representations. If this is not successful they try with chains and imprisonment, and then finally by tormenting the Christian to death. The matter would have come to the same conclusion here if God had not interceded in a wonderful way. O how great the grace of God has been towards me a miserable sinner! He looked upon my great weakness with love for he wanted to mold me even further. When the presentation of Wiebe was finished they decided to hold another brotherhood meeting in Orloff where we were also to attend. We completely refused to partake in the same and did not attend. Later we heard that Enns and Wiebe had completely denounced us and excommunicated us”.

Instead of taking action to cleanse his own affairs and to be reconciled with those whom he had offended, Jakob Enns found it easier to simply excommunicate the ones who were seeking for a restitution of nonresistant Christianity in his Gemeinde. As if this was not enough he made one more attempt to coerce the reformers by threatening them with the power of the Gebietsamt:

“After a time Enns once again summoned us to Halbstaedt to the place of Jakob Fast. He had also summoned the Gebietsamt. He then asked of us whether we were ready to concede by now. If not, he had the officials of the Gebietsamt there in order to assist him. We remained steadfast to our principles and could not concede. After a further period Enns again summoned us to him where he had two of his neighbours present. He then advised us. ‘I have now waited for you for a whole year to reconsider your position and as you have not done so I will hold a ministerial election in order to replace you. Also an investigation has been held in the Old Colony regarding the Waisenamt and soon we will do likewise here. I replied to Enns, ‘Ohm Jakob do think of what you are doing before you have us all carried away into chains and bondage’.

“Now my beloved reader, consider whether you believe our separation to have been only the work of men. Our situation now was like sheep without a shepherd. Indeed like Daniel who was thrown into the lions’ den. We also relied completely, although in great weakness, on the one who says, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’. Hebrews 13, 5.”

It is indeed noteworthy that no trace of separatism is evident in the position of Klaas Reimer and his compatriots in spite of threats of the Gebietsamt and Siberia. Finally only excommunication could deter the reformers from the goal of restitution of the purity of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith in the Molotschna Flemish Gemeinde. It is evident that Klaas Reimer and his brethren were reformers to the last.



## 11.04 A Small Flock Called to be Separate 1812-1816.

The reform movement among the Molotschna Flemish Mennonites had reached a turning point. The excommunications from the Gemeinde of Aeltester Enns had been followed by a year of harassment and persecution. At this point the concerns of Klaas Reimer and his associates turned to the establishment of a separate Gemeinde which they sought to constitute upon the biblical teachings of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith as best they knew how. The year of this historic decision to establish the Kleine Gemeinde of Mennonites in the Molotschna has generally been placed at 1812.

Notwithstanding further accusations to the Gebietsamt and the Supervisory-Committee (Kontor) the reform movement slowly developed into a separate Gemeinde. The small flock now proceeded to hold their own worship services which had their origin in the small prayer and Bible study groups already referred to.<sup>6</sup> The reform church quickly became known for their diligent study of the Bible and the Anabaptist-Mennonite writings.<sup>7</sup> Their leaders were Klaas Reimer, age 42, and Cornelius Janzen age 32, by now both proven and experienced ministers. But it would be many years before the Kleine Gemeinde would be able to take its existence for granted. Klaas Reimer explains some of the difficulties which were encountered from the very start.

"First, we were summoned to the office of the Schulz and advised that we ministers would no longer be entitled to the privileges of the office (i.e. Exemption from Scharwerk or statutory labour) to which we were also quite willing to submit ourselves. We promised to live amongst them quietly and peacefully and to do and pay our share as was required of us. Nevertheless Aeltester Enns laid a very severe charge against us with the Supervisory-Committee (Kontor) as rebels. This accusation was subscribed to by four men, as Aeltester Johan Wiebe of the Old Colony later personally related to me. After the complaint arrived at the Kontor, the aforementioned Klaas Wiens was summoned to explain the situation on the Molotschna. Wiens was a wise and experienced man who was quite knowledgeable regarding the origins and fundamentals of the Mennonite faith. From among all of us Wiens was held in the highest regard by the government authorities. Wiens now made a full explanation of the situation as a result of which the Kontor sent a humiliating reply to Enns. For what God has constituted cannot be cast down by human hands. We were unaware of this writing at the time and so we few were in great anxiety and did not know how to deal with the situation".

In the midst of all this adversity the fragile remnant received a wonderful sign of support and approval. As if by a miracle they were contacted by an aged minister Peter Hildebrand from the small Frisian Gemeinde in the Old Colony. He very much encouraged the group and also wrote them a letter of comfort which served to strengthen their resolve. Klaas Reimer describes how this brotherly support gave them renewed strength in a time of discouragement:

"It then came to pass that an aged minister by the name of Peter Hildebrand from Schoenwiese came here for a visit with my fellow servant Cornelius Janzen. Janzen then described the entire situation to him. The Aeltester and ministers from Schoenwiese were completely unfamiliar with our situation as they had never been in our colony nor had they been summoned for any of the meetings as they were of the Frisians.

"Hildebrand found the whole matter to be somewhat amazing and came to be very much inclined in our favour. He left for home and shortly thereafter also wrote us a letter of comfort which very much strengthened us in our resolve. We then discussed the matter and decided that we would make a trip to Schoenwiese for we had heard that their Aeltester by the name of Janzen from Schoenwiese was a very peaceloving man. Although we were otherwise unacquainted with him the three of us, namely, Jakob Friesen from Muensterburg, Cornelius Janzen and myself traveled to the Old Colony. On October 10, 1814, we arrived at the home of Peter Penner where we stayed overnight. Here we met Aeltester Johan Wiebe who was also staying for the night. By virtue of this coincidence we realized that it was essential that we talk to Aeltester Wiebe once more. After a lengthy discussion he acknowledged that we were right in our position but remained unwilling to constitute us as a separate Gemeinde."

The small delegation from the Molotschna now proceeded to their meeting with the Frisian Aeltester Heinrich Janzen. Aided by the recommendation of the aged Peter Hildebrand the Frisian Aeltester finally agreed to assist in the organization of a new Gemeinde. Sometime in 1814 Aeltester Janzen came to the Molotschna and performed the first baptismal services and conducted a communion service. After some further hesitation Aeltester Janzen returned once more in order to supervise an organizational meeting where a lot was drawn for the man who was to be the first Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde. The choice by lot fell on Klaas Reimer.

"We now directed ourselves to Heinrich Janzen, the Aeltester from Schoenwiese, whom we petitioned respecting our dilemma and whom we now asked for help. In response Janzen

became very quiet. However the aged Hildebrand presented our situation favourably and finally Janzen accepted us. Since travelling was difficult at the time of year the matter remained dormant until spring. There were individuals among us who wished to be baptized and we had decided with Aeltester Janzen through our discussion and letter correspondence that we would teach and examine the candidates. In the spring we traveled to Schoenwiese with the three young people where they were baptized together with the Frisian baptismal candidates. After a while he also came to the Molotschna and conducted a communion service with us in accordance with our Flemish customs and practices. We again prevailed upon him with regards to an Aeltester. He declined to do so at the time as he planned to return to us in a short while. Some time later he returned and conducted the drawing of the lots between Cornelius Janzen and myself. The lot fell upon me. Yes, completely unworthy and unqualified as I was. But what could I do? Through all my previous experiences I could not regard this result to be anything other than the will of God. Therefore I also wanted to be satisfied and at peace with my lot. Whatever God wanted of me."

Heinrich Janzen was not yet ready to ordain the chosen Aeltester of the Molotschna Kleine Gemeinde because of the tremendous objections raised by the Gemeinde of Jakob Enns. This occurred in 1815 the same year that the Molotschna Mennonites were constructing a prison in order to contain the evildoers among them. At the same time letters were written to compatriots in Prussia in order to seek comfort and support. Through searching the scripture and other study the Kleine Gemeinde eventually decided that it was not an absolute requirement that an Aeltester be ordained by another Aeltester if there was none available. The call from God was more important than the form of ordination. As a result, the small flock of believers assembled in the year 1816 to witness as the minister Cornelius Janzen ordained the new Aeltester Klaas Reimer.

"We prevailed upon Janzen for an ordination as Aeltester but he only wanted to do so some time later and consequently we discussed this at great length. We perceived that he would not perform the ordination because of the great objections. This occurred in 1815, the same year in which Aeltester Enns instructed the Gebietsamt to issue a decree that revelers (dancers) and drunkards were to be punished with a fine or the performance of compulsory labour. At the same time a Profunck or prison was added to the Gebietsamt office whereby they wanted to bring the offenders unto obedience.

"It was also forbidden for anyone in the colony to write to Prussia unless if the open letter had first been presented to the Gebietsamt. We wanted to write to Prussia with the full details of what had happened but did not know how. Then the knowledgeable Wiens from Steinbach helped us to find a way, whereupon we were able to forward our writing. Letters soon arrived from Prussia in reply, one to me and one to Aeltester Jakob Enns. These letters had been signed by four Aeltesten and many ministers in Prussia. The conclusion of these letters was that if this was adopted as a fundamental principle it would reject our confession of faith. This would destroy discipleship to Christ. Aeltester Abraham Wiebe from Prussia also wrote us few in this regard. Those who have the most love are apparently able to be patient and so we waited until 1816 for our ordination.

"During this time we had studied the Holy Scripture and other writings and had discovered that Menno Simons was apparently not (properly) ordained. And according to what we were told the Aeltester Heinrich Janzen had only been ordained by the minister Cornelius Warkentin. Consequently I also accepted this view. Our Kleine Gemeinde now accepted me as Aeltester through an ordination sermon presented by the Minister Cornelius Janzen. In my insignificance and great imperfection I now served my Gemeinde with communion and baptism. Jakob Enns then held a meeting with his ministers and Johan Wiebe where they decided that anyone baptized by me would have to be rebaptized should they later wish to join his Gemeinde."

Much has been made about the failure of Aeltester Klaas Reimer to obtain an ordination from another Aeltester. The theological implications of this step will be discussed in the next chapter.<sup>8</sup> The ordination of Aeltester Klaas Reimer in 1816 completed the organization of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia. This process had commenced with the formal founding of the group in 1812.

The small reform group now came to be referred to as the Kleine Gemeinde in disparaging reference to the small size of the group relative to the remainder of the Molotschna Flemish Gemeinde. In contrast the larger group under Aeltester Enns rather appropriately came to be known as the Grosze Gemeinde. For some Mennonites the reference to the Kleine Gemeinde also acquired a derogatory meaning in the sense of the acronym "kleingemeensch" with apparent reference to its socio-economic policy.<sup>9</sup> The play on the words Kleine Gemeinde as "small minded" was similar to Plattdeutsch which was mistakenly understood by many to refer to a "low" or lesser German. The Kleine Gemeinde tried to bear such small minded scoffing calmly for after all it was "the meek who would inherit the earth".

But the true meaning of the term "Kleine Gemeinde" was in the sense of a remnant which was

striving to be a true Gemeinde of God in the spirit of the Anabaptist-Mennonite vision. In his "Short Exposition" Klaas Reimer refers to a small flock or small remnant both in Prussia and in Russia. God had ordained that his people would always be a small and weak community engaged in a spiritual warfare with the world. The small struggling band was a part and continuation of the peaceable earthly kingdom of Christ. (See Section 4.02). The best translation of the term Kleine Gemeinde would be in the sense of a remnant or flock as it is used in scripture verses such as Isaiah 1:9.

The name of a Mennonite Gemeinde was usually derived by reference to the place where such a Gemeinde was located. But this option was not available to the Kleine Gemeinde as its membership was scattered throughout the Molotschna Mennonite settlement. The second choice might be a reference to the particular Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition in which the particular group originated. This did not help as the group from which the reformers were expunged was already called the Molotschna Flemish Mennonite Gemeinde. To preface the name with a theological concept was also dangerous as over the years such a choice as innocent as it might be, could unwittingly lead the particular group away from a balanced evangelical teaching. It is evident that the name Kleine Gemeinde was a good one. The term not only had a strong Biblical meaning but was also descriptive of the situation in the Molotschna as well as of the objectives and purpose for existence of the group. And above all the term was neutral from a theological standpoint so that it did not interfere nor detract from the Kleine Gemeinde effort to keep alive the Anabaptist-Mennonite vision in Russia.

### 11.05 Pietism in the Molotschna, 1817-1824.

The departure from the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith evident in Aeltester Jacob Enns and other leaders was not the only problem encountered by the Molotschna Mennonites. They also faced an invasion of a foreign teaching. This was the confession or teaching of pietism. The Anabaptist-Mennonites had been affected and influenced by other Christian faiths or confessions throughout the centuries. This included the bloody evangelical efforts of the Catholic and Lutheran inquisitions of the 16th and 17th centuries. Later these same groups imposed milder legal restrictions and punitive taxes which were also designed to encourage the Anabaptist-Mennonites to abandon their faith in favour of the "true" faith be it Catholic or Protestant. With the possible exception of the Inquisition no Christian faith has had a more profound impact on the Anabaptist-Mennonites than pietism.

Chapter Four examined some of the fundamental teaching of pietism and its origin and spread through Europe. It is noteworthy that in spite of all the suffering, starving, and oppressed humanity in the slums and feudal estates of Western Europe, the pietists had a burning concern and love for the Mennonites on the far distant steppes of Russia. Inspired by this "evangelical" love the pietists were able to ignore these needs at home in order to come to Russia to teach the "true gospel" to the poor ignorant Mennonites. The result of this mission effort was that after a century of often bitter struggle the Russian Mennonites were finally able to overcome many of the cumbersome teachings of the gospel. Now they too could cry "Peace, Peace" to the high heavens as they ignored the mass of suffering and downtrodden humanity about them. In fact, as a result of these evangelical efforts the new and enlightened Russian Mennonite church, with a population of some one hundred thousand in 1910 already had fifteen missionary families in foreign mission fields of their own.<sup>9a</sup>

Pietism in the Molotschna had its roots in the Prussian Mennonite Community. These roots have already been considered in Chapter Ten. It is evident that pietism made great inroads into the Mennonite church in Prussia during the 18th century. In fact the Anabaptist-Mennonites in Prussia would be overwhelmed by these forces during the 19th century. Therefore it is no surprise that the Molotschna pioneers also included Mennonites who had abandoned their faith in favour of the teachings of pietism.

Two tendencies were evident among some of these early settlers. One, the despotism of someone like Aeltester Jakob Enns who was not concerned about Anabaptist-Mennonite teachings because he was doctrinally indifferent and spiritually insensitive. Second, there were those who perceived the dangerous tendencies represented by Enns but were unwilling to make the sacrifices which the Kleine Gemeinde would have to make in order to seek the restitution of the nonresistant apostolic church. Instead these concerned individuals turned to pietism for their spiritual solace and inspiration. This was an easier but still Christian way.

The pietistical orientation of some early Molotschna leaders is already evident in 1807 when the ministers, David Huebert and Jacob Fast pledged funds in support of the Napoleonic War. Jacob Enns, the man who had occasioned so much grief for the Molotschna Mennonites died in 1817. He was replaced as Aeltester of the Grosze Gemeinde by Jakob Fast who was a sincere but very weak

man. His pietistical tendencies became even more evident as soon as he was in office. Klaas Reimer describes the new Aeltester as follows:

“Then in 1817 Jakob Enns died. According to what the people said he died in great terror of departing from this world. Perhaps he also experienced the grace of God in his last hour like the thief on the cross. Jakob Fast of Halbstaedt now became the Aeltester. He had been nominated and ordained previously. When he came into office Fast became proud and no longer considered it necessary to talk to me although he had earlier been a sorrowful but friendly man. When he became Aeltester this false spirit masqueraded as an angel of light. In the earlier years we had spent much time discussing the desolation of Christendom. Many times the tears had flowed from his eyes. But now that he had come into office he instituted a much greater desolation in the Gemeinde than the previous Aeltester. The leadership of Jacob Enns had often been evidenced in a terrible anger but Fast was very friendly and accommodating.

“Then a writing came to Fast from Prussia advising him that fine books of spiritual instruction were available there. Fast was to make inquiries to determine how many copies would be needed in his Gemeinde. He was to notify the sellers who would forward the books. Fast sent notes to us requesting that those of us who were interested in these fine books also allow our names to be added. But when these ‘fine’ books arrived it was the **Glaubens und Hoffnungs Blick** in which the author earnestly endorsed and propagated the teaching of ‘The Thousand Year Reign’ (millenium). Of this teaching the Apostle Paul writes, ‘If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable’. Certainly these teachings were contrary to the entire Word of God in which we find so much which teaches against such a belief. In this manner the false spirit had overtaken the remnant of the seed of woman.’”

Aeltester Klaas Reimer here expresses the fundamental Anabaptist-Mennonite teaching that conversion to Christ resulted in the regeneration of the inward man and the immediate institution of the Kingdom ethics of the sermon on the mount. This was the evangelical Thousand Year Reign or millenium which was instituted in the hearts of all believers. (See Section 4.05).

By the middle of the 19th century at least three major species of pietism had imposed their influence on the Molotschna Mennonites. These were the Moravians, the New Baptists, and the Wuerttemberg Separatists.<sup>10</sup> In addition there were almost countless smaller groupings of pietists so that it is impossible to discuss the theological and historical origins of each splinter group. Suffice it to say that the form of pietism encountered among the Molotschna pioneers seemed to be milder than the forms of pietism which came with immigrants who arrived in the Molotschna after the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815. Although these later Prussian immigrants were generally of the poorer class in Prussia, they were frequently quite zealous to propagate their pietistical faith and to proselytize among their Mennonite hosts and new neighbours.

This was also the case with the major groups among some two hundred and sixty families who immigrated to the Molotschna between the years of 1818 and 1824. One of these was the Gemeinde of Aeltester Franz Goerz who arrived in the Molotschna in 1819 and who settled in the unoccupied south-eastern portion of the Molotschna settlement. This group settled in seven villages centered around their main village of Rudnerweide. The Gemeinde of Goerz consisted of some one hundred families of Frisian Mennonite background, who had already fallen under the influence of pietism in Prussia.

Certainly there was a natural curiosity among the earlier Molotschna pioneers as to who their new brethren in the faith might be. Did the new immigrants include any blood relations? Would the immigrant group also include firm adherents of the faith? Would they make good neighbours? Did they need any financial help? No doubt these were some of the questions which the Molotschna Mennonites asked as they saw the wagon trains of immigrants arrive from Prussia. Klaas Reimer had a similar interest and concern which he has recorded as follows:

“When Aeltester Franz Goerz came in 1819 we made a trip to see him in order that we could have a discussion with him to seek out the true faith in him. When we started talking we quickly came around to the ‘Thousand Year Reign’ and how at that time the spears would be made into scythes and the swords into plowshares and that this millenium would soon be instituted. As I could not understand the matter in the same way, Goerz took his Bible and read in Isaiah Chapter 2. When I perceived his error my spirit became zealous and I said ‘Ohm Franz, are you familiar with the **Die Wandelnde Seele?**’ To this he replied in the affirmative. Then I said, ‘You will know what it says about this’. Goerz talked with us on two more occasions and tried to persuade us to accept his terrible error.’”

Aeltester Klaas Reimer held firmly to the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith refusing to be deceived. He was also compassionate and tried to help his poor colleague who had fallen upon such grievous errors. In his concern Klaas Reimer refers Goerz to the Anabaptist-Mennonite literature where he could satisfy himself as to the teachings of the faith on that point. Naturally Klaas Reimer must have

been astounded that an Aeltester who was to provide leadership to his flock of nonresistant Christians would fall into such apostasy. And not only that but that such an Aeltester would then try to proselytize others to these doctrines which were completely contrary to the teachings of the gospel. No doubt Klaas Reimer and his fellow believers found it hard to understand why these new Mennonite immigrants would want to abandon the wonderful assurance of faith of an entry into the spiritual Kingdom of God immediately upon conversion in favour of a vague and uncertain future millennium.

In 1821 a small group of some thirty Old Flemish Mennonites arrived from Prussia and founded the village of Alexanderwohl which was located in the middle eastern portion of the Molotschna settlement. The Old Flemish had traditionally been very earnest Anabaptist-Mennonites and it appears that they had been in correspondence with Klaas Reimer and the Kleine Gemeinde while still in Prussia. It seems that previous arrangements had been made for Aeltester Wedel to be billeted in the home of Klaas Reimer in Petershagen. Reimer mentions that he noticed something odd in the attitude of Wedel right from the start but that he remained meek and friendly towards Wedel. However the peace did not last for long as on the first Sunday three days later, Klaas Reimer returned from worship service to find the ministers assembled in his home. He explains what happened as follows:

“Then Aeltester Peter Wedel arrived. It had already been decided in Prussia that he would be billeted in my home. When he arrived he first went to the Gebietsamt from where the Secretary directed him here which I found to be rather strange. But I did not know what had been agreed to in Prussia. The Aeltester then moved into our place and his co-worker with my neighbour Dueck. However, I remained humble and friendly towards him.

“Three days later was Sunday and when I returned from Worship Services I found the ministers gathered in the ‘Stuebchen’ or small room. Nevertheless I entered. They pressed upon me to join their worship service and that they wanted to help fashion the services in any way I wanted. I presented many matters to them (of the teachings of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith). But it quickly came to the point where they asked me if I then wanted to repudiate the other Confessions (Christian). They pressed me very hard in this regard until I finally said that I confessed that all those who believed in child baptism, the swearing of the oath and war were not right thinking Christians (Recht denkende); even though they were as pious as could be in other respects.

“The Aeltester (Wedel) then jumped from his chair and exclaimed, ‘Man!! You have made a terrible statement which cannot stand!’ And no presentation on my part from the Holy Scripture was of any assistance. In fact I regretted having made the statement until I had an opportunity to read to him from the writings of Peter Peters entitled ‘Speech of Gerhard and the Kingdom of Peace’. For here the matter was stated even more categorically than what I had said. Consequently I was satisfied with respect to these points and with regards to what the learned men had said about the same. My conscience was at peace. Nevertheless they frequently talked at great length to us about their millennium and did everything within their power to convert us to their terrible error.’”

The reference by Klaas Reimer to child baptism, the swearing of oaths, and the waging of wars is a standard affirmation of the fundamental distinctions between the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith and other Christian confessions.<sup>12</sup> All three are necessary results of the Anabaptist-Mennonite belief in discipleship by virtue of which the believer was to follow and practice the teachings which Christ had instituted by word and deed. These beliefs in an experiential objective piety did not mean that anyone who did not agree with the same was eternally damned. In fact the Anabaptist-Mennonites specifically believed that it was not Christ-like or Christian to judge other confessions. The only duty and joy of the Anabaptist-Mennonite was to follow the Lamb wherever He leads with the realization that the Lord and Master would dispose and direct as necessary.

Although the Anabaptist-Mennonite considered certain actions to be Christ-like or Christian and certain other actions to be unchristian or not Christ-like, he most certainly did not deny the salvation of other confessions. In the end each faith would have to give its own account before God. What is most amazing is the fact that this simple statement of basic principles should cause so much controversy in the century to follow. The opponents of the Anabaptist-Mennonites gleefully fell upon this statement and used it to portray Aeltester Klaas Reimer as some sort of intolerant iconoclast and charismatic who went around telling other people they were not saved. This was not what the statement of Klaas Reimer was intended to mean nor is this what he said.

It is somewhat odd that the opponents of the Anabaptist-Mennonites would attack the movement on the basis of intolerance as it seems that these opposing confessions have been at least equally intolerant. i.e. The Catholics and Lutherans indicated their intolerance by burning the martyrs at the stake if they did not become converted to their faith while most brands of radical pietism unequivocally deemed any other confession but their own to be not only unchristian or unchristlike but also eternal-

ly damned. In fact there were numerous groups of pietists who considered each other unsaved because of small variations in the style of immersion during baptism, etc. Where the inquisition could be regarded as a form of physical intolerance or 'terror' the more modern confessions such as pietism sometimes instituted a form of spiritual intolerance or "terror". It is tragic when one considers all the heartaches, sorrows, and grief which such intolerance among Christians brought upon the human race during the 19th century. Especially when other Christian confessions could have avoided such tragedy by adopting the three fundamental evangelical teachings referred to by Klaas Reimer.

In a similar vein Klaas Reimer reflects with respect to the life and teaching of Aeltester Jakob Fast who died in 1821. Here was a man who had had every opportunity to propound the teachings of evangelical Christianity in his Gemeinde. Instead he had turned to mysticism and spiritualism. Every effort was seemingly made to misinterpret and misconstrue the teachings of Christ so that some way could be devised by which a believer need not seek to be Christ-like in order to be a Christian. For some of the Molotschna Mennonites such as Jakob Fast the fanciful and mystical teachings of a 'future thousand year reign' represented such a device. Klaas Reimer explains the tragedy of the situation.

"In this time Aeltester Jakob Fast came to the end of life's journey and was called from this earth. Aeltester Wedel was present at the time of his death. Later when I inquired of him, he replied that Fast had calmly and peacefully fallen asleep. O, what a horror! For it seems that a person who is worldly minded can be inspired to reflection far easier than someone who has fallen into a false holiness. This is also clearly evident in the case of King David and the Manassites and may also be observed in the scribes and pharisees. Notwithstanding that the matter was clearly to be understood from the prophets and that they were able to witness the fullness of God in front of their very own eyes, they did not accept the truth because of their empty selfish vanity. In their own self-righteous holiness they preferred to believe that Christ would raise up an earthly kingdom for them. The situation is still the same even today. Through such beliefs it is impossible that they will be regenerated unto penitence. O God, how terrible it is that Satan has been loosed and is now free to mislead as an angel of light. For I believe that he wields power over those whose spiritual eyes have been darkened and who are no longer able to see the Sun of Righteousness."

One of the most tragic results of the inroads of pietism in the Molotschna was the division of the Grosze Gemeinde in 1824. Although many in the Grosze Gemeinde were no longer practicing the teachings of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith they were still not prepared to adopt a foreign faith to replace the teachings which they had abandoned. Thus when the proponents of pietism became too assertive in the propagation of their faith a rift developed which was to poison and to be the root of consequent struggle, disputation and strife in the Molotschna for the next fifty years. We again turn to the account of Klaas Reimer for an explanation of these events.

"Both Aeltesten Goerz and Wedel preached very earnestly and at great length. Yes, they spoke much about love and peace. They even taught against the strictness of the Gebiet-samt so that the 'Profunct' was broken down. In the meantime Bernhard Fast in Halbstaedt became Aeltester. All the Aeltesten and ministers then held a general assembly at the place of Jakob Dueck in Orloff where all of them together achieved a tremendous unity and peace. The news of these events was even sent to Prussia from where an appropriate greeting of peace was written in reply. In their mind everything was marching forward with great might to usher in the thousand year reign on earth. Everyone was so caught up in this spirit, the nonresistant as well as the sword Christians (war waging Christians), so that no one could have helped them to reject the same. They were like the ancient Egyptians in their darkness."

"All this occurred in the year 1820. And then certain books were received as a gift from the Committee (Bible Society) in Petersburg. These books stated how peaceable and abundantly loving it was that they from one land had a concern for the other, and of the earnest hunger which the Kalmukan, as well as heathen the world over, had to have the gospel printed in their own language: How the heathen had gathered together in their eagerness to determine what was required of them by the gospel just as Christ had spoken that it would be a witness over them. Unfortunately through this the false spirit had also sent his truant messengers throughout the entire world where they could preach that Christ would now come and be here and reign with them for a thousand years.

"They also preached that all gifts and writings were to be directed to Petersburg. For this purpose Peter Wedel in Alexanderwohl became the President and everyone, whether leader or member, was to forward their gifts of money to him and he in turn was to send it away to Petersburg. After all of this had been instituted we were once again invited to the place of Jakob Dueck in Orloff where all the Aeltesten and ministers were present. Here they demonstrated much love to us and especially to me. At one point after lengthy

discussion, I said to Franz Goerz that the 'apostles teach so and so'. Then he said to me, 'if the apostles were alive and here today they would teach differently than what they had taught'. Consequently we left and they were ready to report to St. Petersburg that everyone was 'now united, except for us few'."

It seemed as if a great unity would now be achieved for even the reactionary cultural forces in the Grosze Gemeinde had apparently been persuaded to partake in these endeavours and to look favourably upon these millennial teachings. In the end the millenium proponents were to be denied the fruits of such a victory for Wedel and Goerz had moved far too quickly and had gone much too far. Suddenly a terrible backlash developed among the reactionary forces in the Grosze Gemeinde who now realized that under the guise of unity and peace they had been sold out to an alien faith. The spell was broken. The cultural conservatives in the Grosze Gemeinde were again able to exert their authority over the majority of their group. It was perceived that the officials of the Bible Society in St. Petersburg were living in open immorality and ostentatiousness. By adopting the military style titles of the Bible Society Wedel was indicating that this was also the true essence of his great unity and revival. i.e. A war-waging kingdom of worldlings. The engagement of a pietist school teacher for the secondary school which had been established in Orloff the centre of the revival, as well as the partaking in communion by a Moravian (pietist), all added to the sudden unease of the Grosze Gemeinde majority. Aeltester Klaas Reimer explains.

"However, before this (unity) occurred God sent a spirit of disunity among the united people so that they were instantaneously torn asunder. The leaders then beset my brother-in-law Johan Friesen, of Rosenort, at great length. Friesen was the senior minister among the group which had broken away. But the right goal also remained distant to this group as their grounds was that they did not want to have the officials of the Bible Society from among them. The promoters of the Society now addressed themselves to my brother-in-law to such an extreme that they came to him during the night and confronted him after he and his wife had retired for the night and tried to persuade him to remain steadfast together with them. By virtue of these tactics Friesen became very sick on account of which he became dizzy. This condition has also remained to an extent. The proponents of the Bible Society then constituted themselves as a Gemeinde, and then gathered together a sum of money to be sent to St. Petersburg for which they also accepted the honour for themselves."

The pious efforts of Aeltesten Peter Wedel, Franz Goerz and Bernhard Fast to institute the teaching that a peaceful millenium of Christ could be ushered into force through socio-economic reform and a disembodied inward piety had been thwarted. Regrettably their sincere though misguided efforts had resulted in the most tragic ecclesiastical event to befall the Molotschna Mennonites. Namely the further division of the Molotschna Flemish Gemeinde into the culturally orthodox Grosze or 'pure' Flemish Gemeinde and the progressive 'pietistical' Orloff Gemeinde. As a result of the all out pietist effort to convert their 'brethren' the latent and smoldering religious tension in the Molotschna was brought to light and fanned into a raging fire. The opposing forces were now separated and regrouped as two opposing Gemeinden who would automatically contest any issue which arose during the decades ahead. The resulting storms and battles would not be quelled until a milder, more subdued cultural pietist Mennonitism would gain control in the Molotschna in the final quarter of the 19th century.

### **11.06. Prisoners and Piety, 1821.**

One of the serious differences between the reform leaders and Aeltester Jakob Enns of the Grosze Gemeinde was the physical punishment and imprisonment of wrongdoers. This was not a matter where there was room for compromise on the part of the reformers. In the view of the reformers the Biblical teaching of nonresistance was simple. The only force which could be used against anyone no matter how evil was the force of love. If the offender also happened to be a member of the Gemeinde then they were obligated by the teachings of the Holy Scripture to exercise the discipline of love against the same. i.e. First loving admonishments by individuals and then by a group were to be extended. When all else failed the Gemeinde was obligated to complete this discipline of love by excommunicating the offender who demonstrated by his actions that he had already separated himself from the love of God.

The countering theology of Aeltester Jakob Enns and many of the Molotschna Mennonites was tragically summarized by the boast of the minister Jacob Huebert that he had beat his servant in order to improve his behaviour. This action symbolized the class consciousness and elitest attitudes of some Russian Mennonites prior to 1914. Indeed Aeltester Enns found the use of police power to be an expedient and convenient instrument to use in taking care of his enemies in the Grosze Gemeinde as well as in other groups such as the Kleine Gemeinde. It seemed as if Russian Mennonite leaders

such as Jacob Enns and Bernhard Fast believed that evil could be subdued through the application of such a "Calvinistic social gospel".

In 1815 this philosophy that it was in order to punish and imprison offenders in the spiritual as well as temporal realm was institutionalized by the construction of a "profunck" or prison in the Gebietsamt in Halbstaedt. Aeltester Klaas Reimer explains that in the same year Aeltester Enns issued and promulgated a decree stating that drunkards and revelers would be punished with forced labour and fines. Regrettably this was to become a common method of persuasion among the Molotschna Mennonites. Aeltester Reimer also pointed out the irony that this was the way in which the "new improved breed" of Mennonites would induce evil doers to do good. Presumably these puritanical measures were part of the legislative program which was to usher in the post-millennial reign of Christ. How pitiful this situation must have appeared to the Anabaptist-Mennonites. With the hindsight of history the reader will no doubt have trouble understanding the events and causes which led to such a fall. Here is the lamentable picture of peace loving Mennonites beating and disciplining each other and mistreating their servants.

An incident from 1821 will illustrate the tragedy of the situation. In his **Sammlung . . . zur Historie der Kleine Gemeinde der Mennoniten**, Aeltester Peter Toews has included numerous documents written by Abraham Friesen (1782-1849). Friesen was a deacon of the progressive Orloff group in the Grosze Flemish Gemeinde who had joined the Kleine Gemeinde in 1818 and who was elected as a minister of the reform group in 1823. In 1837 he became the second Aeltester of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. A great deal more will be said of Aeltester Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) in subsequent chapters.

Two of the letters written by Abraham Friesen deal with a certain Franz Thiessen and his daughter Anna who had been arrested and imprisoned because of the crime of incest which they had committed. The ministers of the Grosze Flemish Gemeinde had filed charges against the two with the government authorities. Consequently the two were delivered into imprisonment by their former fellow brethren with the approval of the ministerial, and at the command of the Gebietsamt. Thiessen and his daughter were confined in the prison at Oracchow. The reader can well imagine that the conditions of imprisonment during this period in Russia were not very favourable. In a letter of 1820, Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) had already mentioned how sad it made him to see a certain Thiessen kept in chains. Aeltester Peter Toews has noted that he concludes from this that Thiessen was being held in bondage in jail from one year to the next. Here they languished and starved in their cold, lice-infested cell.

Although the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde itself was still suffering from the oppression of the Grosze Gemeinde it could not endure to perceive such suffering. In 1821, Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) wrote a petition to Bernhard Fast who had become the Aeltester of the Grosze Flemish Gemeinde in 1817. Aeltester Fast has been lauded as a great Russian Mennonite leader apparently on the basis that he was one of the first influential church leaders to openly promote the teachings of pietism among his parishioners. However, the incident of Franz Thiessen and his daughter reveals that when it came to sensitivity and compassion for his fellow men, Aeltester Fast was still of the same mold and species as his predecessor Aeltester Jakob Enns. In this letter dated October 23, 1821, Abraham Friesen earnestly and humbly pleads with Aeltester Bernhard Fast and his ministerial to show some Christian compassion for these suffering and afflicted humans. He points out that the grace of Christ was also sufficient for Thiessen and his daughter no matter how grievous their sins may have been. The letter of Abraham Friesen speaks for itself in outlining the tragic situation:

"Beloved ministers:

"Do allow me to address myself to you by this letter in order that I may make supplication on behalf of Franz Thiessen and his daughter who must languish in prison in Oracchow. One of my co-workers has encouraged me to take up the cause on behalf of their release. Therefore sympathy for the plight of the condemned ones has moved me to venture a few words on their behalf in the hope that these words might somewhere find a favourable hearing. I bid you: That you do consider the lamentable circumstances regarding the body and the soul in which these two find themselves.

"For behold! Are these not truly the lost sheep which the Saviour has commanded us to seek in Luke chapter 15? Or do you believe that imprisonment is what the Saviour means by seeking for his own? Indeed no! For this seeking through imprisonment and the punishment of the physical body is of the spirit of these times which has its work in the children of unbelief. As these people are forced to languish there in confinement and to endure your judgement (punishment) completely divorced from all compassion, my conscience will not be still within me. Accordingly, I am compelled to plead on their behalf. Would it not be possible that they could once more be freed from their imprisonment and thereby



also from the impending punishment. After all the commandment to stone has been revoked by the beloved Saviour. John 8. Although this form of adultery is not as common place as the other, it is nonetheless my view that we have no commandment from the word of the Lord to punish in any way other than excommunication and avoidance.

"How then can such a one be delivered over to the authorities apparently in order for them to be eradicated from the earth? For the Lord Jesus wants to forgive all the sins of mankind other than the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Matthew 12:31. And how can we deal so harshly with our fellow man? As if we ourselves are without sin? Oh that while there is still time we might pay heed to what has been said to us. That we shall be dealt with in the same way we have treated others. And that we should not judge in order that we ourselves, would not be judged.

"But as this punishment is being continued for such an extended period, I pray that through the forbearance of God, matters could be disposed in such a way that at least someone of you would pay heed to their plight. Therefore I bid you, beloved ministers! For the sake of the love of Jesus do allow yourselves to be moved. For behold! He has given His own life for the sinner, and allowed Himself to be martyred even though He Himself was without sin. Yet we ourselves are so headstrong that we so to speak, trottle and choke our fellow servant who in fact does not owe us anything. Alas, for the wicked servant was thrown unto the most severe tormentors until he too had paid all that was due. And how much more are all of us not indebted in this case?

"Therefore beloved ministers, I have no doubts but that you could once more lead these people out of their confinement as you were able to find means to imprison them in the first place: I understand this judgment first had to be subscribed to by yourselves. Therefore I also plead that you deal compassionately with these people whose plight is worthy of lamentation.

"Behold! The most High is kind even unto the unthankful and to the evil. Luke 6:35. Therefore do also be compassionate as also your Father is compassionate and allow them to experience the acceptable message that the Saviour has come to preach deliverance to the captives and that they are to be set at liberty. Luke 4. That they might thereby receive the freedom of choice which God has bestowed on mankind from the beginning. He hath set fire and water before them, in order that they may stretch forth their hand unto whichever they will. According to Sirach 15:16".

"Orloff, on October 23, 1821."<sup>13</sup>

"A.F."

One must pause here to reflect that this sincere plea and admonition by Abraham Friesen must have required a great deal of courage and conviction on his part. For if possible Aeltester Bernhard Fast would have wanted to see many of his Kleine Gemeinde brethren in the same situation as Franz Thiessen. Fortunately the Russian government demonstrated more compassion than Aeltester Fast, for they never allowed the persecution against the Kleine Gemeinde or any other Anabaptist-Mennonite group to go to such lengths.

Aeltester Bernhard Fast was seemingly unmoved by the earnest and compassionate supplication by Abraham Friesen. Thiessen and his daughter continued to suffer in their cold and miserable dungeon. Shortly after the above letter to Fast the matter took an even more tragic turn when Franz Thiessen died in prison apparently because of the terrible conditions and mistreatment which he had endured. Franz Thiessen was now released from his suffering and was beyond the help of all human compassion.

However, the daughter Anna Thiessen, continued to languish in prison so that the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde now concentrated their efforts in an attempt to assist her. As no sympathy had revealed itself on the part of Bernhard Fast of the Grosze Flemish Gemeinde, the Kleine Gemeinde now directed their efforts to the Mennonite secular authorities. In the days of Klaas Wiens the Oberschulz had come to their aid. The Russian government authorities were also anxious to free the daughter from her imprisonment.<sup>14</sup> It appears that they could not do so without the approval from either the Grosze Gemeinde leadership in the Molotschna or that of the Gebietsamt (Mennonite district authorities), who would usually act at the request of the Grosze Gemeinde, and later at the request of the Kirchen-Convent. In desperation the Kleine Gemeinde decided to direct a petition to the members of the Molotschna Mennonite District assembly in the hope that a spark of compassion might be present in that body. Here follows the text of this second petition dated December 27th, 1821:

"To the members of the Gebiets Assembly of this Colony:

"I cannot do otherwise but to address you once more. Without a doubt you will have read my letter to Bernhard Fast in Halbstaedt. From his letter you will already be familiar with my concerns. As I have understood from Johan Friesen in Rosenort, it seems that my supplication to the ministerial has been completely in vain. For they do not wish to demonstrate compassion to their fellow man, namely Franz Thiessen and rather have allowed his blood to come upon their conscience. O what a sorrowful situation!

"But the daughter continues to languish in prison. Earlier I understood that you in-

tended to release her and had experienced a heartfelt joy at the hearing of this news. Unfortunately, I have received such lamentable information in this regard today. Not a single one of you has personally travelled to visit her. From this it is evident that there is no earnestness among you to obtain her release. I have taken the liberty to place her plight before your eyes, as it seemed to me that like Belial you were unable to see.

"Therefore I request that you consider these words from Matthew 22:37-39: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and your neighbour as yourself. And in John Chapter 14, Jesus says, 'He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me.' Now I will allow you to judge for yourselves as to whether you have kept the commandment of the Lord in this matter. For at that time you not only walked right past the people who had fallen among the murderers of the soul, but actually personally delivered them into their imprisonment. Tell me, where has the love of God or to your neighbour been present in this case.

"Through the people of Blumstein I have already perceived that Anna, the sinner, is almost overcome in her terrible misery. On the one hand because of her heartfelt remorse over her past sin and on the other hand she languishes away because of starvation and lack of clothing. In addition she has been terribly savaged by the lice. Yes, so that she is weeping night and day and has no hope of any compassion.

"Oh how can you continue to be so loveless towards your fellowman. She is also only flesh and blood just like you. In the evening you peacefully proceed to recline in your beds in your homes with your own, but she must go to sleep on the cold floor and is separated from all her blood relations; And she has no one with whom she can talk during her sleepless nights, of which she no doubt has many. Nor does she have anyone to give her comfort. In the morning you arise and dress in clean and elegant clothes. Some of you attire yourselves expensively and live a glorious life and in peace like the rich man. Luke 16.

"But by comparison this woman must lie outside together with the poor Lazarus and has had her body afflicted by the insects. O beloved! How do you honestly feel about this? Where is the fulfillment of the commandment 'Love your neighbor as yourself'?"

"Ah, if only I knew the words with which to articulate this plea in order that I might be able to move your hearts to compassion, I would gladly do so from my heart. For great concern must be expressed here for those who take people into arrest that they themselves do not simultaneously lead their own souls into that eternal imprisonment. Revelations 13.

"O! A dangerous matter! Consider this well!"

"Orloff the 27th December 1821"

"A. Friesen"<sup>15</sup>

It appears that the "progressive and liberal" spirit of Aeltester Bernhard Fast was in strict control of the Molotschna Colony at this time. The impassioned plea of Rev. Abraham Friesen of the Kleine Gemeinde that Anna Thiessen be released from her torment was disregarded. In the **Sammlung . . . zur Historie der Kleinen Gemeinde**, Aeltester Peter Toews has noted that even the authorities were very reluctant to follow the wishes of Aeltester Bernhard Fast in this matter. Lamentably the said Anna Thiessen was not released. Instead she was banished to Siberia where she still languished some eight years later. In 1829 Anna Thiessen managed to have a letter reach the members of the Kleine Gemeinde in the Molotschna Colony in which she inquired about her inheritance and also pleaded that she would not be completely forsaken.<sup>16</sup> The incident of Franz Thiessen and his daughter Anna is one of the more regrettable chapters in the story of the Russian Mennonites.

### 11.07 Another Assault, 1824.

Section 11.05 considered the efforts of the pietist Mennonites to institute a post millennial earthly reign of Christ in the Molotschna. This evangelization effort created a tremendous backlash in the Gemeinde of Aeltester Bernhard Fast as a result of which three-quarters of his Grosze Gemeinde withdrew from his church. This dissident faction then reconstituted itself as a new "pure" Flemish or Grosze Gemeinde under the leadership of Aeltester Jakob Warkentin. But no sooner was the tragic separation completed when the two factions commenced to do battle with each other.

Aeltester Warkentin now insisted that his Gemeinde have the sole and exclusive use of the church building in Petershagen and that none of the ministers or song leaders or the Orloff Gemeinde were to appear in the same. Aeltester Bernhard Fast felt that he could not consent to such an exclusive appropriation of this church as it had been constructed by the colony at large. This was the commencement of the protracted battle over the Petershagen church. As was to become common, the parties eventually appealed to the Russian authorities who decided that the church indeed belonged to everyone and therefore could not be claimed exclusively by one group.<sup>17</sup> Klaas Reimer explains:

"After this (the division of 1824) had settled down, they (the reconstituted Grosze Gemeinde) elected an Aeltester for themselves. Namely, Jakob Warkentin from Altonau. After this had been accomplished they started to dispute with the Gemeinde of Aeltester

Bernhard Fast over the old stone churches. Aeltester Fast wanted to rotate the Worship Services. Aeltester Warkentin and his flock insisted that no one other than they should be able to attend. Eventually the strife was brought before the Kommettaet (Supervisory Committee) in Odessa, from where Aeltester Warkentin received a sharp reprimand. He and his supporters were being disputative and became enemies of the members of Bernhard Fast totally without any grounds from the Holy Scriptures."

Aeltester Jakob Warkentin was soundly defeated in this battle for the Petershagen church building. As a result the anger of the Grosze Gemeinde was again directed solely at the far more vulnerable Kleine Gemeinde. The small flock continued to attract the enmity of the Grosze Gemeinde group by its steadfast stand for the separation of church and state. The members of the Kleine Gemeinde refused to take part in the capture of criminals, arresting offenders and the guarding and transporting of prisoners. All of these things were legally required of the residents of the Molotschna colony.

The Kleine Gemeinde intervention on behalf of Anna Thiessen and others like her who had been oppressed and downtrodden by the Grosze Gemeinde and Gebietsamt added to this displeasure. It seems that after his defeat, Aeltester Jakob Warkentin directed his attention towards the Kleine Gemeinde in an all out effort to eradicate the group. A serious charge was filed against the Kleine Gemeinde with General Insov, head of the Supervisory Committee in Odessa. For a while it appeared that the entire Kleine Gemeinde might be on their way to Siberia to join the banished Anna Thiessen. Klaas Reimer explains:

"The fury of the beast was great. At the same time that they so legalistically fought against the word of God, they were altogether angry at those who were still remaining like 'the cottage in the vineyard'. Isaiah 1. Their own actions punished their conscience far too much and therefore they were unable to allow their revenge against us to remain at rest. Instead they lodged a severe charge against us few with General Insov in Odessa. I was sternly ordered to appear before the Gebietsamt because I was to assist in apprehending thieves and if I would not do so I was to be sent away. I replied to this by referring to the Holy Scripture, but they continued to insist on banishment. Then I said to them, 'I have covenanted on my knees before God and the Gemeinde that I would not take revenge against anyone and before I will do so, I prefer to be satisfied with that which God and the Czar would do with me.'

"Then we suddenly had to proceed. Indeed, I was very severely accused in the presence of the Oberschulz. I also understood from the general that Aeltester Goerz had made a very serious accusation to him about us, that we were to partake in the arresting and transporting of prisoners. Our small flock was now summoned to appear before the Gebietsamt every eight days where we were again questioned whether we wished to concede. The Oberschulz had prepared a written complaint which he would forward to the General if we would not submit. (The Oberschulz at this time was Johann Klassen who founded the textile factory in Halbstaedt). After this the Society became somewhat calmer regarding us. But there was no danger of yielding on my part for what God established and maintains no one will tear asunder. God hath ordained that in the Mennonite world the situation shall be as we read in Zechariah 13.<sup>55</sup>"

Another onslaught against the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde had been overcome. A similar attempt to do away with the reform group in 1812 had also failed. In both cases a bitter attack was made by someone in a high position in the Mennonite world and in both cases the Russian authorities refused to be deceived by these strategies. But this did not mean that efforts to embarrass and malign the Kleine Gemeinde would thereby come to an end. Aeltester Klaas Reimer explains one such incident which must have occurred in about 1834.

"For then Aeltester Jakob Warkentin became more and more provoked against us because according to their practice we were exercising the ban too soon. When the offenders then wanted to go over to them they did not know what to do for in accordance with all previously established precedents they were obligated to recognize us as a Gemeinde. They now recognized my baptism as valid. But they refused to accept our discipline as valid as this offended their conscience. Since they did not want to practice the spiritual discipline they became angry at us because they realized that they created a great disorder when they so readily accepted those whom we had punished.

"Consequently Aeltester Warkentin summoned the other Aeltesten and all of them came to see me. Namely, Aeltester Ratzlaff, Wedel, Lange, Fast and Warkentin. For a little while they talked to us about excommunication. Then they said to me that they were unable to recognize me as an Aeltester because I had never been ordained by another Aeltester. Warkentin was very angry and indignant that we had been so negligent and indignantly started to speak about the newly published Menno Simons books. With great zeal he stated that he had never yet had a copy in his hand and that he would also see to it that he would never take one. His excuse was that the book had not first been processed through the

ensor. This was not really the reason for when the books had first been published the Aeltesten in Prussia had summoned the publisher Peter von Riesen and commanded him that the Menno Simons books were to be gathered together and deposited with one of the Aeltesten. Peter von Riesen and the printer then took the original copy of the Menno Simons book to the censor where they were given permission to publish the same. From this it could be seen that the books punished their conscience too much and made their desolation manifest to their own brethren.

“Since they were unable to determine the matter the Aeltesten in Prussia became united that they would quickly prepare and publish another Confession of Faith which is very foreign to me. This occurred in 1836. I read this publication from which a great freedom was evident and a destruction of the writings of nonresistant Christianity. In the introduction they write as follows: ‘The writings of the nonresistant Christians are founded on the word of God and are to serve for the instruction of the youth’, and then follows a pregnant dash. The article regarding the Godhead has been divided into many parts and many words stand out like Lucifer. In Article Two they declare the writings of the forefathers to be insignificant and frivolous no matter how correct they might be. In the Tenth Article they console the Brethren that they should not become disheartened because of evil since evil and good must be found among the other until the end of time. For this they take the example of the five foolish and five wise virgins. In the Eighteenth Article they write with respect to excommunication, but with particular reference to those who are also regarded as harmful and punishable by the Government. They state that such a person must be separated from the Gemeinde without further ado.

“Aeltester Jakob Warkentin was very ill disposed towards us, partially because the Menno Simons book had been taken to Prussia from here for publication, and partially because we were too strict in the exercise of discipline. He then made a trip to the Old Colony where he discussed this with Aeltester Jakob Dueck. They reached agreement that they would forbid me the regulation in our Gemeinde. Warkentin then returned to the Molotschna and again called all the Aeltesten together where the deacon Gerhard Enns had also been present. Here Warkentin presented his decision to the gathering. Enns then spoke out saying that ‘you will not be able to achieve anything against them nor will I approve of this.’ This has been related to me.

“Now I must declare with all thankfulness, honour and supplication, ‘The Lord has graciously and compassionately stood by me and helped me until now. He has cast my misdeeds behind him and has helped me in all my trouble. Yes, he hath torn away all the snares and bonds which were laid before me and disposed of them which I only realized later’. Indeed His grace to me as sinner has been all abundant.

“So many thousands of our forefathers were judged so harshly. Through the power of God they were able to overcome it all and now they rest in peace under the altar where no torment can disturb them. The poet says: ‘Je Schwereu nur der Krieg, Je herrlicher der Sieg. Der Streit geht vor dem Kronn, Die Christus zugeachtet, Denn der den Lauf vollbracht, Zum ewgen Gnadenlohn’. How blessed for those who will conquer.”

Ever since the ordination of Klaas Reimer in 1816 the Kleine Gemeinde had faced an external struggle for its very existence. In the view of Klaas Reimer the position of his small flock was secure as long as they remained true to the evangelical teachings of nonresistant Christianity.

### **11.08 The Humility Movement, 1819.**

During all this time the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde also experienced an internal struggle as they sought to reinstate the principles of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. The most serious battle within the Kleine Gemeinde was the false humility movement in about 1819. Klaas Reimer traces the historical background which led to this challenge to the faith:

“Let us refer back for a moment and briefly consider our Gemeinde and how zealous Satan has been to cast it to the ground. Since he had been unable to tear us all away from the hand of God by frightening us, he now sought to deceive us through another means. When God wanted to separate us few from the spiritual fellowship of the others he had also used powerful means. In 1813 when the communion was being held in Orloff Jakob Enns had a quarrel with David Huebert. Enns then conducted the communion without having further discussed the matter with Huebert. Communion service was to be held here in Petershagen the following Sunday. That Saturday we traveled to Huebert’s place and enquired about the matter. He informed us that Enns had deeply offended him. Consequently we refrained from attending the communion service and also from the church. We few then conducted worship services alternating between here (Petershagen) and Muensterburg. In 1816 God ordained us as a Gemeinde even though we were only too few who had remained steadfast until then. Some 18 or 20 brethren.

“After God had constituted us as a Gemeinde he commenced to purify us from the practices of the worldly minded Babel. My co-worker Cornelius Janzen who had faithfully stood by my side until then became proud and spiteful. God had chosen my brother-in-law

Abraham Friesen in Orloff in his place who came to help me and to purify our house somewhat. After the wife of Cornelius Janzen died he married another whom he clothed according to the latest fashions. Abraham Friesen and I did not want this but then Janzen became proud, arrogant and defiant. My brother-in-law and myself wanted to maintain a disposition of humility whereupon he and Jakob Friesen from Muensterburg and a few more went over to the others.

“When God wanted to chastise my former co-worker Cornelius Janzen and his shame, he allowed him to fall into pride. He started to preach among the others freely without a prepared text. After they accepted him again as their minister God made manifest his disgrace. He convicted the young woman with whom Janzen had forcibly committed his shame on the open steppes giving her no peace of conscience. Instead she came to him during the night from a distance to discuss the matter with him. It was during the harvest. Janzen was very casual regarding the entire affair and simply advised her that he had committed the matter to God and that she should do likewise. This was related to my brother-in-law Dueck (neighbour Johan Dueck) but they had decided to remain silent since Janzen no longer belonged to our Gemeinde. Thus it remained until spring when Dueck could no longer carry this burden within himself. He related it to me and I in turn told my brother-in-law Johan Friesen in Rosenort. They (the Grosze Gemeinde) then removed him from his office as minister as they did not know what else they could do. Later they also placed him under the ban for three or four days.

“This (secession of Cornelius Janzen, Jakob Friesen and others of the Grosze Gemeinde) almost finished the rest of us but it was not yet the will of God. Rather he awoke one and another here and there and led them to join us. Now Satan realized that he was unable to lead us to the others through erring ministers and also that he was unable to turn us completely away from God through the confusion of Babel. For as our numbers increased a false spirit came in among us as an angel of light and became our true fellow brother. This occurred in the manner of which Menno Simons says that the angel of light locates himself in the midst of the saints so that he partook of communion with them and washed the feet of the saints and was an earnest and productive spirit in all his deeds.

“For Satan seeks those who in their innocence earnestly wish to live in accordance with the Word of God. Because Satan had been unable to persuade us to allow ourselves to be delivered over the freedoms of this world he now came among us with the spirit of the holiness of the pharisees. This spirit was even more terrible than the first. For if God would not have worked among us with mighty power we would have fallen even deeper for we were still in the confusion of Babel through which Satan has conquered almost all the nonresistant Christians. But God works in wondrous ways making obvious the foolishness of the evil spirits. But this only for each in his own time”.

The evil angel of light in this case was a group in the growing Kleine Gemeinde which had fallen upon an erroneous teaching, namely, an over emphasis on the scriptural teachings of humility and fear. In effect this was a form of reverse pietism and no doubt developed in reaction to the teachings of the various pietist groups in the Molotschna at the time. Certain forms of pietism laid almost complete emphasis on inward peace and joy and ignored the other elements of scriptural piety. In contrast the humility movement in the Kleine Gemeinde went to the opposite extreme placing its central focus on fear and humility. Klaas Reimer explains:

“After this Satan also came among us with many terrible sanctimonious matters through his servants: Bernhard Rempel of Muntau; Klaas Friesen of Lindenau; Heinrich Wiebe of Orloff; and Martin Warkentin of Blumstein. These carried out ostentatious displays of devotion to God. Rempel presented lengthy prayers which he had composed in advance and frequently he lay<sup>18</sup> (poorly clad) for lengthy periods in the streets and ditches at home as well in other villages. In so doing he prayed very loudly and whimpered. When they were unable to cry during their prayers for a meal they would leave the table without eating. They ate poor food and in addition they often went hungry. Through all this his brother Johan Rempel lost his life principally because of the cold.

“Klaas Friesen believed that we should be very simple and distinguishable from the others. Likewise with our clothes. Also that we should have no secular association with those who were outside of us, that we should serve no public office, and carry no letter for the Gebietsamt. We should sell all our possessions and divide them among us. Wiebe from Orloff agreed with Friesen and Rempel in certain points. He was also too fond of other women on account of which he was removed from his (ministerial) office.

“Martin Warkentin became sick and after he had recovered his health he said that a spirit had shown him that the world would perish that very same summer. He spoke powerfully from the Holy Scripture through which many people were filled with fear and terror. Warkentin also announced the day which is contrary to the Word of God. For Jesus says that the hour and the day is not known by anyone, not even the angels. If there is even one exposition among many words which is contrary to the word of God then it is not from God but rather from Satan. I do not think that I was zealous enough at the time.

Nor did I search earnestly enough in the Word of God and pray for perception, enlightenment and strength. I was too complacent and too weak in spiritual zeal to punish the evil spirit.”

It is worthwhile to compare humility pietism in the Kleine Gemeinde with the radical pietism in its extreme form as a disembodied inward piety. Radical pietism frequently indulged the sensual appetites of the individual by endorsing an expensive lifestyle, expensive homes and clothes, and over consumption in all aspects of life (at least for those who had the means). Humility pietism went to the other extreme where the proponents of this faith adopted an almost puritanical asceticism which was completely foreign to the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. i.e. Calvinistic asceticism for its own sake. The proponents of this humility pietism dressed and ate very poorly. They lay in ditches praying while they were poorly clad. The radical pietists required a legalistic demonstration of their joy and assurance of faith and presentations of long eloquent prayers in their churches or in public. In contrast the humility pietists recited prepared prayers very loudly in front of families and others but with the difference that their orientation was to show their supposedly Godly humility and fear. In addition where the pietist would like to shout and scream to express his inward joy the humility pietists would weep loudly and tearfully to show the opposite emotion.

The proponents of the humility movement had a somewhat unique philosophy. Some aspects of their teachings had a proper origin and basis in Anabaptist-Mennonite theology but this was not the fundamental spiritual inspiration of these beliefs. Eventually the true colours of the movement were revealed. Klaas Reimer explains the events which followed:

“Through the prophecy of Satan many were filled with terror and fright. Indeed, many were deceived through this pharisaical holiness. Warkentin talked so frightfully of that Last Day, how it would burn, crack and sizzle. It seemed as if he suddenly knew the complete Holy Scripture by memory which he expounded at great length. As the falseness among us was forcibly taking the upper hand, Wiebe came to me with a number of brethren and some others. They were very dishearted. Especially Heinrich Warkentin. He cried very pitifully but as I did not accept the prophecy he did not say anything to me in that regard. The following Sunday I travelled to Orloff for worship services. He was also there and after dinner many came together at the place of my brother-in-law Abraham Friesen. Martin Warkentin then started to speak about the last days and also from the holy scripture where Jesus spoke to the pharisees saying that all the sins of mankind would be forgiven, but that anyone who blasphemed the Holy Spirit would not be forgiven, not in this world nor the next.

“This was heard by the sister of Bernhard Rempel. The same spirit then said to her, ‘You are the one who has slandered the Holy Spirit’. She burnt all her vainglorious clothes and was filled with terror and fright. She came to our worship service after which she approached her brother Bernhard Rempel and they hugged each others hand and wept bitterly. Of course we comforted them. But this was not right of us and we should have punished her instead for her actions were not founded on the word of God. We should have admonished her and told her to submit her spirit to the punishment of light. They did not do so and consequently they remained confined in darkness. In so far as could be seen they did not respect the word of God as their fear originated with a false spirit. They were ashamed to confess their matter to God and the Gemeinde. They did not open their hearts before God humbly and without shame, and therefore their false spirit continued them in their pharisaical worship of God, so that they would not lose their honour among the people. Hosea 7, 6.”

The dooms-day theology of the humility movement was really nothing more than yet another form of radical millennialism similar to that which was adopted by Klaas Epp and his group who emigrated to central Asia in 1880<sup>19</sup>. This millennialism was also similar to that adopted by the Templer Mennonite Gemeinde during the 1860’s. The theology of both of these groups was based on the teachings of the eminent pietist Jung-Stilling. Both groups believed that by moving into the eastern part of the world (Jerusalem for the Templers) they could avoid the coming tribulation<sup>20</sup>. It now appeared that the proponents of the humility movement in the Kleine Gemeinde would be able to subvert the group by bringing in a form of premillennialism under the guise of the evangelical teachings of fear and humility. A terrible tribulation would come during which the true Christians would be persecuted after which Christ would come to gather his church into the bliss of the thousand year reign. Such a teaching must have sounded very foreign to Anabaptist-Mennonites such as Aeltester Klaas Reimer or Michael Makoski who knew from firsthand experience that those Christians who sought to follow the Lamb wherever he might lead did not have to wait for any certain or uncertain future time to experience the reign and Lordship of Christ in their hearts as well as persecution and tribulation for the strength of their convictions.

Klaas Reimer describes what a terrible effect this unscriptural speculation about the end times and on fear and humility had on some of the members of his small, but rapidly growing flock. He describes how the proponents of the humility movement convinced one of the women that she had committed the unpardonable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. As a result she burnt all her "vainglorious" clothes and was filled with terror and fright. It seems that the Kleine Gemeinde until this time had a complete aversion against the use of the ban. Klaas Reimer notes that one reason that the false humility movement became so established in the Kleine Gemeinde was that the evangelical discipline of love was not used against those who had fallen into such terrible spiritual delusions. Instead the Aeltester comforted those who had been seized in the clutches of *Seelen Angst* or "terror of the soul". Reimer later realized that instead he should have acted more forcefully in punishing those who were spreading such doctrinal heresy.

Aeltester Reimer then explains how he sought to bring this false movement under control by composing and presenting a sermon with a text based on John 13, 35 which states that, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another". In addition this sermon emphasized that all teaching must be founded on the word of God. Revelations 22, 18-19. Nor should anything be taught to be a matter of conscience for the members of the Gemeinde if it was not founded entirely on the scripture. i.e. The test of the correctness of a particular teaching was not whether it was the strictest possible interpretation as was the case with certain branches of the Calvinist confession. Rather the test was whether the teaching was Biblical which was sometimes directly contrary to that which was merely strict.

Reimer goes on to note that this sermon had a profound effect but not what he had prayed for. The proponents of the humility piety movement were already so strong that they now openly presented a counter sermon which had a text from Matthew chapter 12, verses 43-45. This dealt with the unclean spirit which should be swept from the House of the Lord. The reference to the unclean spirit was no doubt meant to refer to Reimer and those who were still standing steadfast in the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. In Reimer's own words the result was as follows:

"The phariseecal holiness then made great strides among us as has already been mentioned. Indeed we were like the sheep who have been dispersed by the wolf. I was opposed to much of this and prepared a sermon on a text from John 13, 35 and in my weakness I composed it to stress the necessity of love, principally to God. Also that we should neither add nor subtract from the word of God. Revelations 22, 18-19. Nor should we make anything a matter of conscience without a basis in the holy scripture. But I created a lamentable dissatisfaction among us with this sermon so that one brother said to me that he was nauseated when he thought of the ministers.

"Indeed how terrible. And this for the sake of the unrighteousness which was amongst us because of our blindness. For we also had a terrible aversion among us to the exercise of the ban which was comparable to the days of Joshua and Aaron. Yes, such adultery of which the heathen would undoubtedly have much to say. In such a situation it was impossible that God could grant us the victory over our enemies for such adultery was too terrible. Although the confusion was so great it would increase even more.

"In my great wretchedness I instituted a brotherhood meeting and then prepared a presentation. I expounded on the writings of Menno Simons, Peter Peters and a number of the martyrs and how they had viewed the life and walk of a true Christian. In my weakness I based the presentation on the teachings of the Lord and the apostles. While I was still speaking Heinrich Wiebe from Orloff who was also one of our ministers, seized his cap and said to me, 'that is false'. Then he made his exit and almost all of them left with him."

Matters with the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement in the Molotschna had fallen to a definite low point. One can hardly imagine what would have happened to the Russian Mennonites had the Kleine Gemeinde been subverted and turned to radical millenium teachings through this false humility pietism. No doubt apostasy from the faith of the fathers would have advanced quickly without the steadying influence of a Kleine Gemeinde securely anchored on the doctrines of the gospel. Would the Russian Mennonites then have completely rejected all evangelical teaching and have taken up the bearing of arms? Would they all have moved into central Asia together with Klaas Epp or to Jerusalem together with the Templers? Would the Kleine Gemeinde itself have fallen into the unashamed pursuit of wealth and culture? Of course this is sheer speculation as the pietist-humility movement in the end did not gain the upper hand in the Kleine Gemeinde. The proponents of these teachings now set up their own brotherhood meeting apparently with the intention that the brotherhood would impeach and reject Klaas Reimer at this meeting.

"Now it seemed as if we were completely finished had God not wonderfully worked among us. For God is the ruler of all destiny. I could never surrender to such a self-elected

holiness and if I would not surrender they would reject me. Now I often felt as if I myself should run away for I was completely without further counsel. However the help of God quickly accrues to those who submit themselves to him.

"The aforementioned Heinrich Wiebe now instituted a brotherhood meeting in Muntau. (Another transcription refers to the home of Peter Fast in Orloff as the place of this meeting). I was also summoned to be present. Here I had to remain outside until he had discussed the matter with the brethren according to his wishes. Then I had to come inside. He inquired of me whether I wanted to remain by the former teaching or not. I replied to this 'yes I gladly wanted to remain with the old.' He then instructed me that I was to ask of each and everyone whether they wanted me to continue as Aeltester in this case. This I did and they replied 'yes'. With this the entire matter was concluded.

"I now returned to my normal place before the brethren and spoke anew to them. Whereupon God performed mighty wonders among us. The foolish hearts were smitten so mightily that they were compelled to confess their great shame. And not only one amongst a great multitude as in the days of Joshua. Instead it was more than two or three among us few. Indeed Paul says 'of which the heathen know nothing to say'. And now God gave us the power to punish according to his Word.

"However, we were not completely able to root out the spirit of Achan from among us for he kept himself hidden. Matters are and remain as stated by Paul when he says, 'in a house there are vessels for honour and for dishonour'. Oh God, for how is the world to subsist for any period of time when this is so common among the nonresistant Christians and everything has become so obscure. God would also reveal these teachings to others if they really wanted to know. Although we few dearly desired to root out the false spirit of Achan it did not seem as if this was possible for Satan is very zealous. He realized that he had only little time left for God continued to purify us and wanted to extinguish the false spirit among us and this in accordance with his will.

"During this purification my brother-in-law became aware of the false holiness. Then I prepared a sermon with a text from Romans 12, 9-10, in respect to which Klaas Friesen in Lindenau told me that he was nauseated by me. The two of us then traveled together to see the brethren who had formerly been so very opposed to me and tried to persuade them. And when some perceived that Abraham Friesen was united with me they departed from us in their misguided faith. When we came to Blumstein and Martin Warkentin heard that Friesen was with me he bowed his head between his hands and sorrowfully went away."

With this the threat of humility pietism in the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde had been completely defeated. Through his resolute steadfastness and courage Klaas Reimer had saved his beloved Gemeinde from spiritual apostasy and the religious delusions of his time.

### 11.09 The Institution of Footwashing, 1829.

A living faith requires continual renewal and reinterpretation. Although the false humility movement was defeated, it would be more than a decade before the scriptural teaching of humility as symbolized in the ordinance of footwashing was rediscovered and instituted in the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. The ordinance of footwashing was based on the express command and example of Jesus who washed the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper (John 13, 1-17) and on the statement by Paul that to have washed the feet of saints was a qualification for the acceptance of a widow into the widow group of the church (1 Timothy 5, 9-10). The practice was accepted by the early Anabaptist-Mennonite leaders including Menno Simons, Pilgrim Marpeck, and others. It was Dirk Philips who in his *Enchiridion*<sup>21</sup> provided detailed instructions and teaching on the practice of footwashing as an ordinance of the Church of Christ. Footwashing was carried out by the brethren among each other in pairs and likewise the sisters. This ordinance was performed during the communion service.

Aeltester Klaas Reimer explains the institution of footwashing in the Kleine Gemeinde. This was an issue which dated back to 1826. In that year Peter von Riesen, the brother-in-law of Klaas Reimer and the oldest brother to Aeltester Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) had made his first journey to visit his brethren in Russia. At this time he was somewhat influenced by the teachings of pietism which had become popular in Prussia. Apparently he promoted a greater freedom of the world among his brethren in the Kleine Gemeinde at the time of this trip in 1826.

With the defeat of the false humility movement the Kleine Gemeinde had reacted against such ascetical strictness. But then God started to purify the Kleine Gemeinde as described in Zechariah chapter 13. In this passage reference is made to a cleansing of the house of Jerusalem and to a remnant which will be tried in the fire and refined like silver, "and they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say. It is my people: and they shall say. The Lord is my God". Klaas Reimer explains: "But more and more God directed us towards (evangelical) freedom and commenced to purify us. Then our brother-in-law Peter Friesen from Danzig came to us in 1826 and sought to lead



us towards the freedom and piety of the world. Through all of this God purified us as we read in the prophet Zechariah 13, so that we had to exercise discipline. By this cleansing God granted penitence unto forgiveness to some of us but others remained proud and departed from us. All the while Satan worked mightily and zealously among us seeking whom he might ensnare.”

A number of events in the short history of the Kleine Gemeinde had already demonstrated the crucial importance of evangelical humility. On the one extreme was the case of the false humility movement which had almost destroyed the Kleine Gemeinde. On the other extreme was the case of Cornelius Janzen who had been a faithful disciple and powerful worker in the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. Then he became proud and vain and fell into disgrace in a most lamentable manner. Through this purification God more and more directed the Kleine Gemeinde to the evangelical teaching of humility so that the extremes of false humility and pride could better be vanquished.

Humility is commanded by God. Proverbs 15:33; Acts 20:19; Colossians 3:12; James 4:6. Christian humility is gentleness in affliction, a grace whereby the believer honestly recognizes that in the sight of God he is without merit and that he is the least among the brethren. Biblical humility does not require undue self depreciation as found in Catholic monasticism or Calvinist puritanism. Depressing negative views of self have no basis in the Bible nor in Christian doctrine. In the words of one commentator the Biblical word humility is “about equivalent to meekness (Psalm 25:9) and is essential to discipleship (Matthew 18:3-4)”.<sup>22</sup> Meekness is that grace of the soul which accepts the dealings of God without resistance or struggle and is content to be disposed to His will. Matthew 11:29; James 1:21; Ephesians 4:2. Biblical meekness “is first a meekness with respect to God, is also such in the face of men, even of evil men, out of the thought that these, with the insults and injuries which they may inflict, are permitted and used by him for the chastening and purifying of his people”. One who is meek knows that he bears a sinner’s doom and “this will teach him to endure meekly the provocations with which they may provoke him. . . .”<sup>23</sup> Galations 6:1; 2 Timothy 2:25; Titus 3:2.

Such a humility consisted of a complete and absolute submission to the Savior as a priceless pearl in the hands of the Master. Such humility could only come about through a sincere and earnest discipleship of love. The Christian ordinance of washing the feet of the saints symbolized this teaching. Klaas Reimer explains how the decision to institute this Biblical ordinance was finally achieved.

“But through all of this God directed us more and more towards (evangelical) humility so that one after the other we became convinced that we were omitting to practice one very important law and commandment of Christ. Namely, the washing of feet which occurred in 1829. This practice was demonstrated to us as an example by our redeemer Jesus Christ in John 13 and is also very urgently commanded unto us four times. We studied the question and found that the matter in fact was as described in the writings of Aeltester Dirk Philips of Danzig. Namely, that the practice was discontinued when the hearts of believers became too filled with pride so that they were unable to humble themselves in accordance with the commandment of Christ. They were too ashamed and considered the practice unnecessary just as the world often considers the Godly wisdom for foolishness.”

A similar view was expressed by Aeltester David P. Reimer a great-grandson of Aeltester Klaas Reimer (1770-1837). Reflecting upon the development of various spiritual innovations during a much later period Aeltester David P. Reimer made the following poignant comments. “The more spiritual adjustments we make the more we seem to fall short of the insatiable appetite of progress. The matter may be compared to the manner in which earnest and singular men of God have written. Namely, that the more we institute that which is visible and certain the shallower we seem to become in our inward self. In his book *Die Danziger Mennoniten Geschichte* Dr. Mannhardt has written as follows ‘In the former times the hearts were of gold even though our communion goblets were only made of wood. But now when the communion goblets are made of gold it seems as if the hearts had become like wood’.”<sup>24</sup>

To the Anabaptist-Mennonites footwashing was the evangelical symbol of submission to the Lordship of Christ. By heeding the express command and example of the Savior the Kleine Gemeinde demonstrated and confessed that this submission included all aspects of their lives. This specifically included the full gospel teaching of sharing with the brethren and of serving unto the necessities of the saints. As a result of these considerations the Kleine Gemeinde instituted the ordinance of footwashing in 1829.

Needless to say the Kleine Gemeinde would never attain perfection in its desire to serve their Lord. Among many alternatives Christ had chosen to build his peaceful earthly kingdom with weak sinful mortals. Evangelical doctrine would provide direction in the advancement of this earthly realm but wickedness and sin would never be eliminated. This was certainly the case among the Anabaptist-

Mennonites and the Kleine Gemeinde was no exception. A constant battle had to be maintained so that the evil one did not attain the upper hand. In order to ensure that no one would idealize the Kleine Gemeinde Klaas Reimer describes an incident of this nature which occurred in his small flock.

"I will present something more. If one becomes too secure and unwatchful God sometimes allows us to fall in order that we shall pay heed to the false allure of Satan. This also happened to me, miserable sinner, in 1835. Through the enticement of others and his own curiosity my son had designed a new wagon. I must confess that I myself am also too much afflicted with a natural curiosity which is a hindrance to watching and praying. This wagon was powered by the motivation of the driver. Although this wagon would not have been for wealthy people it was nonetheless something new. Consequently a number of the brethren, including fellow ministers, were sorely grieved. This was not good in any event. Since it had caused offense we did not proceed and I made a humble presentation to the brethren which resolved the matter. Nevertheless the affair overall had given some persons bad thoughts about me.

"Then God instantaneously directed matters so that the great shame of Heinrich the son of Abraham Friesen was brought to light through my son who had wanted to construct the wagon. This occurred through a marriage which was to occur with the daughter of Sawatzky for he had slept with her. But when this was revealed it came to light that he had slept with two women and had taken one. When this became evident we ministers came together in order to discuss the matter. I then asked them whether they could perceive the wonderful leading of God. They now acknowledged everything and a great sorrow fell upon my brother-in-law Abraham Friesen. My beloved reader! Would that each and everyone would guard against judging too frivolously as had occurred among us so that some had become so proud and inflated that they no longer found room for penitence nor humility.

"This is exactly what happened here to my brother-in-law Sawatzky. We summoned his daughter before us two times and asked her whether or not she had consented to the shame. She replied 'yes'. But her father did not want her to acknowledge so much guilt and instead stated before all the brethren that his daughter was now supposed to be the scapegoat upon whom all the sin was to be cast. As a result he went away from us. We waited for some time for him to come back in order to confess that this was not so. When he did not do so we held a brotherhood meeting and he was separated from the Gemeinde.

"If she had said so it would not have been so noteworthy for the adultery to be protected in this manner by the father who otherwise allowed many misdeeds to be reported about him. For us it was something terrible for adultery to be defended in this way. As a result they were so provoked about us that there was no lack of insults and scorn. When someone is disciplined it frequently occurs that they are drawn into deep inward remorse together with the prodigal son. Here the grace and love of God is immediately present. But if a person becomes proud and arrogant and does not allow himself to be convicted by his conscience then everything is lost. And even if such a person in tears like Esau later seeks to find penitence he will not satisfy his quest. Instead his own honour will prevent him from humbly directing himself to the experience of grace. O God, for then everything is lost unto eternity.

"Therefore beloved reader, do not be proud. For whoever believes that he stands would do very well to pay heed lest he fall. And thus our brother-in-law earnestly opposed us which has given us much reason to look out for ourselves. And so we always have good reason to watch and pray for ourselves and also for our small flock for Satan seeks to draw away from God with many cunning deceptions."

The foregoing will illustrate the difficulties in the continual struggle to maintain an evangelical equilibrium in the teaching and practice of the Anabaptist-Mennonite Gemeinde. Obedience to the commandment of Christ to wash the feet of the saints provided a necessary focus for the preservation of such a balance.

### 11.10 The Evangelical Ban, 1832.

One of the great victories in the early theological development of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde was the realization of unity with respect to evangelical discipline. One of the important instruments of such discipline was excommunication. Excommunication was not merely founded in the natural right of every society to exclude those no longer sympathetic with its aims. Excommunication in the Christian church was instituted by Jesus Christ. Matthew 18:15-18. The apostle Paul added considerable clarification to the extent and nature of this ordinance which was a fundamental practice of the apostolic church. 2 Corinthians 1:23; 13:10; 1 Corinthians 5:11; 1 Timothy 1:20; Titus 3:10. The object of excommunication was to maintain the purity of the church and to bring about the penitent restoration of the offender.<sup>25</sup> The reinstatement of apostolic discipline was one of the first concerns of the infant Anabaptist-Mennonite movement.<sup>26</sup> The ordinance was endorsed by the Schleithem

Confession and all subsequent Anabaptist-Mennonite confessions of faith. The ordinance was taught and practiced by Menno Simons, Dirk Philips and all later Anabaptist-Mennonite leaders and theologians.

The ban has proven to be one of the most difficult teachings of Christ to apply in day to day practice. Differences of interpretation at times led to division and confusion regarding this teaching. Klaas Reimer has made reference to the fact that the Kleine Gemeinde originally had a terrible aversion to the exercise of the ban. No doubt this fear was inspired by the excessive use of the ban among some radical pietist groups in Germany and Russia who would viciously excommunicate and ban each other over minor technical differences in modes of conversion experience, eschatological expectations, dispensational beliefs, etc. Such measures were also carried to an extreme by certain branches of the Calvinist faith when they legislated "social gospel" programs in order to impose strict moral precepts upon everyone in their societies. Such concepts had also found foothold among the Molotschna Mennonites as is evident in the case of Anna Thiessen who was banished to Siberia without hope of forgiveness by Aeltester Bernhard Fast.

At the other extreme was Aeltester Jakob Enns who used the teachings of the ban and shunning as an instrument of church politics when he needed to rid himself of opponents in the Gemeinde or if he wanted to chastize them in order to institute his theological concepts or lack of the same. The use of the ban as an instrument of social terror against the leaders of the Kleine Gemeinde must have left them with a very negative view of this evangelical ordinance.

Consequently it is not surprising that there would be uncertainty in the Kleine Gemeinde over the use of the ban. But the near victory of the false humility forces brought home the realization that discipline was a proper evangelical ordinance instituted to be employed in the Church of Christ and that the Kleine Gemeinde had been in grievous error by not exercising the same. Many questions remained to be resolved. Under what circumstances and to what degree was discipline to be enforced? These uncertainties were particularly relevant when it came to the practice of the evangelical teaching of avoidance or shunning. Klaas Reimer explains the development of the matter and how the different viewpoints pertaining thereto were resolved.

"In 1832 brother-in-law Peter (von) Friesen came to us from Danzig for the second time. At this time it came to pass that Heinrich Warkentin of Blumstein was punished with the ban because of his disobedience. He then went over to (the Gemeinde of) Jacob Warkentin. My beloved brother-in-law Abraham Friesen then allowed himself to say that we should ban him (Heinrich Warkentin) for so long as he lived. When this became known to Jakob Warkentin he accepted Heinrich Warkentin into his Gemeinde without him even being present. For it seems as if this had angered Jakob Warkentin and his associates.

"Nor is the word of God to be understood in this way regarding the ban. Nor do Menno Simons and Peter Peters consider this to be the function of the ban. For according to their writings the exercise of the ban is to serve both the world and the punished one to the best. Therefore if they have accepted as a brother someone who has been placed under the ban I am unable to hold myself any more distant from such a one in eating, drinking, extending the hand of fellowship, than anyone of the others. Otherwise the ban would only serve the world as a great mockery and it is not the will of God that this be the case. This is how I understand Menno Simons and Peter Peters. Menno Simons writes that we must see spiritually in order to understand the scripture. At this time my beloved brother-in-law Abraham Friesen was interpreting the scripture too literally.

"In general I have far more reason to give heed to someone who has gone over to another Gemeinde and has been willing to be accepted as a brother there than for those who have not yet done so and do not intend to do so. But in order not to anger the others without clear scriptural grounds I cannot shun those who have been accepted as a brother in another Gemeinde anymore than the others in that Gemeinde. We must be careful not to awaken anger among them as there might still be some souls who could be led to seek God more earnestly.

"In so far as the ban is concerned I am far more responsible for the welfare of my flock than over those who have never been with us. And in my weakness I am convinced that we are to practice scriptural abasement regarding those who have been separated and to withhold fellowship in eating, drinking and extending the hand in order that they might be shamed and thereby directed penitently back to God and the Gemeinde. We are commanded to admonish such a one like a brother. But this only seldom has any application for those who have left us to join another Gemeinde."<sup>27</sup>

From the foregoing it is clear that Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) originally held a very literal interpretation with respect to the exercise of the evangelical ban. He appears to have shared in the common error that the strictist view is necessarily the most evangelical. According to Anabaptist-Mennonite hermeneutics this was certainly not necessarily the case. Considerable change occurred

in the views of Abraham Friesen over the next years. (See chapter fifteen and sixteen). It was only after considerable difficulty that the more balanced, Biblical interpretation of Klaas Reimer was accepted as the policy of the Kleine Gemeinde. Klaas Reimer explains.

"But what was to be done. The few of us were only too little inspired regarding the ban and separation. It appeared that brother-in-law Peter Friesen from Danzig had done his share since both brothers-in-law now had unfavourable thoughts about me as if I wanted to do violence to the ban. God forbid. Next they both wanted to have a meeting with me. I then told Abraham Friesen that only the three Ohms should come to me in order that we could discuss the matter. I did not want Peter Friesen to be present for he apparently was the rock over which Abraham Friesen had fallen. Consequently we discussed the matter and were able to achieve unity of mind.

"My beloved reader, Jesus says that we are not to cast pearls before the swine for they will tread them underfoot and tear them asunder. Paul says they have much to say but not everything is beneficial. If we do not have clear scriptural grounds in our practice it is better to leave the matter alone. I believe as Peter Peters has written that together with Job we should shun the sin from the heart and have a loathing for wickedness and backsliding. For then the spirit will instruct us how we are to conduct ourselves in all concerns. Since love is the foremost commandment I am obligated to prove everything carefully and to institute what is best.<sup>27</sup>

Several aspects of the evangelical ordinance of the ban become evident from the foregoing statement. If a fallen brother has left his former brethren and departed to another fellowship the ban was not to be continued nor to be enacted for the spiritual responsibility now rested with the new fellowship. They would have to give their own account to God. The statement that the ban was instituted by God in order to serve both the world and the fallen brother for the best is reminiscent of the Jan Cents Confession of Faith of 1630 which sets the following bounds for the evangelical employment of the ban, "yet with this distinction, that it be done with such moderation and discretion that the word of God may everywhere retain its place, and the higher laws and commandments of the Lord, by which the believer is bound to the separated one, be not broken, but that everywhere necessity, word, promise, love, benevolence, mercy, justice, and Christian discretion be observed. 1 Corinthians 5:5; 2 Timothy 2:16-18; 2 Thessalonians 3:14; Titus 3:10; Luke 6:36; 2 Peter 1:6."<sup>28</sup>

The reference to the commandment to admonish the separated one like a brother touches on an aspect of the ordinance of the ban which has only too frequently been overlooked by all Christian confessions. Namely, the duty which the Gemeinde took upon itself when the separated one was initially received into the fellowship. Too frequently the admonition of the Apostle Paul to "give such a one over to Satan" has been interpreted as a convenient tool to get rid of dissidents and those who had become an embarrassment to the particular church, be it Mennonite, Catholic, Reformed, or Pietist.

This appears to have been the view of Aeltester Jakob Enns when he placed his opponents such as Oberschulz Klaas Wiens under the ban. Other confessions carried this concept to the point that during the inquisition the heretics would be banned and then immediately executed whereupon their property conveniently escheated to the particular church. There are countless examples of mental and spiritual execution to be found in the annals of the radical pietists as well as in the histories of the cultural Mennonites. In fairness to the Anabaptist-Mennonite position it should be noted that the same developed during a period when strict internal discipline and unity was a necessity as one weak link or traitor could betray an entire Gemeinde which at that time meant torture and death.

At other times all Christian confessions have completely ignored the evangelical commandment to exercise the ban as a spiritual discipline of love. Thus some confessions have encouraged their members to wage wars, steal, plunder and kill in the name of the church. Other confessions have promoted indulgence and excesses in pride and ostentation to overabundance amidst a world of hunger and starvation. All confessions at times have failed in their evangelical obligation to direct such offenders to the way of the cross and the ethics of the peaceful kingdom of Christ. The evangelical ordinance of discipline was instituted to be exercised for those who demonstrated with their life and conduct that they had separated themselves from this earthly spiritual kingdom. The evangelical ban and separation was to be employed when loving admonitions and all other means had failed.

It is commendable when Anabaptist-Mennonite leaders had the courage to address the question of the evangelical ban and the proper application thereof. This is especially the case when leaders such as Aeltester Klaas Reimer were also able to deal with the duty which the Gemeinde subsequently owed to the one who had been separated. i.e. "Loving admonition as a brother". Presumably this duty which the Gemeinde accepted when the individual first became a member would not terminate until death and perhaps also extended to descendants of the separated one.<sup>29</sup>

## 11.11 Conclusion.

This concludes our consideration of the founding and early internal theological developments in the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. Near the end of his eventful and tumultuous career Klaas Reimer wrote **Ein Kleines Aufsatz** or **A Short Exposition**, the complete translation of which has been set forth above. He concluded this account with some personal reflections regarding the issues and events which he had experienced. These remarks constitute a fitting conclusion to this chapter:

“Now my beloved reader. Menno Simons writes as follows: ‘One cannot understand otherwise from the Holy Scripture but that this is the last invitation to the wedding feast of the Lamb which is to occur before the advent of the never ending winter’. He has certainly understood this correctly as this is the apparent meaning of Revelations 6:11. Consequently the only future alternative which we can anticipate is the terrible day of judgment. But God is doing so much for mankind even in this last hour. In many ways and with every available power God is seeking to inspire each and everyone to stop to reflect and to decide for the hour is so nearly at hand.

“This is firstly evident from the fact that in the end God is allowing the gospel to go forth as he says, ‘that it shall serve as a witness over them’. At the same time Satan is also zealously sending out his servants in order that they will falsely expound the gospel. Yes, even the heathen desire the same in their own languages. But then what happens? Instead the false prophets entice them away from the (full) gospel with the teaching of a future earthly kingdom. Second, in addition to the evangelization many signs and wonders are occurring in the heavens and on earth. Foremost are the appendages to the stars which threaten to punish the world. Likewise the many fireballs in the sky. These attest to the end times as **Die Wandelne Seele** teaches us with respect to the rainbow.

“Through all of this God has also divided into three parts the seed of woman which he led here from Prussia in order that through their protracted disputation they should search the Word to determine what He required of them. In addition he has given each one the free choice, without serious hindrances, whether they want to serve God and to keep His commandments: As they would want to if they would surrender their pride and honour among men and instead would rather learn of humility from Jesus. But my beloved reader, none of this is given any heed. In spite of all this the Menno Simons writings have once more been brought to light in a miraculous manner. Through this edition many have obtained a new interest to read these writings. These writings also serve as a witness for the nonresistant Christians who until this time have always entered into a covenant with God through their confession of faith whereupon they accepted baptism as a solemn seal.

“Oh God, what will finally become of those who are so truly and willfully offending against the word of God. For the ways of God, my beloved reader, are a mystery. His regulation is incomprehensible. Often times He teaches through a provident disposition in certain things. When the Menno Simons book was published it was not submitted to the secular government for the reason that the foolishness of the Aeltesten in Prussia would thereby be made manifest. They rejected the book ostensibly on the grounds that the book had not been approved by the censor. But the censor had not only given permission to publish these writings, he had also instructed that the printer should make sure that they were not diminished in any way. This is comparable with the words written in Luke 23:4-5. This is only a partial exposition.

“Now my beloved reader. With this I have committed something to paper with regards to how our gracious God has directed and regulated everything for me in this earthly realm. From this each and everyone can come to their own conclusion as they see fit, as to the spiritual matters in and about me. God knows everything about us humans and knows our thoughts from afar. He very well knew what an insignificant and sinful person I was. But He says, ‘I am gracious to whom I am gracious’. And therefore we may conclude from this that it is God who hath made me worthy and that He has cast all my sins behind Him. For this all thanksgiving, honour and supplication is due unto Him for ever and eternity.

“I am unable to regard this in any other way than as spoken by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:26-28 when he says that ‘God hath chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise’. Now then, I have stated various things from the time of my youth until I came to be among the ministers. I have also declared some matters from that time forth, how God led me insignificant one, to cling firmly unto His will. The Aeltester Matheis Serwas said that ‘God is all powerful but He sometimes also chooses to work through people!’

“But my beloved reader do not think that I have written this in order to disparage the Aeltesten and ministers. God forbid. Rather that God might use it as a lesson so that each one in his weakness might remain true to God. Whoever is held in the hands of God cannot be cast down by any enemy. All that will be required of the steward is that he has remained true.

“I have also written a little about the commencement and separation of our Gemeinde. Regarding the terrible anger which Satan had against our Gemeinde and how an angel of light assaulted us when Satan realized he could not keep us in the desolation of Babel in which he is only too zealous. And he has not yet given up in his attempt to mislead us. Consequently he came from the other direction in order to lead us to the freedom of the world but God in His time always made these efforts manifest and granted us the power to stand steadfast. God forbid that I should have written this to anyone’s detriment. Rather I have written the same only from love as a teaching for us so that we would not fall.

“Now my beloved reader. I bid that each and everyone might truly consider with spiritual eyes why God sends these things among His people. We have sufficient reason to perceive this also in the people of Israel. The same thing is also manifest here when the Aeltesten said to us that in accordance with the Holy Scripture we were completely correct but that they could not practice it in that way. Or as the Gebietsamt said to us, that they did not want matters in that way, which was also the truth.

“For although the Aeltesten said to us, they could not practice this teaching, this was not the truth for God says that ‘if My people want to be obedient I will quickly extinguish their enemies’. But God will not forsake anyone. And when the Book of Life will be opened on that great day, we will be judged by the Scripture according to our works. AMEN.”

Written in December, 1836. Klaas Reimer, Petershagen.

## FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER ELEVEN. THE EARLY YEARS, 1804-1824

1. Klaas Reimer, **Ein Kleines Aufsatz** (in English “A Short Exposition”). Unpublished journal in the possession of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference Archives, Steinbach, Manitoba. This is an original hand-written writing by Klaas Reimer (1770-1837) which had been handed down to Aeltester David P. Reimer, Blumenort, Manitoba, his great-grandson. This handwritten manuscript was transcribed by great-grandson Klaas J.B. Reimer. Except as noted, all references to the Klaas Reimer writings in this work will refer to this original transcription which is more extensive than other available transcriptions. The quotations from **Ein Kleines Aufsatz** in chapters ten and eleven together form a complete translated copy of this writing. With only a few exceptions the order of these quotations as set forth follow the sequence and organization of the original manuscript. The other transcription of considerable authority is the one contained in the **Sammlung - - Zur Historie der Kleinen Gemeinde** of Aeltester Peter P. Toews. This transcription is entitled “Ereignisse und Begebenheiten so wie die Ursache wie und Wodurch die sogenannte Kleine Gemeinde Entstanden ist”. In a few instances the information in these official versions complemented each other so that the two were compiled into one composite and more descriptive report. The quotations from Klaas Reimer’s **Short Exposition** will not be individually footnoted.
2. Benjamin H. Unruh, *op.cit.*
3. Cornelius Krahn, “Steinbach”, ME 4, 624.
- 3a. See James Urry, *op.cit.* 432 Fn. Apparently K. Reimer and his colleagues had negotiated for the purchase of the Velenko estate for a 1,000,000 Rubles on behalf of 162 families.
4. David P. Reimer and P.J.B. Reimer, editors, **The Sesquicentennial Jubilee** (E.M. Conference, Steinbach, Manitoba, 1962), 90.
5. J.J. Hildebrandt, **Hildebrandt’s Zeittafel**, (Regehr’s Printing, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1945), 168.
6. J.H. Lorenz, **The Mennonite Brethren Church**, (Hillsboro, Kansas, M.B. Publishing house, 1950) 24.
7. J.A. Toews, **A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church**, (Fresno, California, G.C. of M.B. Churches, 1975), 26.
8. See Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 131.
9. Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 93.
- 9a. *Ibid.*, 673-674 and 687. In his book **Gospel Versus Gospel** (Herald Press, 1980), T. Schlabbech, discusses many of the naive assumptions and imperialistic designs of the 19th century (Protestant) “Evangelical” mission effort.
10. Robert Friedmann, **Mennonite Piety Through the Centuries**, *op.cit.*, 68.
11. The Klaas Reimer manuscript uses the word “rechtdenkende” or “rightminded”. Some transcriptions omit this word. See Peter M. Friesen *op.cit.*, 130.
12. These were three of the seven articles of **The Schleitheim Confession**, adopted by the Swiss Mennonite Brethren in 1527.
13. Peter Toews, *op.cit.*, 43-45.
14. *Ibid.*, 47.
15. *Ibid.*, 47-49.
16. *Ibid.*
17. H. Goerz, **Die Molotschnaer Ansiedlung**, *op.cit.*, 60.
18. Other transcriptions have added a reference to “poorly clad” and others use the phrase “half-naked”
19. F.R. Belk, **The Great Trek**, (Scottsdale, Pa., Herald Press, 1975) 51-62.
20. Franz Bartsch, “Claasz Epp”, ME 2, 234.
21. Harold Bender, “Footwashing”, ME 2 349.
22. Merrill F. Unger, **Unger’s Bible Dictionary**, (Moody Press, Chicago, 1979), 507, 509.
23. *Ibid.*, 709.
24. David P. Reimer, **Sesquicentennial Jubilee**, *op.cit.*, 99.
25. Merrill F. Unger, *op.cit.*, 330.
26. Neff van der Zijpp, “Ban”, ME 1, 219-222.
27. This quotation is a composition of the Klaas Reimer manuscript in the possession of David P. Reimer, and the transcription in the Peter Toews’ **Sammlung**, *op.cit.* It is highly probable that Aeltester Klaas Reimer wrote more than one document expressing the same concerns somewhat differently.
28. Thielmann J. van Bragt, *op.cit.*, 27

29. It is noteworthy that three decades later the question of the application of the ban would once more become an issue in the Kleine Gemeinde. This came about when the Gemeinde under its third Aeltester Johan Friesen again became too lax in the use of the evangelical ban. In this he had probably fallen too much under the influence of the cultural pietism of the Orloff Gemeinde. As a result too much impurity had come into the Gemeinde. In a later writing Aeltester Peter Toews notes that by this time the practice of transferring membership to another Gemeinde had reached epidemic proportion so that an excommunication apparently only rarely took place. [See Peter Toews, **By Their Fruits Ye Shall Know Them**, (Roblin, Manitoba, C.W. Friesen, 1983), 35]. But much of this impurity could have been avoided had Aeltester Johann Friesen exercised the ban lovingly and spiritually as did Aeltester Abraham Friesen his predecessor. As well the teaching within the Gemeinde must be one of evangelical love in order that members would want to transfer into such a Gemeinde as they did under the leadership of Aeltester Friesen. i.e. The Gemeinde should be held together by spiritual love and not merely by the threat of the punishment of the ban. It is highly doubtful that the apostolic Gemeinde is truly being emulated in a situation where the latter is the case.

# Chapter Twelve

## Klaas Reimer, Historical Reflections

### 12.01 Introduction.

The founding of the Kleine Gemeinde in 1812 was one of the more controversial occurrences in the Molotschna Mennonite colony. The question is, was it justified? At the same time the faith and character of Aeltester Klaas Epp Reimer (1770-1837) himself has frequently come under critical examination. These are certainly two of the more intriguing subjects in Russian Mennonite historiography.

This chapter will consider the various views which have developed with respect to Klaas Reimer and the founding of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. First, the Kleine Gemeinde view of Klaas Reimer and the founding of the group in 1812. Second, the widely adopted "shoot the messenger" thesis. Third, the Anabaptist-Mennonite position and a poetic eulogy.

### 12.02 Klaas Reimer, Faith and Character

The focal point of any examination of the questions posed above is the faith and character of Klaas Epp Reimer (1770-1837). What kind of a man was he? His descendants and brethren regarded him as a giant man of God who had lived a life of earnest Christian discipleship. Of special note is the view of Aeltester David P. Reimer (1894-1963) who was a great-grandson of Aeltester Klaas Reimer. David P. Reimer came from a family with a long tradition of service to church and community.<sup>1</sup> He also had a lifelong interest in the history of his Gemeinde. He writes that his parents were only too glad to answer his numerous questions regarding his spiritual heritage and history of the Reimer family.<sup>2</sup> For this reason the impressions which Aeltester David P. Reimer had of his great-grandfather Klaas Reimer can be referred to with great reliance.

In one presentation David P. Reimer makes reference to the early spiritual struggles which his great-grandfather encountered. In his youth Klaas Reimer has demonstrated a great interest and affinity for the affairs of the world. Even at the close of his tumultuous career Klaas Reimer confessed to have had too much curiosity with respect to the development of a new innovation, such as the self-propelled wagon designed by his son. David P. Reimer has the following comments with respect to how his great-grandfather battled with some of these weaknesses:

"In his youth he had lived freely and in the pleasures of this world. Nevertheless it can be seen from his experience that in spite of the favourable inclination which he had for the lusts of the world, he had respect and heed for the older God-fearing people. He himself records an experience where he was performing statute labour (Scharwerk), among worldly company. Here he was brought into temptation to play cards, which was perceived to be a great evil at the time. Then an aged man had come to him and had said 'that if he did not yet know how to play cards, he should rather not learn, as they represented an evil'.

"He also laments that he was full of sin and impurity. Later that spring he was apprenticed to some carpenters. In this occupation he worked from morning to night and then fell asleep, so that only jesting and foolery took place and no spiritual life was experienced. In the same spring in 1790, he also joined the (Danzig) Gemeinde and allowed himself to be baptized. Now he had a severe battle among the builders, between virtue and evil. Consequently he left their company and no longer went to work with them. Later he again performed statute labour. He also attended at weddings where he was once more concerned that he had partaken too carelessly in these associations"<sup>3</sup>.

Through study of the holy scripture and the doctrinal writings of nonresistant Christianity Klaas Reimer grew in his experience and knowledge of God. This study and meditation led him to a warm spiritual faith through which he was able to submit himself to a life of victorious discipleship. David P. Reimer explains:

"In his solitude the spirit of God, as he puts it, had deeply convicted his conscience. He goes on to write that (in his youth) he had not searched sufficiently in the scriptures and that as a consequence of his negligence he had remained too much in darkness. He goes on to state word for word, 'I concentrated too much on the matters of creation but I did not search enough for, nor give enough honour to, the Creator of all destiny'. He (Klaas Reimer) read much in the *Martyrs Mirror* and also listened gladly when elderly people discussed the Holy Scriptures, especially when they talked about the wonderful workings of God. From this it can be concluded that his spirit was directed towards 'the secure and tangible substance'.<sup>4</sup>"<sup>5</sup>



The foregoing is a candid and poignant assessment of the man who was destined to become one of the greatest Russian Mennonite leaders. From his lifetime of service devoted to the furtherance of the peaceful earthly kingdom of Christ it is evident that the spiritual quest of Aeltester Klaas Reimer bore bountiful fruit. History would manifest that his faith and life were firmly grounded on the word of God and the teachings of the fathers of the faith.

At the same time Klaas Reimer was possessed of an evangelical humility and meekness. He acknowledged his own weaknesses and shortcomings and yet refused to boast about his talents and abilities. Pride and boastfulness would cause spiritual indifference which would result in a fall. Klaas Reimer was a man who redirected adversity and defeat in a positive way thereby enhancing his spiritual life. He was also able to perceive the molding and shaping hand of God in the unfolding drama of life. This is evident in the following quotation: "Yes miserable sinner that I am and so full of impurity, for I have erred and failed so often. Nevertheless God had called me unto a hard and lengthy battle with so many Aeltesten. At times it seemed as if Satan would completely overwhelm me and fling me out of the way. But God never allowed me to fall into disgrace and at all occasions he helped me to overcome. At times a person becomes too secure and unwatchful. Then we must cling to God for we must pay heed to the terrible cunning of Satan. Yes. Watch and pray."<sup>6</sup>

Klaas Reimer must also be remembered as an earnest and loving leader of his Kleine Gemeinde. This attribute is evident in his recollections of a situation where he had admonished a beloved nephew who had fallen into temptation. Here we perceive the manner and faith of the ever-loving shepherd of his small flock. "I had warned him beforehand that he should give heed and I presented to him the question; If we could not all learn to appreciate how wonderfully God in his great love directs everything in and about us. So that we should never allow ourselves to think that we are of any significance but rather that we should humbly direct ourselves to God in prayer with the heartfelt plea, 'Lord, your will be done'. In order to draw us nearer to him God through his great love allows us to overcome all obstacles'<sup>7</sup>

Biblical humility and meekness is first and foremost a temper or spirit which does not fight or struggle against God. The same disposition prevails respecting evil men or misfortune with the realization that God may use the same to chastize and purify those who are dear to him. A loving God keeps a watchful eye over his people whom he has chosen. He that is meek and humble is cognizant of being a sinner among sinners and such a spirit will meekly endure the provocations of life.<sup>8</sup> This is the spirit manifested by Aeltester Klaas Reimer in the following comment:

"In the beginning when through the grace of God we were led out of the evil harbour (assembly) where the course was so secure, we like Dinah gave ourselves far too freely and securely upon the field. We did not consider together with Lot that we might also be met by misfortune from out of the mountains. If God in his wonderful way had not wished that a small remnant would be left behind we would have been extinguished completely. Just as the angel said to Lot 'I can do nothing until you come to me'. God also forgave us of everything and made manifest the foolishness among us: whereupon through the strength of his word we should engage our hands in order to seek to eradicate the evil. God through his word also purified and cleansed us from the vessels which were unworthy. He set apart the remainder of us and warned us, yes, allowed us to fall and be punished and helped us arise again. All in order that we should come to him and learn submissiveness from him.

"And now beloved reader! God does so much for us disobedient people. For many of us no doubt, until we are old and aged. And then will come that great great judgment day when everything will be accorded its place. What will be our disposition? Oh, let us truly take this to heart. For even in this last day and hour God is truly doing so much for humanity."<sup>9</sup>

Klaas Reimer also had a burden for the propagation of the full gospel teachings of nonresistant Christianity. His concern for reform in the Mennonite Church and the restitution of sound evangelical doctrine has already been referred to in the previous chapter. In his writings Klaas Reimer laments the apostasy from such teachings just at a time when some of the larger Christian confessions had finally recognized the need for evangelization. Klaas Reimer expresses his concern that the allure of the mystical and fanciful teachings of a future earthly kingdom were almost concealing the great truths of the gospel. "Indeed, it is almost beyond comprehension. Firstly, Jesus said that the gospel should go out as a witness to all people and then shall come the end. Yes, the peoples of the world require the gospel in many languages and also receive the gospel through many writings. At the same time there are many false prophets in circulation seeking to deceive in order that the hearer shall not be able to sift out the truths from the presentation. For their might is in their mouths and they have principles through which they do much harm."<sup>10</sup>

Klaas Reimer notes that great damage was inflicted upon the spiritual kingdom of Christ through the spreading of such a false or partial gospel. Unfortunately the proponents of this evangelization effort were frequently earnest and zealous people who sincerely believed that a "thousand year earthly reign of Christ" was imminent. But Klaas Reimer was not a man without hope. He points to the 1833 publication of Menno Simons' **Foundation Book** as a sign of great progress for the spiritual earthly kingdom of Christ. Menno Simons was a chosen instrument of God whose writings expounded the sound evangelical doctrines of nonresistant Christianity. These writings have always stood as a courageous testimony to the truth. Through the wonderful leading of God these writings have again been published in spite of earnest opposition. Klaas Reimer explains: "Secondly the writings of Menno Simons also go out as a witness over the world and the nonresistant Christians. Because of this the Aeltesten and ministers were very angered for they had already wanted to eradicate these writings. Consequently God has revealed their foolishness for all to see. For Menno Simons has truly been a chosen instrument of God. He was able to compose and publish many writings and all the while he himself was protected in wondrous ways. His writings speak for themselves and yet they often languish unread in the corner. In a miraculous way these writings have again been published."<sup>11</sup>

The fundamental spirit of Klaas Reimer is one of adoring and heartfelt submission to the grace and love of God and a recognition of his Lordship in all aspects of life. Klaas Reimer concludes his remarks with the following comments:

"Now, beloved reader. I request that where I talk of our weaknesses you would take note that I do not want anyone to extend recognition to me for humility. That is far from my mind. Instead this writing is to be a remembrance so that we would always be mindful of our failings. That all of us together, myself as well as you, might humbly be directed on our way to God. For the same reason the sword could not overlook the House of David in order that he would always be mindful of this, and therefore, that he would find his way to God. This is also what occurred, so that David became a most worthy man of God."

"Wer dir, O Gott gehorcht, erwaeHLT das beste Theil:

"Wer Dir, O Gott verlaeszt, verlaeszt sein eigen Heil<sup>12</sup>

### 12.03 The Kleine Gemeinde View.

Some of the views which others held of Klaas Reimer and his small flock will now be considered. The first school of thought to be examined is that the formation of the Kleine Gemeinde in 1812 was simply unjustified. This was the view held by the Grosze Gemeinde for many decades. The proponents of this position might even admit that the situation with the Gemeinde of Aeltester Jakob Enns was quite intolerable. Nevertheless they would insist that the reformers such as Reimer should have continued to work for the renewal of the Grosze Gemeinde from within and not from without.

In his 1845 **Einfache Erklarung**<sup>13</sup> Aeltester Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) replies to this charge at considerable length. In the preface to this work Aeltester Friesen sets the stage for his reply to these and other accusations which were made against the Kleine Gemeinde with the following poem:

- 1) "Jesus, du Brunn aller Gnaden, Der du Niemand von Dir Stoesz't, Der mit Schwachheit ist beladen, Sondern Deine Jünger trost'zt; Sollt' ihr Glaube auch so klein, Wie ein kleines Senfkorn sein, Wollt' st Du sie doch würdig schaezten, Grosze Berge zu versetzen.
- 2) "Lasz mich Gnade vor Dir finden, Denn ich bin voll Traurigkeit: Hilf Du selbst mir ueberwinden, Wenn ich fuehren musz den Streit; Meinen Glauben taeglich mehr', Und des Geistes Schwert verehr', Damit ich den Feind kann schlagen, Alle Pfeile von mir jagen."<sup>13</sup>

With this poem Aeltester Friesen has set the focus of his reply to the Grosze Gemeinde charges against the Kleine Gemeinde. Jesus alone is the fountain of all grace. Jesus will not reject a disciple who is laden with weakness rather he will comfort such a one. Even if their faith is only like a mustard seed Jesus will treasure such followers and they will find grace and worth in him. Through Jesus his disciples will overcome. Aeltester Friesen then goes on to explain the general tenor of the accusations which were still hurled against the Kleine Gemeinde in 1845:

"**Treasured reader**

You are as aware as I am of the many judgments and unconsidered accusations which are being hurled about with respect to the so-called Kleine Gemeinde. In my view these charges come into being because almost everyone who is of a different view neglects to investigate our dealings thoroughly. Rather they are too easily contented to simply believe whatever they hear i.e. That those in the Kleine Gemeinde are misled so and so much; they punish and judge so and so strictly; And that they despise and condemn in such and such a manner. Matthew 5, 11; 1 Peter 4, 14; and Isaiah 51, 7. And more of the like, unfounded and detrimental speech which I believe has its main origins in hostile ministers.

These ministers have declared us to be factious, scantimonious hypocrites, and the like. As a result if any truth seeking souls were still at hand they would have to develop a distaste for us.

“For this reason I come to greet the good hearted reader with this small declaration, in which the reader can readily find our teachings with respect to a number of these points, and in particular regarding those in which we are accused the most maliciously. I would hope and wish that the well-meaning reader might read this declaration with an unbiased heart and with care and that they might search in the scriptures with those from Berea as to whether these things were so. Acts 17, 11, Judge only with understanding and allow the word of God, the Lord Jesus, and his apostles to be your guide. For then you will know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. John 7, 17.”<sup>14</sup>

With these preliminary remarks Aeltester Abraham Friesen has explained the purpose of his **Einfache Erklarung**. So much gossip and slander is being spread about the Kleine Gemeinde that it would detract and hinder even those souls who were still searching for the truth. Reference should be made here to the special closed settlement conditions which had been constituted for the Russian Mennonites so that one can well imagine how the gossip might rage back and forth in the Molotschna that now the Kleine Gemeinde had disciplined one of their members for beating his servant or for driving too hard a bargain in a business transaction, etc. Within the closed confines of the Mennonite colonies in Russia such goings-on would have created a tremendous diversion for those who had a limited comprehension of evangelical faith.

Aeltester Friesen goes on to rebut the charges made against the Kleine Gemeinde and deals with the question under consideration. Namely, was the organization of a separate Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde after the reformers had been excommunicated, justified or not? We allow Aeltester Friesen to speak:

“Firstly, with respect to our going out of the Grosze Gemeinde which is offensive to so many people and for which only the smallest number had any desire. In fact, many deemed it to have been not merely harmful but completely wrong. Behold, my beloved reader. Notwithstanding that the people regard it in this way and consider the same to have been harmful, the apostle Paul directs us in this manner with very clear words, when he says: ‘Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you’, etc. In the eminent Revelation the spirit says further: ‘Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not her plagues’ Revelations 18, 4.

“Beloved reader. Will you now object and say that matters were not yet that serious with the Mennonites? And that therefore it was better to remain together in order to help the fallen to once more come aright? For not only myself but also the since deceased Aeltester Klaas Reimer and many others thought exactly the same. With complete dedication we sought to bring this into fulfillment. There are still enough eye and ear witnesses who saw and heard of these endeavours and can testify to them.

“But Jakob Enns the Aeltester at the time, together with his ministers, preferred to direct the disobedient and rebellious members to the Gebietsamt for punishment. In fact, they stated in the presence of the entire brotherhood that these were police matters, which they would not deal with themselves, and they deemed it to be good to refer the same to the Gebietsamt. In consequence of which the Gebietsamt considered it necessary to commence the construction of a prison in which they brought to obedience the unruly and the perverse.

“But the spiritual discipline, to which only and alone we have been directed, was practiced only little. Matthew 18; 6, 9, 15-17. Klaas Reimer and many others were very concerned in this regard and also sought to convince the Aeltester Jacob Enns from the Holy Word of God, how such dealings were entirely and completely contrary to the teachings of Jesus and our confession of faith. Whereupon the Aeltester Johan Wiebe from Koslitz (Chortitz Colony) was summoned to come here. And thus there were many dealings and discussions regarding this matter and as to whether the physical punishment could be discontinued and the righteousness-working spiritual discipline instituted once more.

“That is to say, pursuant to the teachings of Jesus and his apostles, to punish the disobedient by and in accordance with the Word of God. According to the teachings of the Apostle the Word is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even unto the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and to the joints and the marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intentions of the heart, Hebrews 4, 12. But alas, these Aeltesten and ministers could not be persuaded any further in this regard except to the extent that they conceded that Klaas Reimer was correct according to the Holy Scripture. However they demanded that he desist from his designs and that he should concede. They also stated that if he did not do so he could be sent to Siberia for that reason. Matthew 24, 9-10.

“Take heed, my beloved reader. Since this time, which occurred in the year 1812 or 1813, the spiritual and Christian discipline has been almost completely put aside in favour of the physical and worldly punishment which has been instituted among the Mennonites in the Molotschna (Molatzna) and whereby this burden has been imposed upon the Gebietsamt. Behold, for this was also the first and most important reason that our separation occurred. This separation was highly necessary if some

remnant of nonresistant Christendom should remain.

"Since that time, the evil Godless practices such as debauchery, fighting, lying, cheating, and more of the like, have taken the upper hand. That is to say, since it was first noted that the spiritual discipline was always more and more cast aside. Alas, my beloved reader, enough tears cannot be shed to sufficiently lament the fact that thieves and drunkards are not even put under the ban. Quite to the contrary, it is actually accepted as a defense if the drunkard in his stupor has indulged in other infamous acts and vices, even though drunkenness by itself constitutes a mortal sin and is cause for the ban. 1 Corinthians 5, 11; and Galatians 5, 21.

"Do say for yourselves. What alternatives were left open to us so that we would not become partakers of your sins? For you yourself know that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. 1 Corinthians 5, 6; Behold! Amongst such a fellowship you are as little able to guard yourself against their sins, as in a lump into which a little leaven has been mixed. Since you will then actually be in the same fellowship as the drunkards and others who will not be partakers in the kingdom of God and who are to be excluded from the fellowship of the believers. For without are not only dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, but also whosoever loveth and maketh a lie. 1 Corinthians 6, 9 and further; Galatians 5, 19-29; and the Revelations of John 21, 18 and 22, 15.

"Alas, do weigh carefully what Paul writes to the Corinthians. For upon doing so there is no way that in good conscience towards God, you will be able to go to the table of the Lord to fellowship with those who are openly living in the works of the flesh. 1 Corinthians 10, 18 and further. Rather you will have to admit that no other alternative remained open to us but that we depart from the same and commenced to walk in the light and to purify ourselves from all unrighteousness. 1 Thessalonians 5, 4 and further; 1 John 11, 7. 1 John 1, 7.

"Alas. Alas. The downfall has progressed to such an extent that many a sincere and thinking person sighs and laments in that regard and does not know how we are ever to come out of all this Godless living and conduct which is being practiced so boldly and freely. Yet such persons cannot bring themselves to the point that they go out from among them and that they cleanse themselves from these in order to become a sanctified vessel. 2 Corinthians 6, 17; 2 Timothy 2, 21.

"One is truly disturbed with respect to the downfall and apparent desolation of the Mennonite faith. Many have no inkling of the means by which they themselves may flee from this confusion. They do not take note of the direction provided by our Lord Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, when he says, 'let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto' Luke 21, 21. Or when Paul says, 'for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness' and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. And I will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. 2 Corinthians 6, 14-18.

"Now my true and good-hearted reader, take note as well what the holy apostle has prophesied even from afar, namely: 'This know also that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truth breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God; Having a form of Godliness but denying the power thereof; and the same avoid' 2 Timothy 3, 1-5.

"Behold. But already for some time, the ministers have not given heed to such scriptures. And because of this a bitter root hath grown up causing much trouble and thereby very many have been defiled. Hebrews 12, 15. Therefore my beloved reader, do realize that not we, but they must accept responsibility for our separation. For they were the ones who tolerated all the Godless and fleshly customs among them, and thereby occasioned so much dispersion and anger: In addition there is the teaching wherein Paul so unequivocally states that 'We should avoid the same'. He has also added thereto, 'For they that are such serve not the Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.' Romans 16, 17.

"My beloved reader, from this you can well perceive that our going out was not superficial and unfounded, or due solely to a party spirit, as has been attributed to us. Rather we had great reason and also a firm foundation in the Holy Scripture for doing so. In addition to everything else we have a truly wonderful promise from the Lord, namely; 'As you do cling yourself to me, you shall stand before me and you shall be my minister; And as you teach the pious to separate from the evil people you shall be as my minister; and before that you would fall unto them, they shall fall unto you. And even if they strive against you they shall not prevail against you, for I am he, that I will redeem you and help you, saith the Lord. Jeremiah 15, 19-20; Jeremiah 30, 10-11.'"<sup>15</sup>

Of course no logic or reason would persuade those who were quite content to continue in their immoral and unspiritual ways, that the organization of the Kleine Gemeinde was justified. Nor did it help to refer back to the principles of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith for this new breed of Mennonites had only little regard for the same in any event. In the **Einfache Erklarung** Aeltester Abraham Friesen gently reminds the reader that it was after all Aeltester Jakob Enns and his supporters who were responsible for the existence and toleration of these circumstances and not the reformers. The

reformers had made all possible efforts to redeem the situation prior to their excommunication and subsequent organization of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. To this must be added the poignant comment of Aeltester Klaas Reimer that after a certain point it was no longer sufficient to merely teach the gospel for in the end faith must also be put into practice.<sup>16</sup> Eventually a separation was inevitable.

## 12.04 The "Shoot The Messenger" Thesis.

In addition there is a third view of the organization of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in 1812. This school of thought definitely agrees that the circumstances warranted the formation of a separate Gemeinde. The adherents of this position then go on to maintain that although the organization of a separate Gemeinde was justified the Kleine Gemeinde was not founded on proper principles as a Church of God and that therefore its subsequent efforts and endeavours were largely in vain.

This would be the view promoted by historian Peter M. Friesen. Regrettably this view has been repeated by a number of historians so that this school of thought has become the semi-official position of Russian-Mennonite historiography. Until 1915 it could also be said that this was the view of the winning side in the theological and cultural battles which had raged through the Molotschna since its founding. By the 1880's the culturally progressive Mennonites and the mild pietist forces had combined to create a winning alliance which reigned triumphant for several decades. Granted that in a sense this was only a hollow victory as by their emigration in the 1870's many of the Anabaptist-Mennonites had quietly removed themselves from the fray.

This rather negative view of the founding of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde is largely based on the assessment which Russian Mennonite historian Peter M. Friesen made of Klaas Reimer and of the Kleine Gemeinde in 1910. Several decades later C. Henry Smith categorized the charges made by Peter M. Friesen in giving the following assessment of Klaas Reimer and his small band.

"Klaas Reimer, a rather sensitive soul, with a somewhat narrow religious horizon, contentious and critical in spirit, after being ordained a minister in his native church in Danzig, migrated, in 1804, first to the Chortitz community, and later to Molotschna. He was out of step from the beginning with the rest of his fellow ministers in the Flemish church. He found fault with the laxity of their church discipline; he criticized the entire church as being too formal in its church practices and worship; and especially did he question the right of a Mennonite civil official to administer local police power over a fellow Mennonite church member. In course of time Reimer gained a few followers for his views, and stirred up so much dissension through the preaching of his doctrines that the Molotschna elder, Jacob Enns, requested the local Gebietsamt to silence him. Reimer appealed to the Chortitz elder, Johan Wiebe, to intercede in his behalf. The latter, however, also threatened the disturber with banishment in case he set up a separate ecclesiastical organization apart from the Mennonite body already in existence.

"Paying no heed to the threats of the two elders, Reimer, with eighteen others, seceded from the main body and organized a church of their own. Although the Mennonite elders put up a strong protest against the move, the new party secured recognition from the government as a separate ecclesiastical organization with all the rights and privileges originally granted the main body of Mennonites. Other similar groups seceded at the same time throughout the different settlements. These later united with one another to form what became known as the *Kleine Gemeinde*."<sup>17</sup>

This school of thought summarily dismisses the Kleine Gemeinde by using the same tactics with which Aeltester Jakob Enns so successfully fought off all efforts at reform, i.e. Simply label the leader of the movement as being ignorant, fault finding, and contentious. Add to the charges that the man had a limited education, narrow religious horizon and a jealousy for his own fellow brethren and the scenario is complete. Once this thesis is accepted then everything which the Kleine Gemeinde later did can also be summarily dismissed. "By shooting the messenger" the Kleine Gemeinde can neatly be shelved as a cute but misguided incident in Molotschna Mennonite history.

One of the peculiar charges made against Klaas Reimer should be dealt with here. This is the accusation that the official position of Klaas Reimer and his Gemeinde was that salvation could not be conceded to people of other faiths.<sup>12</sup> Historian Peter M. Friesen makes this charge in the following exact words: "The attempt by two elders of the Frisian Church, who had migrated in 1819/20 Franz Goerz (Rudnerwiede) and the 'Old Flemish' (Ukwallian) Peter Wedel (Alexanderwohl), both of whom possessed a vital Christianity (SIC) and rejoiced in their state of grace—to win Klaas Reimer to their views failed. The fact that they conceded salvation to people of other faiths, read books written by men of other faiths, and believed in the millennium (earthly kingdom), filled that very pious soul with such alarm that any approach was made impossible."<sup>18</sup>

Peter M. Friesen appears to base this charge on a quote from the writings of Klaas Reimer. In a discussion with the Pietist-Mennonite Aeltester Peter Wedel, Klaas Reimer made the statement that

“I believed that all those who confessed child baptism, the swearing of the oath, and the bearing of arms as their faith could not be right thinking Christians no matter how pious they might otherwise appear to be.”<sup>13</sup> (See section 11.05.)

It is difficult to deal analytically with a charge as nebulous and categorical as the foregoing one. Three comments will be made in this respect: First, reference should be made to the treatise **Faith and Reason** (1833) by theologian and minister Heinrich Balzer who states the official position of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde to be as follows: “We certainly do not judge other Christian confessions; they stand or fall before the Lord. They act according to their faith and their knowledge, and they will have to give account for both”. (The entire treatise is included in chapter fourteen.) This statement of faith by Heinrich Balzer is so unequivocal and definitive that no further comment respecting the teaching of the Kleine Gemeinde and the Anabaptist-Mennonites is necessary.

Secondly, the controversial statement by Klaas Reimer was merely the affirmation of three crucial distinctions between the Anabaptist-Mennonites and other Christian confessions. The articles of nonresistance, believers baptism and the refusal to swear an oath, were three of the seven articles of faith contained in the **Schleitheim** Confession of faith adopted by the Swiss Brethren Mennonites in 1527. These fundamental articles of nonresistant Christianity have been repeated in every Anabaptist-Mennonite confession of faith since that time. These articles were also endorsed and propagated by all the writers and theologians of the faith. Klaas Reimer himself referred the errant Aeltester Wedel to the writings of Aeltester Peter Peters as containing a correct statement and exposition of evangelical teaching on the point.

Third, the statement by Klaas Reimer was misinterpreted by Peter M. Friesen and many subsequent historians. The most fundamental article of nonresistant Christianity was the evangelical commandment to love God. Matthew 22, 37-39; Mark 12, 29-31; Luke 10, 25-27; Jesus Christ ordained that the love of God was manifested in discipleship. “If ye love me, keep my commandments” John 14, 15. To the Anabaptist-Mennonites this meant that a Christian was one who had been touched by the regenerative grace of God which resulted in a desire to be Christlike. Consequently Christians were those who sought to practice the teachings and example of Jesus Christ. It was an integral part of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith that persons who believed in the swearing of oaths, infant baptism, and the bearing of arms (waging war) were not practicing the teachings and example of Christ and therefore were not to be considered as Christlike or Christians in that sense.

The following will illustrate this reasoning as applied to the three articles of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith referred to by Klaas Reimer. One, the teaching of Christ to his followers not to swear an oath is stated in Matthew 5, 34-37: “But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God’s throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool; neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea. Nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh from evil”. The Anabaptist-Mennonites interpreted this statement to the effect that it was contrary to the will of Christ that his followers should swear an oath.

Two, it was the belief of the Anabaptist-Mennonites that those who by faith had been converted to the peaceful earthly spiritual kingdom should be baptized as a symbol of their sanctification in Christ. “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved”. Mark 16, 16. In order to believe the individual should have an understanding of the boundless regenerative grace of God. Grace not only saved the sinner from damnation but also regenerated the inward man. Evangelical grace released the sinner from the bonds of sin and inspired him with a new bondage of love for the redeemer. An infant was not capable of such belief and therefore the Anabaptist-Mennonites regarded infant baptism as a senseless waste of water. Children in their years of innocence were a part of the spiritual kingdom of Christ in any event. The Anabaptist-Mennonites also observed that those Christian confessions which promoted child baptism frequently also lacked a comprehension of the regenerative power of the grace of God.

Three, the Anabaptist-Mennonites practiced the saying of Jesus when he said “Thou shalt not kill, and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment.” Matthew 5, 21. As killing was a common occurrence during war time the Anabaptist-Mennonites considered war to be an activity which was contrary to the will of Christ. In fact the Anabaptist-Mennonites went one step further and actually confessed that a Christian was one who tried to follow the dictates of Christ when he said “love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you” Matthew 5, 44.

The fundamental evangelical concept that believers were known as Christians because they sought

to practice and live out the commandments and example of Christ was rejected by many Christian confessions. Those who rejected this principle included the Reformers (Luther, Calvin and Zwingli), Pietists, Darbyites, and all dispensationalists. The fact that these confessions did not teach discipleship did not mean that their adherents were unsaved. As stated by Balzer, this was a matter between each believer and his maker and between each confession and God.

Nevertheless Klaas Reimer correctly outlined the evangelical teaching to Aeltester Wedel when he stated that those who believed in child baptism, the waging of war (i.e. the power of resistance instead of the power of love) and the swearing of oaths, were not right thinking Christians. In fact Anabaptist-Mennonite literature is full of such statements. A good example is Felix Mantz who was drowned in 1526 because he would not recant his faith and who thereby became one of the first Anabaptist-Mennonite Martyrs. Felix Mantz said as follows: "But those who are hateful and envious, and do thus wickedly betray, accuse, smite and quarrel, cannot be Christians"<sup>19</sup>.

Menno Simons in discussing the true Christian faith made numerous such statements of which the following quotation speaks for itself:

"I know of a certainty that a proud, haughty person is no Christian, no matter who he is. I know of a certainty that an avaricious selfish person is no Christian, that a drunken gluttonous person is no Christian, that a heady, envious person is no Christian, that a false, untruthful person is no Christian, that an untrustworthy, thieving person is no Christian, that a defaming, slandering person is no Christian, or anyone incompassionate, or cruel even if he is baptized a hundred times and attends the Lord's supper daily. For it is not the sacraments, nor the signs, such as baptism and the Lord's Supper, but a sincere, Christian faith, with its unblamable, pious fruits, represented by the sacraments, that makes a true Christian and has the promise of . . . Life."<sup>20</sup>

In fact it is astounding that a Mennonite leader would be literally crucified by his fellow Mennonites for defending the three basic precepts of his faith. Namely, adult baptism, the refusal to swear an oath, and nonresistance. What is even more lamentable is that he had to raise this defense against two fellow Mennonite Aeltesten who should have been familiar with such basic principles of the faith. If only such leaders might have been tolerant of the Anabaptist-Mennonite views of Klaas Reimer instead of also trying to convert him to their error! What a tragedy for the Mennonite world!

## 12.05 The Aeltester Ordination.

Another statement made by historian Peter M. Friesen is that Klaas Reimer and the Kleine Gemeinde made a mistake in their determination that Menno Simons was not ordained. This is based on a statement by Klaas Reimer that "we studied the holy scripture and other writings and had discovered that Menno Simons was apparently not ordained. And according to what we were told the Aeltester Heinrich Janzen had only been ordained by the minister Cornelius Warkentin". (See section 11.04). The response by Peter M. Friesen was as follows: "That is an error. According to many reliable historical sources, Menno Simons was ordained by Obbe Philips, the brother of Dirk Philips and a former Catholic priest, who was an Anabaptist elder or bishop. But Menno appealed to it as little as he appealed to his Catholic ordination as presbyter or priest, preferring to appeal rather to his calling by the 'Godly'. . . . Wrong C. Warkentin was ordained by Elder Regier before his death."<sup>21</sup> The implication is that such well-meant farmer philosophers were obviously unfit to examine and expound the scripture and Anabaptist-Mennonite writings if they could make such an error. This question will be discussed under several headings."

First, careful note must be made that the Kleine Gemeinde in 1816 did not decide that ordination was not required. The position taken by Klaas Reimer and his brethren was that in a case where no validly ordained Aeltester was available, an Aeltester ordination could also be performed by a minister. In its context the statement of Klaas Reimer is obviously not meant to say that Menno Simons had never been ordained for then it would not have been necessary for minister Cornelius Janzen to have ordained Klaas Reimer at all.

Second, it appears that Klaas Reimer and his brethren were correct in their view that Menno Simons had never been ordained by another validly ordained Aeltester.<sup>22</sup> Aeltester Obbe Philips who had ordained both Menno Simons and Dirk Philips was himself only ordained by a self-appointed Aeltester and not by another properly ordained Aeltester. It is reported that Obbe Philips was concerned about "the Legitamacy of his own office" and by 1540 he had fallen completely away from the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith.<sup>22</sup> This broke the physical chain of apostolic succession. It appears that the Kleine Gemeinde was also correct with respect to the ordination of Aeltester Heinrich Janzen of Schoenwise. Although Cornelius Warkentin was ordained as Aeltester by another Aeltester this was only later, after Warkentin had already ordained Janzen. Here again the chain of apostolic suc-

cession would not have been operative. From these examples the Kleine Gemeinde concluded quite correctly that a physical unbroken chain of succession was not required by Anabaptist-Mennonite doctrine.

Third. The instances of Menno Simons and Cornelius Warkentin were only referred to as authoritative precedents. It should be underlined that the actual basis of the Kleine Gemeinde position was determined by reference to the teachings of scripture and the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. In this regard Aeltester Peter Toews refers to a declaration regarding certain accusations against the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde written by Aeltester Klaas Reimer in 1830. In this epistle Klaas Reimer explains his position at greater length. He refers to Menno Simons who apparently was never properly ordained, and goes on to explain that this is how matters frequently had to be because of circumstances. That sometimes a righteous minded Gemeinde would arise in one place and sometimes in another. Klaas Reimer cites the example of Peter Waldo of Lyons, France (c.1177). In this writing Aeltester Reimer goes on to note that nowhere in the Holy Scripture is it to be found that an Aeltester without ordination by another Aeltester is not properly constituted if an ordination is not possible. To the contrary, Klaas Reimer refers to the book of Numbers for an example where the election of the Aeltester was stated to be more important than the ordination.<sup>23</sup>

The other Mennonite Gemeinden in Russia refused to provide an Aeltester to perform the ordination. Consequently no ordination qualified Aeltester was available and therefore it was decided that Klaas Reimer would be ordained as Aeltester by his co-minister Cornelius Janzen. The example of nature alone dictated that it was not the will of God that a group of people who were spiritually awakened and converted could not become a properly constituted Gemeinde in the Kingdom of Christ merely for want of an ordination-qualified Aeltester.

Four. The doctrine of an apostolic succession was a Roman Catholic teaching which was used to legitimize the authority of the Roman Church and the papacy. As such the teaching was completely rejected by Menno Simons, Dirk Philips and George Hansen to name a few. (See section 3. 17). In fact both Menno Simons and Dirk Philips recognized two valid callings for the ministers of God. A direct calling from God and his call through the Gemeinde.<sup>24</sup> Consequently the Kleine Gemeinde position was in keeping with sound scriptural exegesis and authoritative Anabaptist-Mennonite principles.

Five. Peter M. Friesen states that Klaas Reimer had been in error in his position regarding ordination by another validly ordained Aeltester. Oddly enough in another section of his book, Peter M. Friesen himself reports that he "cannot see anything else in ordination than the prayerful confirmation of the person being ordained in his position, to which he has been called upon the desire of the congregation, by the man (or men) which the congregation deems most appropriate according to the apostolic example, not order".<sup>25</sup> In fact it is reported that Heinrich Huebert the first Aeltester of the Mennonite Brethren was ordained in his own church in the same way that Aeltester Klaas Reimer had been ordained.<sup>26</sup>

## 12.06 The Religious Disposition of the Kleine Gemeinde.

One of the most remarkable statements which Peter M. Friesen makes about Klaas Reimer is that, "The religious disposition of Klaas Reimer, although a pious one, was devoid of any joyous knowledge of God's grace, while his confessional stance in educational and cultural matters was indescribably narrow. Reimer even considered the reading of books published by people of other faiths to be a sign of apostacy and the coming of the anti-christ."<sup>27</sup> One hardly knows how to reply to such a misleading statement. An attempt will be made to do so point by point.

Firstly, apostacy simply means "the abandoning of what was once believed". It is quite true that Klaas Reimer and other Anabaptist-Mennonites regarded it as apostacy when people who were born and raised as Mennonites discarded the evangelical beliefs of their forefathers and took up another faith such as Pietism and then read the books and writings of that new faith. The same would have been true should members of an Anabaptist-Mennonite group have rejected their former teachings and taken up Catholic, Calvinist or any other beliefs. This would have constituted abandonment of what was once believed. Surely the new reading material of those who were then converted to another faith, evidenced the abandonment of the former faith so that indeed these were signs of apostacy.

It is helpful to note by way of comparison that Klaas Reimer and his group held in highest esteem all of the Anabaptist-Mennonite writings. This was in contrast to the early period of the secessionists or Mennonite Brethren group of historian Peter M. Friesen, who not only rejected the Anabaptist-Mennonite writings but also many of the writings of their own faith, if these writings were not in complete accord with their own particular denomination of pietism. Record is found in the work of



Peter M. Friesen, that some of the early secessionists burned pietist writings such as Hofacker's **Sermons** and Arndt's **True Christianity** as well as many other books.<sup>28</sup> Thus it is admitted that Klaas Reimer considered the reading of pietist writings to be signs of apostasy or abandonment of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. However in fairness it must be pointed out that some pietist groups made similar judgments with the exception that they went a step further and considered as apostasy the reading of books of their own faith which were not in complete accord with their particular interpretation.

Many Molotschna Mennonites were converted to separatist pietism through the reading of radical pietist doctrinal books such as those of Jung-Stilling, Hofacker, etc. One writer claims that a copy of the novel **Heinweh** was found in almost every Russian Mennonite home and was revered as a second Bible.<sup>29</sup> As a consequence the Kleine Gemeinde quite naturally warned its people against the reading of such unevangelical teachings. This was satisfactory for the early leaders of the Kleine Gemeinde who had a sound historical and theological understanding of the Christian church and the teachings of the various confessions. But the tendency of some Anabaptist-Mennonites to avoid foreign confessional books would lead to trouble for those who were less well-grounded in the faith. As a result they were easily persuaded and susceptible to all manner of alien doctrine. This would reinforce the initial Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde endeavour to develop an appreciation for Bible doctrines in all believers. A believer with a sound understanding of the full gospel teachings of Christianity would read other confessional works in order to enhance his own knowledge and could even obtain a certain edificational value in such books.

Secondly, the claim of Peter M. Friesen that the "confessional stance" of Klaas Reimer "in educational and cultural matters was indescribably narrow," has already been dealt with in chapter nine with respect to educational concerns. Hopefully the charge with respect to cultural matters can be dealt with in a future volume. It is freely acknowledged that the Kleine Gemeinde never attained the nuances and niceties of "culture" nor "socio-economic aspirations" as did the later pietist-cultural Mennonites in Russia. At the same time it is submitted that there is no evidence that these deficiencies interfered with the Kleine Gemeinde submission to the lordship of Christ, their practice of Kingdom ethics, their evangelical zeal and their sharing of material goods. (See chapters 17 and 18).

Third. The most amazing charge of Peter M. Friesen is that the "Religious disposition of Klaas Reimer although a sincerely pious one, was devoid of any joyful knowledge of God's grace". This point must have been important to Peter M. Friesen as he repeats it at least twice.<sup>30</sup> First of all one is somewhat puzzled as to the sources on which Peter M. Friesen based this rather remarkable judgment. Presumably Klaas Reimer and his followers did not walk around with signs saying "we do not have a joyous knowledge of God's grace". In addition the tenor of the work of Friesen makes it very clear that it would have been beneath his dignity to write to the "humble and deluded" Kleine Gemeinde in Manitoba or Nebraska to inquire as to their confessional stance on this point.

Therefore the source on which historian Peter M. Friesen based this statement must be the writings of the Kleine Gemeinde extant in Russia around the turn of the century or from pure hearsay. In his historical work Peter M. Friesen refers to having among his research material only two of such writings. These were a "poor and incomplete" transcription of the Klaas Reimer **Memoirs** and a copy of the 1845 **Einfache Erklarung** by Aeltester Abraham Friesen.<sup>31</sup> Neither of these sources would in any way support the statement that "Klaas Reimer was devoid of a joyous knowledge of God's grace". Accordingly it must be presumed that Peter M. Friesen here is reporting only common hearsay with respect to this point. Not that hearsay is not frequently truthful, but historians must be careful not to propagate as complete truth "the common knowledge" of one group against a faction and faith which it opposes. Usually there is another side in such a situation.

Indeed, Klaas Reimer like his Anabaptist-Mennonite forefathers believed in a balanced evangelical exegesis. That is to say, no point of scripture was complete without reviewing the entire Bible on that point. In the case of apparent conflict the New Testament was given more weight than the Old Testament and within the New Testament the gospels were given precedence. i.e. Progressive revelation coming to a central focus in Jesus Christ. It was strictly contrary to this hermeneutical scheme to take one or two isolated Bible passages and to build a complete theology around them. In the view of Menno Simons each passage and verse in the Bible was there for a reason and therefore the meaning of each passage had to be reconciled and interpreted in accordance with the spirit of the whole.

Thus Klaas Reimer and other Anabaptist-Mennonites would not have been able to take a few scripture passages dealing with "joy" or "grace" and then construct a complete edifice of theology and faith around the same. For example an Anabaptist-Mennonite would not have been able to take a verse out of the description of the pentecost (Acts 2, 4) and then completely centre his outward

deportment and faith on one or two similar verses. Instead the Anabaptist-Mennonite would also have referred to verse 43 which mentions that after the pouring out of the Holy Ghost fear came upon every soul, and also to verse 44 which presumably requires some sort of hermeneutical position with respect to the sharing of the wealth.

The faith of Klaas Reimer and other Anabaptist-Mennonites was based on a number of evangelical elements including "joy", "grace", "peace", "fear", "anxiety", "works" and "humility" and others. Presumably this is what troubled Peter M. Friesen who felt that "true" Christian deportment was only evidenced in "joy", "peace" and "grace". The effect of the more complete hermeneutics of the Anabaptist-Mennonites was a subdued, quiet, inward "peace" and "joy" which the pietist Mennonites such as the Aeltesten Wedel and Goertz apparently could not quite comprehend. Certainly such "peace" and "joy" was integral to the faith of the Anabaptist-Mennonites. In this sense or true meaning the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde had a very blessed and joyous knowledge of the grace of God.

## 12.08 Humility and Odious Sins.

Another claim of Peter M. Friesen which deserves some consideration is his statement that, "It appears to be Reimer's opinion that the renewal of the practice of footwashing among other things produced spiritual pride which in turn lead to the confusion described above".<sup>32</sup> By the "confusion describd above," Peter M. Friesen is referring to the false humility movement in the Kleine Gemeinde. Klaas Reimer in fact wrote as follows: "But through all of this (the danger of false humility as well as the freedom of the world) God directed us more and more towards (evangelical) humility so that one after another we became convinced that we were omitting to practice one very important law and commandment of Christ. Namely, the washing of feet which occurred in 1829". (See section 11.09.)

It is evident that Peter M. Friesen has misconstrued this statement to mean the exact opposite of what Klaas Reimer actually said. To the Anabaptist-Mennonites, footwashing symbolized, among other things, evangelical meekness and humility which provided a focus for true faith through which such excesses in practice and gross error in doctrine could be avoided. Furthermore the insinuation that the radical pietistic excesses of the false humility movement were a result of footwashing in the Kleine Gemeinde is physically impossible as the washing of feet was only instituted in 1829 (1826 some sources) almost a full decade after the false humility pietism had been totally eradicated.

This would be the opportune place to deal with another apparent error on the part of the usually reliable historian Peter M. Friesen. With respect to the proponents of the false humility movement in the Kleine Gemeinde he says as follows: "Finally according to Reimer's notes, the over-excited state of some (the natural consequence of hyper-nervous tension) led them into odious carnal sins".<sup>33</sup> This appears to be a total misinterpretation of what Klaas Reimer actually reported in his **Short Exposition** which Friesen again cites as his source. In the German original Peter M. Friesen uses the term "haeslichen fleischlichen Sunden"<sup>34</sup> which would be translated as "wicked or villainous sins of the flesh".

A translation of the complete and unabridged writing by Aeltester Klaas Reimer is set forth in chapter eleven. But no report of odious sins or villainous sins of the flesh is evident either within the Kleine Gemeinde or among the proponents of the false humility movement. If the historian Peter M. Friesen is referring to the reference of Aeltester Reimer that "Heinrich Wiebe of Orloff was too fond of other wives" it should also be noted that H. Wiebe was promptly removed from the ministerial for this inclination. It is very doubtful that Klaas Reimer would so gently allude to "odious sins" by stating so mildly that the man had been "too fond of other wives". From the other descriptions of Reimer we already know that he was usually painfully honest and blunt in his descriptions of people and events.

Or if historian Peter M. Friesen is referring to the shameful fall of Cornelius Janzen sometime after his departure from the Kleine Gemeinde he should fault the Grosze Gemeinde for encouraging his arrogant departure as well as his ostentatious lifestyle and unrestricted ministry. The failings of those who found the discipleship of love of the Kleine Gemeinde to be a burden and too great a restriction and consequently left for a group where they could give free reign to their sensual desire, should not all be laid on the doorstep of the Kleine Gemeinde. Perhaps the usually reliable historian Peter M. Friesen considers lying in the snow bank or ditch and tearfully crying loud prayers to God as being "odious sins". Or perhaps Peter M. Friesen was troubled by the fact that on some such occasions the leaders of the false humility movement were poorly clad or "half naked" as one transcription so bluntly puts it. Every one, including Klaas Reimer and his brethren who stood steadfast in

the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith, would agree that such apostasy and consequential practice was terrible. But if these activities are to be considered as villainous sins of the flesh then all the Calvinist Puritan asceticism and Catholic monastic discipline would need to be regarded in the same light.

It can be seen that these types of statements are merely value judgments which anyone so inclined can pronounce upon any one he pleases. Thus for example someone like Leo Tolstoy might regard the disembodied piety of the pious pietist, loudly and magnificently delivering a wonderful public prayer in church while the servants he had oppressed and beaten all week were starving at home, as also being an "odious sin". In any event Klaas Reimer firmly opposed not only the excesses but also the very essence of the false humility movement and took the firmest measures to eradicate the same.

Certainly these incidents were hardly comparable to what happened among the Mennonite Brethren when that group was founded during the 1860's. For in this group the excessive emotionalism became a fundamental characteristic of the entire early movement. In addition to the legalistic requirement of dancing, loud music and noisy merrymaking, one even more excessive branch of the movement adopted a teaching of freedom in Christ so that all distinctions would cease including the distinctions between male and female. Those who propagated this doctrine "considered all members not in agreement with them as being carnal and still in bondage. Even when one of the group fell into grievous moral sin, they were not willing to admit that the moral lapse of this brother (as well as of two sisters) was the direct result of their false teaching. They banned the fallen brother with self-righteous indignation, not realizing that they were involved in this guilt. . . . This false freedom aspect of the movement was completely overcome by the end of 1862".<sup>35</sup>

In closing this critical analysis of the "shoot the messenger" thesis it is noted that there is no intention to hereby malign or disparage the most valuable historical work of Peter M. Friesen. He had obviously made no detailed study of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde and the teachings of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith and therefore his statements pertaining thereto must be accepted in that light. Without a doubt Peter M. Friesen was absolutely sincere and earnest in his efforts to document Russian Mennonite history from his theological viewpoint. Each group is certainly entitled to develop its own historical view. Of course this also holds true for Peter M. Friesen. At the same time comments such as the ones outlined above have cast a pall and shadow on the study of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde and other Anabaptist-Mennonite groups. Hopefully no one will be offended by the foregoing effort to correct some of these unintentional misrepresentations.

## 12.09 The Anabaptist Mennonite View.

The Anabaptist-Mennonites in Russia would affirm that Klaas Reimer and his reform movement had no choice but to form their own Gemeinde. They had been excommunicated and had nowhere else to go. There were no alternative, short of reconciling themselves to the philosophy of Aeltester Jakob Enns which was largely premised upon the use of physical force as a proper vehicle for use by the nonresistant Christians.

Nevertheless the leaders of the small flock were loathe to make the decision to leave their brethren and remained with them and worked together with them in a brotherly manner for seven turbulent years. But their loving admonishment and good example was for naught. Finally when Aeltester Enns himself insulted the purity of the communion table Klaas Reimer and Cornelius Janzen could no longer partake in good conscience. At this point they held back from the Gemeinde of Enns in the hope that this might initiate some reform. Instead Enns denounced them and excommunicated them. Only then did the members of the reform movement consider the formation of a separate Gemeinde.

At this juncture the reader may find it of interest to make a comparative reference to the historiography of the Swiss-American branch of the Mennonite church. Here we find a view which could be described as being in basic sympathy with this Anabaptist-Mennonite interpretation. Thus John Horsch, writing as the historian of the Mennonite Church in America describes the founding of the Kleinen Gemeinde of Mennonites as follows:

"The first instance in which the use of force was threatened in the settlement of church matters occurred in connection with the movement which resulted in the inception of what is now known as the Kleine Gemeinde. Klaas Reimer, the leader in this movement, had been ordained a minister in Prussia in 1801 and a few years later had emigrated to Russia. He was a diligent student of the Scriptures and of Menno Simons' writings, a man of strong convictions who saw with sincere regret the spiritual decline and the almost general neglect of scriptural discipline. With a few associates he suggested to the bishops of the church that there should be a stricter attitude toward transgressors. When such suggestions proved fruitless, Reimer, after years of waiting, began to hold separate meetings, though he and his associates never withdrew from the old church. He was finally ordained as elder by

one of his associate ministers. The name "Kleine Gemeinde" was due to the fact that the membership of these congregations was not numerous.

"The Kleine Gemeinde emphasized the need of repentance and newness of life, and took a strict attitude in regard to discipline. This group of churches disapproved the holding of civil offices which necessitated the use of force. They were outspoken in their testimony against worldliness, including the use of tobacco. After Reimer's death the congregation chose a bishop and requested the bishop of the congregation of Halbstadt to ordain him, but the request was not granted. For a time the Kleine Gemeinde was threatened by the village and wollost authorities with banishment to Siberia, but in 1843 this group was formally recognized by the higher authorities as a Mennonite church."<sup>36</sup>

From the foregoing it is evident that the American Mennonite Church has a far more favourable view and realistic appraisal of Klaas Reimer and his small flock than do historians C. Henry Smith and Peter M. Friesen. This also demonstrates the fact that the Russian Mennonite church of the 19th century had departed radically from the teachings of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith.

The view that the formation of a separate Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde was justified found wide acceptance. But this is where the difference of opinion arose. The adherents of "the shoot the messenger" thesis presented the arguments dealt with in the previous sections and argued that the Kleine Gemeinde was not a "true" church because it was not founded on correct principles and practice. Inevitably everything hinges on the assessment which is made of Aeltester Klaas Reimer. If the view of Peter M. Friesen and C. Henry Smith is correct and if it is even plausible that Klaas Reimer was a cantankerous bitter, disputative eccentric then the entire Kleine Gemeinde story has no further meaning or value. In this case it could also be argued that the entire Kleine Gemeinde reform movement was dead, spiritless and devil-inspired.

It is a fundamental premise of this work that this "shoot the messenger" theory is false and incorrect. It is submitted that Klaas Reimer was a profound and devoted human being who was divinely led to gather a portion of the Molotschna Mennonites into a renewed Gemeinde in the tradition of his Anabaptist-Mennonite forefathers. It is submitted that it is far more logical to assume that Klaas Reimer was a man of integrity and love for his fellow humans than to assume that he was possessed by a false spirit.

At the very least the life, personality and beliefs of Aeltester Klaas Reimer deserve another look. This review will consist of five aspects. First, the material and secular realm. Klaas Reimer was a man who had certainly prospered in the financial realm. He had been richly blessed in his farming operations in Prussia where he owned a farm in partnership with his wife's uncle. In 1805 he settled on farm number four in the Molotschna village of Petershagen. The 1808 Revisions Liste shows Klaas Reimer to be a prosperous 38 year old farmer. In the words of Aeltester David P. Reimer, his great-grandfather Klaas Reimer had prospered materially as well as spiritually.<sup>37</sup> As if it were a sign, Klaas Reimer was also blessed with a host of descendants who were listed in the 1958 **Reimer Familienregister**.<sup>38</sup> At the time of publication this book included 9491 names. By today this clan would have been doubled or more. This veritable multitude also includes hundreds of ministers and prominent church leaders.<sup>39</sup>

Two. Evangelical meekness and submissiveness. Mention has already been made of the view that Klaas Reimer was a man possessed of a truly Christlike meekness and humility. This view is supported by the following testimonies. In 1866 Johan Friesen, the third Aeltester of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde, referred to the terror and dread which surrounded Klaas Reimer at the time of the founding of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. Aeltester Friesen, who was also a nephew of Klaas Reimer, refers to the great concern of his uncle that he might not bring something into existence which was not founded solely on the word of God and how he at all times had wanted to present himself as "the least of all" so that a reconciliation could take place, if only that which was contrary to the word of God was removed.<sup>40</sup> In 1874 Aeltester Peter Toews endorsed this witness to the evangelical meekness of Klaas Reimer with the following testimony:

"The justification and recognition given to Klaas Reimer (by Aeltester Johan Friesen) disagrees with the fact that a part of his own written explanation is not recognized (some parts were omitted in some transcriptions) as the reader will find on page 28. The foregoing testimony is nevertheless in accordance with what the reader himself will find in Reimer's account. Although Reimer relates of the infirmities of others, one cannot find that he in any way wanted his own failings or those of his children to remain hidden. Rather he even listed them himself. And so the reader will find the above testimony 'that Klaas Reimer wanted to stand there as the least of all' to be quite correct."<sup>41</sup>

Three. A disposition of spiritual love. Through the writings which Klaas Reimer left to posterity it is also possible to demonstrate something about his spiritual character. The Anabaptist-Mennonite

view of Klaas Reimer as a spirit filled man of God is evident in a sermon which he presented to his Gemeinde for a communion service or love feast in 1829. Here follows the conclusion of this sermon:

“Yes, Beloved. When Jesus Christ, whom we love with all our hearts and on whom we firmly believe—that is to say on his Word as we have not seen him—will reveal himself when he will come to judge the entire world: Then we will rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. (1 Peter 1). There we shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, Daniel 12, there we shall stand before the throne of God and serve him in his temple, Revelation 7, enraptured we shall gaze upon the brilliant countenance of God, which has not been seen by any human eye, nor can it be seen. Then God will wipe away our tears which we have shed here for his sake, and then we, all the elect and the angels, shall glorify God and honour the Lamb singing praises unto him always and eternally. Amen.

“Now we want to prepare ourselves for parting, but let us not depart as an ungrateful people. First and foremost let us praise, honour and thank our mighty and loving God for the great goodness which he continues to evidence to us. For he still allows us to proclaim his service undisturbed. He also allows us to maintain his commandments among each other in good health. Therefore let us praise and thank him in spirit and in truth without ceasing. Yes, to earnestly pray to him that he would maintain us in the right truth, for we do not know if the Lord will again call all of us together here before his table.

“Let us also pray to God, that in this last hour he might teach us his truth and that we might evidence his teaching with our daily walk. Let us also pray for the weak and the sick, that they might carry their cross with patience and that they might accept their circumstance as being for the best of their soul. Let us also pray for our youth, that they might truly seize the teachings of Jesus, the apostles and the prophets into their hearts and also be governed by these teachings. We also pray for those who have gone astray, that they would become conscious of what they have fallen from, and that they might find the righteousness-working fruits of atonement for their sins.

“Let us also pray for our Czar, his Regents and Princes, for their well-being and that their reign might be just. Yes, that they might find peace and that matters would go well with them and that under their protection we might be able to live out our faith in peace and tranquility.

“We are also obligated to pray for all mankind. At this time prior to the end God is sending out his gospel to all people in order that there will be some of these who will thereby obtain the right truth, in order that they would also be able to come to Jesus.

“And also for whatever other reason one has to pray to God. May this not only occur here, but also when we are at home in solitude, in the manner which our Saviour Jesus has taught us. That we should pray to him with few words and primarily in the spirit, and without ceasing as he says in John 4, ‘But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the father in spirit and in truth: for the father seeketh such to worship him’.

“In closing let us now cast ourselves down upon his footstool before his Holy Throne and all together direct ourselves to God.”

- Congregation kneels for several minutes of silent prayer. -

“We do not have anything further to present to you at this meal of commemoration and service of love except that I wish you from the heart what God said to Moses, ‘Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, when ye shall bless the children of Israel. The Lord bless thee, and keep thee. May the Lord make his countenance to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee. May the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace’, Numbers 6.

“I also bless you with the words of David, ‘May the Lord bless us from Zion, he who has created the heaven and the earth, so that we upon earth might recognize his ways, and all the heathen his goodness’. Psalm 67. Yes, and I also say with Peter, but do grow and increase in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, for to him alone be glory, honour and praise for his great love and goodness, both now and forever. Amen. 2 Peter 3.”<sup>42</sup>

The foregoing is an appropriate view of Klaas Reimer as a loving man and devoted guardian of his Gemeinde. This is hardly the same person presented to history by Peter M. Friesen and C. Henry Smith. Rather, this is the heart of a great Christian leader whose selfless devotion ensured that the light of nonresistant Christianity would not be completely extinguished in 19th century Russia.

Four. There is also a prophetic side to Klaas Reimer the man of God. This is evident in an epistle of 1830 in which Klaas Reimer found it necessary to defend various teachings and practices of his Gemeinde from the scoffers and maligners in the Molotschna. In his *Sammlung* Aeltester Toews has summarized the main points of this letter which were not already dealt with in other sources thereby preserving the substance of this letter of 1830.<sup>43</sup>

One of the noteworthy charges made against the Kleine Gemeinde at this time was that they continually sought to add more and more believers to their fellowship. In the words of Peter Toews,

Aeltester Klaas Reimer defends the Kleine Gemeinde position in this regard as follows: "That each and everyone might truly reconsider such an accusation, he said. For the ministers of the Grosze Gemeinde have always acknowledged the correctness of our teaching in accordance with the Holy Scripture. By virtue of this doctrine we should have true love for our former brethren and should also want to be able to say with Paul. 'For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinship according to the flesh.' Romans 9, etc."

It is worthy of note that this evangelical love was not without fruits for the membership of the Kleine Gemeinde increased tenfold during the 60 years of its sojourn in Russia. i.e. The group started with some 20 families in 1814 and had increased to about 200 families at the time of emigration in 1874. This notwithstanding that Kleine Gemeinde theology was not a popular one in a time when many of the Russian Mennonites were more attracted to the rhapsodies of Jung-Stilling and Bangel, than to seek the way of the cross.

Nowhere in his writings does Klaas Reimer allow personal bitterness to colour his view of his fellow confessionists. This in spite of the fact that on more than one occasion he had found it necessary to prepare himself to forsake his all and to face banishment to Siberia for the sake of his faith. On at least two occasions he had been summoned to give account to the highest authorities because of the desires of the Grosze Gemeinde to eradicate him and his small flock. For this reason the views of Klaas Reimer with respect to the historical and philosophical directions which the Mennonite world of his time was taking are of the great interest. In the words of Aeltester Peter Toews, Klaas Reimer reflects as follows:

"After he thus answers one point after the other he also talks of the fall of the Mennonites and the infiltration and institution of unrighteousness, both here, as well as in Prussia. And he mentions how so many are also promising themselves a beautiful 1000 year period of peace here on earth, out of Revelation Chapter 20. He also discusses the persecution of the Mennonites and how their downfall had commenced as soon as this persecution had ended. And how the Mennonites after that had allowed themselves to be misled by the Reform ministers, and in the end, how they have embraced their doctrinal teachings through the adopting of their devotional books (Lehrbücher). He also writes with respect to the disputation regarding the ban during the time of Menno Simons."

Regrettably Aeltester Toews has not noted the views of Klaas Reimer with respect to the differences regarding the ban. This would have been interesting indeed. In discussing the increasing pride and ostentatiousness in the Prussian Mennonite church, Aeltester Reimer also reflects briefly regarding the Mennonite Church in Russia. We quote from the summary of Aeltester Toews: "And then God called many to come here to Russia where he also sought to inspire many to come to him through various powerful means. But as the Lord Jesus says they would not give heed 'until the flood came and took them all away' (Matthew 24). Thereafter it also occurred that God divided us into three parts so that these parts should exercise their Godly piety one against the other, whereby he wishes to purify us (Zechariah 13). But unrighteousness is taking the upper hand with full power and might. Klaas Reimer Petersburg 1830."<sup>8</sup>

Here we have a prophetic Klaas Reimer whose foresight reverberates over the centuries with crystal clarity. In their parochial self indulgence the pietist and cultural Mennonites in Russia had difficulty in comprehending the reference of Klaas Reimer to the embracing of teachings and doctrines of foreign Christian confessions. This point would have received a warm reception in the scholarly work of someone like Dr. Robert Friedmann who wrote his book **Mennonite Piety through the Centuries** on exactly this theme. i.e. He traces and records how the reading material and subsequently the faith and practice of the Mennonites in Europe changed and evolved over the years. From the records of which group was publishing which books, or from the fact that as time went on the Anabaptist-Mennonite literature was left unpublished, he outlines the changes in the fortunes of the faith.

The reference of Klaas Reimer to the division of the Molotschna Mennonites of course is meant to refer to the 1824 separation of the Grosze Gemeinde into the pietist-cultural Orloff Gemeinde and the reactionary-cultural Grosze Gemeinde. The Anabaptist-Mennonites, including the Kleine Gemeinde, represented the third major grouping. One can only imagine how poignant the reference of Klaas Reimer to the failure of the Molotschna Mennonites to heed the evangelical message would seem to those descendants of the pietist-cultural Mennonites who actually had to undergo a flood which literally swept away everything in its path. The passage of time has proven that the prophetic historical comprehension of Klaas Reimer was unequivocally correct. No doubt his faith and teaching would have found a warm and sympathetic reception in the hearts of the regenerated Russian Mennonite Church which later arose triumphantly from the rubble and ruin of devastation.

Five. The resolute man of action. Aeltester David P. Reimer has referred to the firm character and resolve of Klaas Reimer which he describes as follows: "It is evident from his writing **A Short Exposition** that he possessed a firm and resolute character without which he perhaps would never have attempted to take the first step in the journey for which his Redeemer had chosen him. Again and again his steadfastness reveals itself in his writings when he uses the expression that there was no conceding with him, when he met with opposition and contradiction of his convictions which were based on his understanding of the scripture. He was a man who was not to be stamped along with the majority as is otherwise so often the case."<sup>43a</sup>.

Although the earnest zeal and visionary honesty of Klaas Reimer sometimes seemed to bespeak of almost excessive one mindedness, this was an essential characteristic for someone who was to lead and establish a renewal movement. A man of action needs to have an absolutely firm resolve to persevere in his cause whatever may be the consequences. In the words of David P. Reimer, his great grandfather was "truly a storm-proven man who was possessed of a resolve to continue steadfastly on the straight and narrow". Surely this steadfast nature and one-mindedness in the faith was a characteristic which Klaas Reimer had in common with the martyrs and early Anabaptist-Mennonite leaders who were also his spiritual fathers in the faith.

### 12.10 A Poetic Eulogy.

This giant man of God died on December 28th, 1837, while he was riding horseback on a journey of pastoral visitation. Here a valiant and courageous soldier of the cross who had stood steadfastly in the face of all adversity was overcome by his death. Through the faith which he defended and the Gemeinde that he founded, Klaas Reimer left a rich heritage which should be treasured by all the Russian Mennonites and their descendants.

An appropriate parting glimpse of Klaas Reimer and his faith is found in an epic poem written by Rev. Heinrich Balzer. Heinrich Balzer had a high regard for Klaas Reimer and his work and he wrote this lengthy tribute as a fitting eulogy for this man who had inspired him to find fulfillment of his own faith. The reader is asked to take special note of the letter with which each stanza is commenced.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>1. "Kronen ewiger Seeligkeiten<br/>Will got allen denn bereiten<br/>Die hier durch Geduld in Leiden<br/>Sick bereiten zu den Freuden.</p>                | <p>8. "Montag dritten Weihnachtstage<br/>Ihm noch hart die Pflicht auflage<br/>Allen Bruedern vorzustellen<br/>Wie der Feind uns wolle faellen.</p>             |
| <p>2. "Labend wird es ihn erfreuen<br/>Die mit Traenen hier austreuen;<br/>Wenn sie dort die Frucht erblicken,<br/>Jatchtzend froh und voll entzuecken.</p> | <p>9. "Es drang ihm die Noth zu klagen<br/>Daß sich gar sehr schlecht betragen<br/>Ein'ge Kinder unsrer Mitten<br/>Mit Diebstahl und boesen Sitten.</p>         |
| <p>3. "Also liebe treue Brueder<br/>Und ihr Schwestern als Mitglieder:<br/>Troestet euch mit diesen Grunden<br/>Wenn in euch will ueberwinden.</p>          | <p>10. "Ruehrend war sein treues Rathen<br/>Daß bei solchen boesen Thaten,<br/>Doch die Aeltern solches Leben<br/>Ernstlich sollten wiederstreben.</p>          |
| <p>4. "Schwermuht, graemen und Betrueben<br/>Daß der Tod hat unsern lieben<br/>Aeltesten so schnell genommen<br/>Und ist zu der Ruhe kommen.</p>            | <p>11. "Auch vor Hoffart, Tabakrauchen<br/>Womit sich so viel einhauchen<br/>Satans Kraft, und Gottlos Wesen<br/>Das die Welt sich hat erlesen.</p>             |
| <p>5. "Recht ist Gott in allen Dingen<br/>Ihm muß man die Ehre bringen.<br/>Und sein Tuhn muß uns vor Allen<br/>Immer recht und wohlgefallen.</p>           | <p>12. "Eitelkeit, und kartenspielen,<br/>Das so ueblich gar bei Vielen<br/>In der Welt getrieben werde,<br/>Warnete er, seine Herde.</p>                       |
| <p>6. "Es war ja des Herrn Schicken<br/>Das sich daran klar laeßt blicken,<br/>Wie sich alles zugetragen<br/>Das wir hier mit Wan'gem sagen.</p>            | <p>13. "Liebevoll war er verbunden<br/>Diese Bruderschaft vier Stunden<br/>Mit Ermahnen zu bestaerken,<br/>Treu zu sein in guten Werken.</p>                    |
| <p>7. "In dem Tage vor sein'm Ende<br/>Da sein Geist in Gottes Haende<br/>Sich von dieser Welt entbunden,<br/>Und im Glauben ueberwunden.</p>               | <p>14. "Treulich weckte er uns allen<br/>Fest zu stehn'n, and nicht zu fallen,<br/>Um die Laeut'ung zu bestehen,<br/>'Wie wir', sprach er, 'klar einsehen'.</p> |

15. "Es hat hievon recht geschrieben,  
Der Prophet, im Geist getrieben  
Sacharaja dreizehn wir lesen,  
Wie Gott haelt sein Laeutrungswesen.
16. "So im Geist vereinigt schieden  
Wir von ihm im sueßen Frieden,  
Und der großen Kaelte wegen  
Rieth man ihm das Reisen gegen.
17. "Trug er gleich zu seinen Lieben  
Solchen Drang, das kaum aufschieben  
Er sein Heimathsreisen konnte,  
Doch dies mal er sich verschonte.
18. "Er blieb da in Lind'nau nachte.  
Bis Uhr elf er sprechend wachte,  
Und da nun die Brueder schieden  
Legte er sich sanft in Frieden.
19. "Ruhte jedoch wen'ge Stunden  
Da hat er sehr stark empfunden  
Große Brustverwundte Schmerzen  
Die beklemmte seinem Herzen.
20. "Da die Uhr kaum vier geschlagen  
Wird sein Geist schon heimgetragen.  
**Eintausend achthundert sieben**  
**und dreißig** von seinen Lieben.
21. "Es gab dies fuer uns ein Schrecken  
Dock wenn es nur möchte wecken,  
Alle sicheren frechen Menschen  
Das waer wohl recht Sehr zu wuentschen.
22. "Richtig, treu, und redlich Allen  
Hat er sehr gewarnt vor fallen  
Oft mit Weinen sprach er: 'Brueder!  
Haltet feste doch ein Jeder'.
23. "Kommt und laßt uns eifrig laufen  
Sind wir gleich ein kleiner Haufen  
Haltet fest in treuem Bunde  
Sonsten gehen wir zu Grunde.
24. "Lasset doch den Muth nicht sinken,  
Wenn gleich einge strauhelnd hinken  
Mit der Welt auf beiden Seiten  
Und vom rechten Ziel abgleiten.
25. "Er war nachsichtsvoll mit Schwachen  
Doch wollt er auch gerne wachen  
Daß mit muthwilligen Suenden  
Niemand moechte sein zu finden.
26. "In der Ordnung war er feste  
Hielt vornehmlich fuer las Beste  
Daß in einem Geist verbunden  
Alle Glieder sich befunden.
27. "Nicht nach der Vernunft zu richten  
Wollte er die Sachen schlichten  
Die sich stets und viel erhoben,  
'Sondern' nach dem Wort von Oben.
28. "Es war dies sein Schwert im Kaempfen  
Damit er stets wollte daempfen  
Alle boesen schlechte Dingen,  
Die stets suchten einzudringen.
29. "Nach der Einfalt seiner Gaben  
Konnte er die Kraefte haben,  
Fest dem Uebel zu bestreiten  
Und zu kennen schon von weiten.
30. "Gottes Geist war in ihm Kraeftig  
Und war in ihm ganz geschäftig,  
Daß wie ich weiß seit vier Jahren  
Tat er keine Muehe sparen.
31. "Er bestrafte Fest und kraeftig  
Alles Boese daß gar heftig,  
Bei uns wollte Eingang finden  
Durch muthwill'ge Frechheitsuenden.
32. "Mit Vertrauen hielt er feste  
Bis an seinem Lebensreste,  
Freudig stand er vor dem Risse  
Mit der Wahrheit ganz gewisse.
33. "Er hat fleißig uns gewiesen  
Wie wir sollen allem Boesen  
In uns daemfen und bestreiten  
Und zum Guten uns bereiten.
34. "In den Bruderschaften lehrte  
Er im Ernst wie Gott begehrte,  
Daß wir uns vom Suendenleben  
Ferne sollten abgebenen.
35. "Nachdem ich weiß achzig Malen  
Hat er wohl den Bruedern allen  
Noch besonders wollen lehren  
Von dem Boesen sich zu kehren.
36. "Es war ihm ein Greuel-Wesen  
Das sich einige erlesen,  
Selbsterwaehlte Demuthsscheine  
Von den Gliedern der Gemeine.
37. "Außen wollten sie fromm prangen  
Eigne Meinungen anfangen  
Stark in den verkehrten Sinnen  
Waren sie nicht zu gewinnen.
38. "Nicht nachgeben, sprach er, sollen  
Wir, (wenn auch noch viele wollen  
Sich vom schmalen Weg abkehren).  
Recht des Herren Wort zu lehren.
39. "Dies bedenket wohl ihr Freunde  
Wie er es so herzlich meinte  
Wenn er auch mit Gottes-Worte  
Draengte nach der engen Porte.
40. "Es ist wohl vielmal geschehen  
Daß anstatt ihr solltet gehen  
Recht mit Fleiß des Herren Wegen  
Ginget ihr ihm glatt entgegen.
41. "Recht vor ihm woll't ihr behalten.  
Wenn gleich muesten Leugen walten.  
Ja ihr zuerntet noch wohl heftig  
Und ward boes und sehr geschäftig.
42. "Mit verdrehten Red' bewiesen  
Ihn mit Hohn und Spott zu speisen  
Denkt wie habt ihr ihn gekraenket  
Wenn er euch zu Gott gelenket.



43. "O' bedenkt es doch ich bitte,  
Ihr, die ihr des Herren Güte  
So muthwillig wiederstrebet  
Und so frech entgegen gehet.
44. "Laßt euch doch sein Todt bewegen  
Euer Hartsein abzulegen,  
Fallet doch in tiefster Reue  
Demutsvoll zu Gott aufs Neue.
45. "O noch sind die Gnadentage,  
Ach ich bitte: keiner wage  
Doch sein Buße thun bis morgen,  
Heute sollt ihr dafuer sorgen.
46. "Tretet doch vor Gott mit Weinen,  
Seid doch nicht hart wie die Steien  
Laßt doch euer Herz erweichen  
Daß ihr moecht Gnad erreichen.
47. "So will ich auch noch euch Brueder  
Die wir mit einander Glieder,  
Bitten, daß ihr doch mit Flehen  
Wollt zu Gott in Demut gehen.
48. "Christum als den Oberhirten  
Bitten, daß er doch Berguert  
Wolle mit des Geistesgaben  
Einen Mann vor uns zu haben.
49. "Nach des Herren Wort und Lehren  
Einen Aeltesten bescheren,  
Der an unsrer Spitze trete,  
Wie der alte Mann es thaete.
50. "Auf dir treuster Heiland trauen,  
Ja auf dir wir Arme schauen,  
Daß du wollst uns Gnade schenken  
Und zum Letzten alles lenken.
51. "Hiermit will ich nun vollenden  
Was durch meine schwache Haende  
Zum Andenken ist geflossen  
Sich aus Liebe hat ergossen.
52. "Es ist dieses sehr geringe,  
Unvollkommen das ich bringe,  
Nicht geschehen wien zu kraenken,  
Sondern als zu ein Andenken.
53. "In was Leid und Trauernissen  
Wir versetzt sind weil wir missen  
Unsern lieben alten Vater  
Der uns stets hat wohlgerathen.
54. "Nicht soll er vollkommen scheinen  
Denn er selbst bat oft mit Weinen  
Ihm sein' Fehler zu verzeihen,  
Die sprach er selbst, viele seilen.
55. "Recht zwar wollt er's gerne machen  
Doch kann bei den vielen Sachen,  
Auch wohl ja was sein versehen  
Welches wir sehr gern' gestehen.
56. "Ihn drang ein sehr wirksam Leben  
Dabei war er auch umgeben  
Mit Schwachheiten wie wir alle.  
Die wir noch im Fleische wallen.
57. "Christus nur der war vollkommen  
Unter allen Tausend Frommen  
Ist noch keiner es gewesen  
Wie wir in den Schriften lesen.
58. "Brueder! Wenn wir uns besehen  
Muessen wir nicht gern gestehen  
Daß wir bei den besten Wollen  
Doch nicht sind so wie wir sollen?
59. "Also muß man uebergehen  
In der Liebe solch's versehen  
Die aus Schwachheiten vorkommen  
Selbsten bei den groeßten Frommen.
60. "Laßt uns selbst uns recht wahrnehmen  
So wird vieles uns beschaemen  
Das wir noch an uns erkennen  
Faßt unzählig aufzunennen.
61. "Zu dem Ende bitt ich Allen:  
Laßt uns nicht muthwillig fallen  
Und in Suendenlust ergeben  
Sondern uns mit Ernst bestreben.
62. "Einen frommen Kampf zu streiten,  
Damit wir uns recht bereiten,  
Immer Völliger zu werden  
Weil wir leben auf der Erden.
63. "Ruhe wird erst dorten werden,  
Wenn wir einsten von der Erden  
Unsern Geist in Gottes Haenden  
Ihm am Ende uebersenden. AMEN.  
"Heinrich Balzer."''<sup>44</sup>

## FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER TWELVE. HISTORICAL REFLECTIONS

1. See Roy Loewen, *op.cit.* for additional information regarding Aeltester David P. Reimer.
2. David Reimer, "The history of our Reimer family", in *Reimer Familienregister* John C. Reimer, editor, (Steinbach, Manitoba, Family Book Committee, 1958) at page 14.
3. Omit.
4. David P. Reimer, "Die Entstehung und Geschichte der Evangelischen Mennoniten Gemeinde (Kleine Gemeinde)," in *The Sesquicentennial Jubilee, op.cit.*, 89-90.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Klaas Reimer, in "Ereignisse und Begebenheiten so wie die Ursache wie und Wodurch die sogenannte Kleine Gemeinde entstanden ist" in Peter Toews, *Sammlung . . . zur Historie, op.cit.*, 30.

7. *Ibid.*, 30-31.
8. Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Moody Press, Chicago, 1979), 709.
9. Klaas Reimer, *op.cit.*, 30-31.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, 31-32.
12. *Ibid.*, 32.
13. Abraham Friesen, *Eine Einfache Erklarung* (Danzig druck der Gerhardtzn Offizin, 1845) 1.
14. *Ibid.*, 3-4.
15. *Ibid.*, 4-9.
16. Klaas Reimer, in Peter Toews *Sammlung op.cit.*, 55.
17. C. Henry Smith, *The Story of the Mennonites* (Berne, Indiana, Mennonite Book Concern, 1941). 422-423.
18. Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 93.
19. Thielmann J. van Braght, *Martyrs Mirror*, *op.cit.*, 415.
20. J.C. Wenger, *The Complete Works of Menno Simons*, *op.cit.*, 382.
21. Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 131.
22. Paul Showalter, "Obbe Philips", ME 4, 9-10.
23. Peter Toews, *Sammlung*, *op.cit.*, 55.
24. Neff van der Zijpp, "Apostolic Succession", ME 1, 134-141.
25. Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 173.
26. Franz Isaac, *op.cit.*, 269.
27. Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 93. Peter M. Friesen goes on to say of Klaas Reimer and the Kleine Gemeinde as follows: The Kleine Gemeinde was a messenger calling the Molotschna Mennonites to repentance, but it would appear to us, because it was too narrow-minded, too frightened, too isolationist and opposed to education, it never made a profound impact. 'Kleengemendsch'—all those attitudes associated with the Kleine Gemeinde—had very definite connotations for the Molotschna Mennonites". Hopefully these comments can be dealt with in a further volume. But such categorical and unfounded statements have not contributed to brotherhood. With fellow Mennonites who possessed such attitudes, the Kleine Gemeinde and other Anabaptist-Mennonites in Russia had no need for enemies. It is amazing that not only had the Aeltesten Wedel and Goertz adopted new beliefs contrary to evangelical teachings, they were also terribly offended that Klaas Reimer and a few others were still quite content to remain with the faith of their fathers and that the Kleine Gemeinde was not prepared to immediately abandon its faith at the mere mention of the names Bangel or Jung-Stilling. What a pity!
28. Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 328, 380 and elsewhere.
29. James Juhnke, "East West and Home", in *Mennonite Life*, March 1975, 10-11.
30. Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 93 and 281.
31. *Ibid.*, 127-135.
32. *Ibid.*, 94.
33. *Ibid.*
34. P.M. Friesen, *Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruedershaft in Ruszland* (Halbstaedt, Taurien, Raduga, 1911), 76.
35. John A. Toews, *op.cit.*, 61.
36. John C. Wenger, *Mennonite in Europe* (Scottsdale, Mennonite Publishing House, 1971) 276-277.
37. David P. Reimer, *Reimer Familienregister*, *op.cit.*, 19.
38. *Ibid.*, 404. It should be noted that many individuals would be descendant of Klaas Reimer through more than one ancestor.
39. Certainly many of his descendants enjoy peace and prosperity solely due to the sacrifices which Klaas Reimer (1770-1837) was prepared to make. This fact would become more meaningful to the reader who would make the effort to drive over the area between Steinbach, Giroux, Ste. Anne and Landmark, Manitoba, and take note that many of the prosperous farms and fertile lands are owned and enjoyed by the descendants of Aeltester Klaas Reimer. Many of the most prosperous "Mennonite businesses" in Manitoba are now owned by the sixth and seventh generation descendants of Klaas Reimer.
40. Johan Friesen "Erklarung . . ." in *Sammlung . . . zur Historie der Kleine Gemeinde*, *op.cit.*, at 390-391.
41. Peter Toews, *Sammlung . . . zur Historie*, *ibid.*
42. Klaas Reimer, *Eine Predigt zum Abendmahl, geschrieben 1829* (Printed in U.S.A.) 29-31. In typical Kleine Gemeinde/Anabaptist fashion no publication details are noted in the publication. This is unfortunate from the historians viewpoint. (Courtesy of Henry R. Reimer, Riverton, Manitoba, 1981).
43. Peter Toews, *Sammlung*, *op.cit.*, 55-58.
- 43a. David P. Reimer, *Sesquicentennial*, *op.cit.*, 89-90.
44. Heinrich Balzer "Lied ueber des Absterben das Aeltester Klaas Reimer", in *Sammlung*, *op.cit.* 61-168.

# *Part Four.*

## *Theological Development*

### **Chapter Thirteen.**

### **Heinrich Balzer, Defender of the Faith**

#### **13.01 Introduction.**

In many respects theological developments in the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde are associated with Heinrich Balzer. Balzer was a minister of the "progressive" Orloff Gemeinde who joined the Kleine Gemeinde in 1833. The entire text of his major treatise **Faith and Reason**, together with some introductory comments by Dr. Robert Friedmann, will be set forth in Chapter Fourteen. The present chapter will contain the lesser known writings of Heinrich Balzer which include two major poems and four epistles. The chapter will close with a consideration of the significance of Balzer in Russian Mennonite historiography.

Regrettably, only too little is known about Heinrich Balzer, the man and the character. It is known that he was historically inclined, as Aeltester Peter Toews refers to a record book kept by Balzer which included the minutes of Kleine Gemeinde brotherhood meetings during the earlier years. Regrettably, Peter Toews was later unable to locate a copy of this book. Dr. Benjamin H. Unruh lists only one Heinrich Balzer family to have emigrated to Russia. This was a Heinrich Balzer from Schwein-grube in Prussia who had been elected as a minister in 1800. He emigrated to Russia in 1819 where he settled in the village of Groszweide which was part of the Rudnerweide group of villages in the southeastern portion of the Molotschna colony.<sup>2</sup> According to his writings Heinrich Balzer was resident in Tiede, Molotschna in 1833 and after.

If this is the same Heinrich Balzer then it appears that he first rejected the pietism of the Rudnerweide Gemeinde and then joined the Orloff Gemeinde which favoured a milder, more cultural form of pietism. In the end the gifted and talented minister found spiritual fulfillment in the "little" Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde of which he became member in 1833. By so doing Balzer became the sixth minister to leave another Gemeinde in favour of the Kleine Gemeinde. The fact that a prominent and veteran minister such as Balzer would give up his position in the prestigious Orloff Gemeinde must have been a severe blow to the opponents of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. Rev. Balzer died on June 1, 1846.<sup>3</sup> Regrettably he left no physical descendants in the Kleine Gemeinde.<sup>4</sup>

However, Rev. Heinrich Balzer did leave a tremendous spiritual legacy and heritage for the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde as well as for all the descendants of the Russian Mennonites. He was undoubtedly the leading Russian Mennonite intellectual of his time. His eloquent and articulate writing and thought provoking treatise provided a vibrant stimulus to the teachings of the Anabaptist-Mennonites and the Kleine Gemeinde. He was truly a valiant defender of the faith.

#### **13.02 A Poem in Farewell, 1833.**

At the time of his leaving the Orloff Gemeinde Heinrich Balzer composed a lengthy poem in which he explained his reasons for so doing. This poem was entitled "Ein Abschiedslied eines Predigers von seiner Gemeinde" or, in English, "A Minister's Poem of Farewell to his Gemeinde".

The poem bears the memorial that it was composed out of "heartfelt love for the God-seeking and godly-minded brethren in the Orloff Gemeinde, and as a friendly remembrance in farewell from Heinrich Balzer, their insignificant fellow sojourner on the road to eternity." In the poem, dated January 7, 1833, Balzer explains that he has been undergoing a tremendous spiritual conflict for the past two years. He has been convicted that the state of his former Gemeinde could no longer be reconciled with the teaching of the Holy Scripture.

Balzer describes the situation in most lamentable terms. Brethren are exercising revenge, and offenders are punished by instruments of force which belong only to the state. The seeking for honour, culture, power, and reputation, the practice of greed, deception, and falsehood are common place. In contrast Balzer appeals to the evangelical ideal of the Gemeinde as the holy assembly of God. All of Scripture manifests that it is the will of God that the Gemeinde purify itself to this end and

that evangelical discipline be practiced. Balzer explains that his spiritual struggle came to a head in the spring of 1832. Now his own will was broken under the hammerblow of the Spirit after which he was able to submit his will to God. He realized that God wishes to lead his people from the tents of Kedar in order that they might depart from the ways of Babel.

In stanza 28 Balzer explains that the decision to depart was made in the deepest sorrow and heartfelt anxiety. He loved his brethren dearly and found it almost impossible to leave. How gladly he would have led his brethren away from the evil ways. But God is the ruler of all destiny and has created a Gemeinde so that "like can go unto like". God has instituted a small assembly who of their own free will submit themselves to the cross of Christ. This assembly is for those who seek to beautify themselves according to the word and who at all times are prepared to be obedient members of the flock. Balzer admonishes his brethren to forsake the ways of the world if they wish to experience the love kiss of the Bridegroom. Those who are enraptured by the world will be devoured.

In stanza 39 Balzer pleads with his former brethren that they should not be angry with him. It is God who has led him to the Kleine Gemeinde whom he loves equally. He will continue to love his former brethren and to pray for them and hopefully they will do the like. He commits his former brethren to the Word of God and encourages them to study the same. He directs them to the earnestness and goodness of God. He pleads that they should not be offended when the Kleine Gemeinde does not partake in their efforts for secular achievement. For the Kleine Gemeinde is striving for an inwardly beautification, although they also remain full of sin and impurity. Nevertheless they stand as a living testimony of a separated assembly living in quiet peace. Balzer prays that his former brethren might realize the urgency of the matter during the dispensation of grace and before the wrath of God is ignited into flames. Balzer concludes his poem with heartfelt praise to his beloved Savior for having made manifest to him the evil striving of the world. He prays for strength for greater submission and that the Lord would also convict others unto renewal. He closes with a prayer for the Kleine Gemeinde as a small flock of lambs, that it might find grace and strength to persevere in the pilgrim's path and in the building of the spiritual Jerusalem.

## A Poem in Farewell

Melodie 113: Freu dich sehr, o meine Seele.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>1. Inn'rer Drang und heft'ges Treiben,<br/>Angst, Beklommenheit und Noth<br/>Hart und fest einander reiben,<br/>In mein Herze früh und spät,<br/>Tiefe Dehmut, inn'res Leid,<br/>Pressen, drücken allezeit.<br/>Will das Herze Ruhe finden,<br/>Heißt es: fliehe von den Sünden.</p> <p>2. Adventstage zweiter Woche,<br/>Ihr ward mir ein harter Stand;<br/>In euch ward um Jesu Joche<br/>Und um Eitelkeit und Tand<br/>Streit und Kampf mit Ernst geführt,<br/>Jesus selber triumphirt.<br/>Gott sein Dank, als Überwinder,<br/>Und in ihm, auch ich nicht minder.</p> <p>3. Wollt ihr Lieben, gerne wissen<br/>Warum ich von euch ausgeh'?<br/>Und fragt ihr mit Thränengüssen,<br/>Warum ich Euch solches Weh'<br/>Herz'leid und Betrübniß mach'?<br/>O, so denkt nur fleißig nach;<br/>Nehmt des Herren Wort zur Seite,<br/>Und merkt, worauf das hindeute.</p> | <p>4. Nicht von Scherz noch lieblos Wesen,<br/>Wird mein Herz so sehr gepreßt;<br/>Jesus hat es sich erlesen,<br/>Drum Sein Geist nicht Ruhe läßt,<br/>Bis ich mich von dem entzieh',<br/>Was noch offenbar allhie,<br/>Bei uns gegen Seinen Willen<br/>Sich in Unschuldsschein will hüllen.</p> <p>5. Merkt, Geliebte! was Gott fordert<br/>Von den Seinen in der Welt.<br/>Sein Wort, das uns recht beordert,<br/>Spricht dem, der hier Freundschaft hält<br/>Mit der Welt und Sündenlust,<br/>Und nicht flieht was Ihm bewußt<br/>Alle Gnade, Kraft und Leben,<br/>Ewig ab, sie ihm zu geben.</p> <p>6. Nun nehmt Gottes Wort zum Spiegel<br/>Und beschaut doch unsern Leib,<br/>(Gemeine)<br/>Die nach Christi Wort und Siegel<br/>Soll als Sein erkaufte Weib,<br/>Ohne Flecken, zart und schön,<br/>Auch ohn' Tadel heilig sein,<br/>Und beprüft sie daneben<br/>Wie sie steht in diesem Leben.</p> |
|--|---|

7. Hat sie noch ein starkes Wollen,  
Und ist Schwachheit bloß die Schuld?  
Daß sie mit der Welt der Tollen  
So vermengt ist und so wild;  
Nach dem Fleischessinn hinlebt,  
Und der Eitelkeit anklebt.  
O! so wird der Herr in Gnaden  
Sie noch von dem Flush-entladen
8. Aber, ach! mein Herze bebet,  
Wenn es sieht den frechen Sinn,  
Worin manches Glied schon lebet  
Und von eins aufs Andr'e hin  
Taumelnd geht so froh und frei;  
Und nicht selten Spötterei  
Über Gottes Wort sich zeigt  
Und von Gott sich ganz abneiget.
9. Rache üben, Brüder strafen  
An Person und Eigentum,  
Nach der Welt und Reichtum gaffen,  
Ehre, Gunst, Gewalt und Ruhm,  
Geiz, Betrug und Lügen frei,  
Schelmenlieder ohne Scheu,  
Darf man üben mit Vergnügen,  
Und bleibt so im Tode liegen.
10. Ungehorsam, Pracht und Spielen  
Wollust ohne Scham und Zucht,  
Geilheit, Frechheit ist bei Vielen,  
Tabak stinkend bis zur Sucht.  
Raucht und braucht man ohne Maß,  
Fast ohn' End' und Unterlaß;  
Eitle Bücher nebst Romanen,  
Märchen, Fabeln auch zusammen.
11. Mit Nachrichten von Weltwesen,  
Lies't man emsig und vertieft  
Sich dadurch so stark im lesen  
Daß man nicht des Feindes Gift,  
Das er darin ausgestreut,  
Ahnen kann; Unachtsamkeit  
Hat den Besten so benommen,  
Daß der Feind das Feld gewonnen.
12. Bildung nach der Welt Manieren  
Kunst, Geschicklichkeit und Witz,  
Durch Gelehrsamkeit zu zieren.  
Nimmt in uns'rer Mitte Sitz.  
Die Vernunft blind't Einfaltssinn,  
Man strebt da am stärksten hin,  
Was des Leibes Wohlfahrt gründet,  
Und in dem man Wohlstand findet.
13. Und ob in Begräbnistagen,  
Gottesfurcht und Innigkeit;  
Oder ob man Fleischbehagen  
Recht zum Spott der Sterblichkeit.  
Nur den Taback ehrt und meint,  
Und als Abgott, wie es scheint,  
Je dem heil'gen Fest muß weihen,  
Wird einst jener Tag uns zeigen.
14. Auf den Festen und Hochzeiten  
Ist die Gottesfurcht verbannt;  
Prafen, Saufen, Lustbarkeiten,  
Fleischlich Singen und verwandt  
Beiderlei Geschlechter sein,  
Schamlos sich einander freu'n;  
Zucht und Keuschheit abgewichen,  
Ist zur Freiheit eingeschlichen.
15. Spötter! laßt Euch ja nicht dünken  
Daß ihr Gott betrügen werd't;  
Er laßt durch sein Wort euch winken.  
Wollt ihr dem gerechten Schwert,  
Seiner Rache einst entgeh'n,  
So müßt ihr von dem absteh'n,  
Was ein Gräuel ist zu nennen,  
Wollet ihr nicht ewig brennen.
16. Dies hat so die Zeit allmählig,  
Und behutsam eingeführt;  
Daß der Sachen fast unzählig  
Durch Gewohnheit kaum gespürt;  
Wider Gottes Wort und Will'  
In der Freiheit allzuviel  
Als erlaubte Sachen gelten;  
Frei geübet nicht gar selten.
17. Selbst die Wächter auf den Mauern  
Zions Schweigen hierzu still.  
Mancher zwar seufzt mit bedauern,  
In sein'm Herzen, sucht und will  
Von dem Übel sein befreit;  
Doch fürcht't man sich, recht bereit  
Mit des Herren Wort zu strafen,  
Und das Böse wegzuschaffen.
18. Nach des Herren Wort zu schmücken  
Der Gemeinde durch den Bann,  
Hat der Zaun all solche Lücken,  
Daß schon jeder Freche kann  
In des Herren Haus eingeh'n  
Und als Glied vereinigt sein;  
Geh't zum heil'gen Abendmahle,  
Und verunrein'gt dadurch Alle.
19. Denn die Werke die er treibet  
Sind im Licht und offenbar;  
Zeigen, daß er ist und bleibt  
Mit Vergnügen in der Schaar,  
Die gottlos und böse sind;  
Denn auch er ist so gesinnt,  
Daß er Scherz und Narrheit liebet,  
Und sich noch als Christ ausgiebet.
20. Hierein fehlen nun die Frommen,  
Daß sie keinen Unterschied  
Zwischen Sünder angenommen,  
Und daß, wo man offen sieht,  
Daß Verkehrtheit, Fleischessinn,  
Sich stürzt ins Verderben hin,  
Ihn durch's Abendmahl noch trösten,  
Du bist auch von den Erlösten.
21. Lehrt die Schrift doch solche meiden,  
Die noch fleischlich sein gesinn't.  
Und besieht sich abzuschneiden  
Von den'n, so ganz gottlos sind.  
Wie ein wenig Sauer Teig —  
Spricht das Wort — so wird auch euch  
Böse Sitten gar verderben  
Und euch geistlich machen sterben.
22. Suche, liebe theure Seele,  
In des Herren werthes Wort,  
Ob du findest eine Stelle,  
In der Bibel, hie und dort  
Die ein solches Leben lehrt,  
Oder nicht davon abkehrt;  
Such', und du wirst wahrlich finden  
Daß dies sind verdammte Sünden.

23. Wer auf's Fleisch den Tod hier säet,  
Und nach Fleischeslüsten lebt,  
Einst den ewgen Tod auch mähet,  
Weil er selbst darnach gestrebt.  
Gott ist ein gerechter Gott,  
Mit Ihm treibt man keinen Spott;  
Will der Mensch sich nicht bekehren,  
Stirbt er ewig nach Begehren.
24. Dies, getreue fromme Herzen,  
Die ihr Gott fürcht't und vertraut,  
Ist, was nur macht viele Schmerzen,  
Und mein Herze so benant,  
Daß ich seit zwei Jahren hin,  
Nicht mehr ruhig in mir bin;  
Doch erst dieses Spätjahr heftig  
Mich gedrungen stark und kräftig.
25. Gottes Geist sprach unablässig  
In mein Herze durch sein Wort;  
„Du mußt von der Welt dich gänzlich  
„Reißen, und an einen Ort  
„Geh'n, wo man 'es redlich meint  
„Und die Schwachheit stets beweint.  
„Willst du zu dem Leben gehen,  
„So muß ich dich folgsam sehen.
26. „Ich will die Gemeine läutern  
„Die ich mir so theu'r erkaufte;  
„Ich will mir mein Haus erweitern,  
„Ich will meine theure Braut,  
„Die hier unter Mesech wohnt,  
„Und in Schwachheit seufzt und stöhnt,  
„Aus des Kedars Hütten ziehen,  
„daß sie Babels Wesen fliehen.
27. Hart gedrängt auf beiden Seiten  
War mein Herze schon seither,  
Matt und müde von dem streiten,  
Zwischen Fleisch und Geist jemeht,  
Bis der Herr mein Willen brach,  
Mit dem starken Hammerschlag;  
Da mein eigner Will' sich legte,  
Und sich in dem Herren fügte.
28. Zwar wird mir es schwer zu trennen,  
Mich von eurer lieben Zahl;  
Mein Herz will in mir fast brennen,  
Wenn ich euch so um und All  
In der Näh und Ferne seh',  
O! wie thut mein Herz mir weh'!  
Könnt ich Alle Euch abnehmen;  
Von der Welt Euch abgewöhnen.
29. Fragt ihr: „Hirte, warum gehest  
„Du von deiner Heerde weg?  
„Da Du doch mit Augen siehest  
„Diese Wüste, Dorn und Heck;  
„Wo so viel Gefahren sind,  
„Werter, Ungestüm und Wind;  
„Böse Thiere heimlich schleichen,  
„Und die arme Heerd' verschuechen?
30. Sag ich: „Schäfflein! die ihr liebet  
„Jesum den getreuen Hirt,  
„Er als Oberhirte giebet,  
„Seinen Knechten selbst als Wirth  
„Instruktion und Regein aus;  
„Darnach sie in Seinem Haus,  
„Sich ganz pünktlich richten müssen,  
„Und nicht thun nach eignen Schlüssen.
31. Er, als Oberhirte selber,  
Führt die Aufsicht überall,  
Des gemeinen Nutzens halber,  
Theilet Er nach freier Wahl  
Seine Heerd in Theilen ein,  
Nach der Güte grob und fein;  
Und läßt Gleich zu Gleiches gehen,  
So hat Er es Lust zu sehen.
32. Abgetheilt ein kleines Heerdscheu,  
Hieß Er schon seit ein'ger Zeit,  
Aus der großen Zahl der Mächt'gen  
Sich aussondern durch Bescheid.  
Seinen Knechten, den'n Er gab,  
Selber einen Hirtenstab,  
Muth, Verordnung und Befehlen,  
Um zu weiden fromme Seelen.
33. Diese Heerde ist ganz eigen,  
Sie besteht aus freier Wahl,  
Jeder unter ihr muß zeigen;  
Daß er ist ein Glied der Zahl:  
Die gehorsam wollen sein,  
Und sich üben zart und rein,  
Nach des Herren Wort zu schmücken,  
Und im Kreuzesweg zu bücken.
34. Nun ist an mir, dem Geringsten,  
Einer Seiner Knechte auch,  
Sein Wort, d'r an ich nicht im Mind'sten  
In dem frühern Hirtenbrauch  
Denken konnte, stark und laut  
So ergangen, wie ihr schaut,  
Das mich heißet ruft und forderi,  
Und zu gehen mich beordert.
35. Wer bin ich, ich arme Erde,  
Der sich widersetzen sollt;  
Denn wer dessen Ruf: „Es werde!“  
Himmel, Erd zusammen rollt.  
Ach, Sein Wort ist Feuerkraft  
In den Beinen wenn Er schafft,  
Daß es stark und kräftig schallet,  
Alles Blut im Herzen walle.
36. Er heißt mich von Euch ausgehen;  
Ich, als Hirte steh' voran,  
Könnt ihr recht die Wahrheit sehen  
Die auf einer schmalen Bahn  
Nur alleine gelten muß;  
Und wenn ihr als Friedenskuß,  
Von dem Bräutigam eurer Seelen,  
In dem innern Grund wollt fühlen.
37. So müßt ihr die Welt verlassen,  
Und mit frechen Sündern nicht,  
Das, was Jesus heißt lassen,  
Lieben, als wenn euch sein Licht  
Nicht in eure Herzen scheint;  
Denn wenn ihr euch noch vereint.  
Mit der Welt in einem Bunde.  
So geht ihr mit ihr zu Grunde.
38. Laßt der Welt ihr weltlich Wesen;  
Sie ist blind, verucht und toll.  
Sie hat sich zur Lust erlesen,  
Und davon ist sie ganz voll  
Eitelkeit und Sündenwust;  
Mammonslieb' ist ihre Lust;  
Gottes Wort setzt sie bei Seite  
Und verträumt das süße Heute.

39. Nun, die ihr mein Herz so drücket,  
Seid nicht böse, daß von Euch,  
Mich der Herr zu Andern schicket,  
Die ich mit Euch liebe gleich.  
Schließt mich im Gebet stets ein,  
Wie es auch bei mir soll sein,  
Gleich zu Gleiches sucht sich gerne  
In dem Herren nah, und ferne.
40. Ich empfehl Euch Gottes Worte  
Das da reich und mächtig ist,  
Dringet durch die enge Pforte;  
Folgt dem Herren Jesum Christ.  
In Verachtung, Spott und Hohn;  
Laßt nicht Weltlust euch davon,  
Und um Eure Krone bringen,  
Ihr müßt darum ernstlich ringen.
41. Flieht die Sünde, acht! ich bitte  
Euch zum Schluß noch Tausendmal.  
Gottes Ernst und Gottes Güte,  
Merkt im Worte überall,  
Dämpft den Geist nicht, welcher spricht:  
Sünder, willst du gehen nicht,  
Von der Welt zum gläubigen Haufen,  
So müßt du zur Hölle laufen.
42. Stoßt Euch nicht am niedern Wesen  
Bei den Frommen wenn ihr seht,  
Daß sie sich zum Schmuck erlesen,  
Nicht was vor der Welt hoch steht.  
Sie glänzt nicht von außen sehr;  
Sie tracht't nur im Innern mehr.  
Vor dem Herren treu zu leben,  
Und sich Ihm ganz zu ergeben.
43. Denkt nicht, daß sie frei von Sünden,  
Und von Schwachheit schon entblößt,  
Nein, Sie muß noch wohl empfinden,  
Wovon sie so gern erlöst,  
Möchte sein und sehnlichst bitt't:  
Daß der Herr nach seiner Gü't',  
Ihr in allem stärken wolle;  
Will gern sein, was sie sein solle.
44. Doch flieht sie mit vollem Ernste,  
Jeden Mutwill frecher Sinn,  
Darf bei ihr auf's allerfernste,  
Nicht zur Freiheit schleichen ein.  
Sie stellt durch ihr Leben klar,  
Ein lehendig Beispiel dar:  
Wie die Gläub'gen abgeschieden,  
Leben hier im stillen Frieden.
45. Nun Ihr Lieben! sei's geschieden,  
Kann es denn nicht anders sein.  
Will der Herr daß wir hienieden  
Noch vereint gehen ein.  
In ein geistlich Friedenshaus  
So müßt ihr von Euch hinaus,  
Alles böse, gottlos Wesen,  
Fegen mit des Wortes Besen.
46. Oder wenn Ihr werd't befinden,  
Daß dies garnicht möglich ist;  
So macht Euch von frechen Sünden,  
(Ach ich bitt um Jesu Christ,)  
Euch doch los in dieser Zeit,  
Damit in der Ewigkeit  
Ihr nicht ihre Straf empfindet  
Wenn Gott's Zorn sich hat entzündet.
47. Amen! Jesus, teures Leben,  
Tausend tausend Dank sei Dir,  
Daß Du mir das bö's Bestreben,  
Dieser Welt gezeigt hier.  
Gieb mir Kraft, daß Fleisch und Welt,  
Keine Stiche in mir hält;  
Dir will ich mich eigen geben,  
Du, du bist mein teures Leben.
48. Jesu! teurer Oberhirte,  
Dir befehl ich die Gemein',  
Einen treuen Knecht umgürte  
Der an meiner Statt wird sein.  
Mit dem Helm in deinem Wort  
Und Du bleib o höchster Hort  
Selbst ihr Leiter und Regierer  
Gieb ihr lebendige Führer.
49. Schlag mit deines Wortes Hammer,  
Ruchlos Wesen, böser Schein,  
Dadurch ew'ge Not und Jammer,  
In der Höll' wird ewig sein;  
Doch in der Gemein' entzwei,  
Und sie durch dein Wort erneu.  
Laß sie alle folgsam werden,  
Weil sie noch sind auf der Erden.
50. Stärke Herr, dein armes Häuflein,  
Das in dieser Welt so gern  
Als die armen, schwachen Schäflein,  
Folgen möchte ihrem Herrn.  
Rüste ihre Wächter aus  
Daß sie dir dein geistlich Haus  
In des Zions Mauern bauen.  
Und Dich Herr einst alle schauen.

Amen.

### 13.03 Epistle to the Aeltesten, 1833.

The Epistle to the Aeltesten Fast, Wedel, and Goertz must be read together with **The Poem in Farewell** as it completes Balzer's explanation for his departure from the Orloff Gemeinde. The two writings were published together under the title of **Der Balzer Brief** in 1902. The printer of the booklet was A. Wolfe of Plum Coulee, Manitoba, but in typical Anabaptist-Mennonite fashion the booklet does not specify the name of the publisher or the publishing group. It is quite possible that the publication was sponsored by the Scratching River Kleine Gemeinde at Morris, Manitoba, which was only a short distance from Plum Coulee.

**The Balzer Brief**, in contrast to **A Poem in Farewell**, is more of a direct challenge and admonition to the Aeltesten Bernhard Fast, Peter Wedel and Franz Goertz who were forsaking the doctrine and faith of the forefathers. Balzer explains the process by which the subversion of attitudes unto

the ways of the world lead away from godly obedience. In particular, he warns against the propagation of the new teachings (pietism) in schools where innocent minds are unable to make the subtle distinctions required to differentiate between delusion and truth. The pursuit of sophistication and worldly refinement will lead the people unto a terrible destruction. The doctrinal indifference and outright apostasy of these three pietist Aeltesten have created a womb for the birth of a **basilisk**, a lizard is so poisonous that the mere look and the breath were said to be fatal. In closing, Balzer admonishes the Aeltesten to give heed so that their flock will not be subverted by the deluded men who are seeking for a complete desolation.

“**The Balzer letter** to the Church Aeltesten Bernhard Fast, Peter Wedel, and Franz Goertz, 1833:

“May the precious peace of God which is bestowed upon the redeemed by the Holy Spirit, rest upon you and be the salve of your hearts, so that Christ in you would thereby be enflamed, unto spiritual life in the Gemeinden which are bound to your souls, so that through you they might be led to the everlasting fountain of life in God through Jesus Christ: Who has revealed Himself in His word, and thereby prepared the way to the Father. Unto Him be honour in eternity. Amen.

“For my people have committed two evils. They have forsaken me the fountain of living water, and have hewed themselves wells, which are broken cisterns which can hold no water. Jeremiah 2:13.

“Honourable Aeltesten! I must confess publically to the honour of God and unto the praise of His glorious name, that ever since I read the short book by Hunziger a particular inspiration and impulse has been awakened in me, which I am unable to extinguish. Days and weeks had flown by before I myself was truly able to perceive and realize what affect these writings would have on us. Through the grace of God the matter evolved within me until finally I was shocked, as I saw before my eyes, our people rushing madly unto a general desolation. This consists of a departure and turning away from our beloved God, which has been the common ruination of all flesh since time immemorial and which the evil enemy seeks to promote with all his might. Lamentably, it is part of the human condition that man without fail separates himself from God and His grace through sin and vice thereby committing his immortal life unto an unsaved eternity.

“From the time of the great Reformation until the present many benevolent seekers of truth have honestly endeavoured to improve and ennoble mankind through numerous reform measures. However, there is one and only one way, through which this can take place which has clearly been revealed to us by the Gospel. This way consists of faith in Jesus and the singleminded following of His teachings and commandments, unto which the Holy Scripture is the precious Word of Life, direction marker and guide. The evil Satan must have been very earnestly minded in order to innocently lead these precious and worthy benefactors away from this direct and only way to the heart of the Father. In order that this would remain unnoticed as much as possible, Satan for a time allowed these reformers to closely parallel the true way. Then he gradually led them further away so that finally they took a completely contrary course and departed from God instead of coming to Him.

“Through circumstances which came together in my life’s history about a year or somewhat more ago, God in His grace very forcefully demonstrated to me that in many ways I had departed from the simplicity in Christ and the Gospel. I realized that this booklet was the key to much which I had not previously perceived and which I had unknowingly promoted myself. Because this pitiable man so clearly demonstrates that he is obviously very distant from the right way, we all naturally confess that he is on a dangerous road of error.

“But the grace of God clearly convinces me that I would say: We, nearly all of us, find ourselves on this false course, and Hunziger is a concern to us merely because he has progressed such a good distance ahead of us. Compassion and sorrow overwhelms my heart when I feel and see our people hurrying onward to a great and general desolation with the speed of flight. One always believes that the moral and ethical circumstances are being bettered, but unknowingly one is working unto the ruin and dissolution of one’s own people. The entire object of the evil one is that the Christian would become worldly-minded and finally entirely worldly. Such a Christian then belongs to Satan because the world is an abomination to God. James 4:4. As our fellowship here, thanks be to God, is still a good distance away from the great world, the devil must discreetly get on with his work in order to draw us to him. Eventually man abandons the precious fountain of life which is Jesus, and creates his own broken wells which will no more satisfy his thirst then none at all. Even worse, such wells are deceiving, for man then believes himself to be in possession of the source of life.

“When I was compelled, through the grace of God, to realize the foregoing I was unable to ward off the irrepressible compulsion in my heart to make my beloved fellow confessionists aware of the threatening danger and thus to bring to light the surreptitious transformation from Christendom to the world. When I was brought to this realization, albeit against my own will, I composed a little booklet for this purpose, which I hereby lovingly submit to you my precious Aeltesten. This booklet (Faith and Reason) is enclosed herewith. Please receive it from me as a demonstration of my most inward love and highest regard for you. I was compelled and inspired to prepare this writing by my inward spirit which was too powerful for me to resist. Sometimes I was almost numbed by a voice within me which cried loudly and clearly, ‘Watch, and be on guard, for a time of deception is drawing nigh, inasmuch that if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.’ Matthew 24:24.

“I am afraid that our Gemeinde is underway unto desolation with double speed. First, great wealth, then a disposition unto worldly knowledge. And then a focus and refinement of the senses



for comedy and theatre (drama) in novels and ostentatious displays. Then follow atrophied (legalistic) morals and practices without Jesus. And then big business and civil service (the magistracy) and finally the military and service in war. Before matters come to such a condition, Satan must first fashion within our society the apparent ability to combine and unite in one person the cultured worldling and the Christian. The end of our people in their present constitution will come as soon as this concept has gained general acceptability.

Oh! A time which proffers terror and fright when the fact of the decline truly strikes my heart. For we must sever our people from their apostasy to the world. Indeed, we must destroy such bridges of departure from Christendom to the world. Alas! Aeltesten, pay heed for your people are being played out of your hand and you are to be enticed along with them. Retrench and cling firmly to the fundamentals of our fellowship and do not risk any departure therefrom. You must give thought to all the changes which lie before our people. As soon as our young people will be educated (brain-washed) and enlightened in the fashion of the world, and after these polished worldlings have been in control of the rudder for the second and third generation! Suddenly they will have departed from the yoke of simplicity and brought great inertia to such power so that it will continually increase in strength with time and eventually stagger unto the great universal ruination, out of control.

"Aeltesten, arm yourself manly and paternally, against the consensus in our fellowship to refine the teaching methods in our schools (educational philosophy) and to expand more into the realm of learned (contrived) knowledge. Oh, but do not allow this to proceed beyond our essential needs! Aeltesten, do consider our basic beliefs and constitute yourselves manly and fatherly against the transgressions of our fellow brethren who are merely promoting what is fashionable in the world.

"Aeltesten! do prepare yourselves manly and strong, against refinements of the senses and for a reading of novels and fantasy news of the world. Just like the industrious and diligent ants, they each contribute a small iota to the decline in the hunger for the Word of God. Inevitably and unnoticed they prepare the senses of our people for theatre, comedy and a craving for spectacle. Your indifferent example has already had a powerful effect upon your Gemeinden which love you dearly. But I am possessed of a firm hope that many a soul, even if not the entire fellowship, can be directed back to simplicity in Christ, and to be led back to the Lord Jesus as a blessed people and away from the treacherous world.

"This sophisticated desertion to the world through the revision of our understanding is far more dangerous than manifest sins and vices. A spy in disguise is far more dangerous to a military army than the bombs and explosives which can be seen. Was Judith in her beautified display not far more harmful to Hologernes (Book of Judith, Apocrypha) than the armed men of the people? Alas, the tremendous craving for novels of fantasy and the desire and greed for the accumulation of wealth which is presently being promoted so strongly through the educational constitution of our youth will bring terrible results. The consequence for our fellowship will be the birth of a basilisk so dangerous that one would faint at the sight should it appear before us today in a likeness of its power and might once it will be thirty years old.

Aeltesten, my respect for you as fathers should embarrass and silence me but my love for you fills me with trust and hope, so that I cannot remain silent. An earnest voice is calling from the depth of my heart. Pay heed for your flock. Deluded men will arise who will seek for a rapid desolation among you.

"Precious Aeltesten! I bid you in love that you will forgive me for those aspects among the views which I have laid before you with which you are not in full agreement. But I am earnestly convinced that you are united in one mind with the Gospel. I will inwardly continue to love you worthy Aeltesten, my beloved fellow ministers, and your precious Gemeinden as I always have until now but I must teach and create awareness in accordance with my views. Hezekial 3:18. I will earnestly flee from quarrels and that which can give rise to disputation and through the grace of God I will continue in love and toleration.

"With heartfelt love I request your true intercession. Your weak and loving fellow servant of the Gospel".

Tiege; January 1833. "Heinrich Balzer".

### 13.04 Faith and Reason. (See Chapter Fourteen)

The single most important writing of Heinrich Balzer was his 1833 treatise entitled **Faith and Reason**. In this work Balzer attempted to bring together into one united whole, various elements of his thesis of an accelerating moral decline and spiritual apostasy in the Russian Mennonite world. Balzer advocates restitution of the New Testament church. Men like Menno Simons had been led and inspired of God to be able to see through the dim and distant corridors of time to the golden and classical age of the Christian church. This was the apostolic order constituted and founded by the Lord Jesus Himself. In order to recapture the essence of the teachings of Christ, the Anabaptist-Mennonite leaders had to break away the rubble of centuries of tradition and Godless living in the church. They had to embrace the faith and teaching which had survived through the centuries though almost obliterated at times. The highest authority of the Christian was the evangelical teaching and example of Jesus and His apostles. The uppermost desire of the believer should be to follow in obedience through the Gemeinde which was the spiritual bride of Christ.

Overall, **Faith and Reason** provides an excellent exposition of Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde thought and practice during the 1830's. Although conceptually dated, **Faith and Reason** stands as a brilliant work for its time. Heinrich Balzer was obviously regarded as a great theologian with a tremendous gift for the exposition of the evangelical faith. His treatise **Faith and Reason** continued to be well known among the Kleine Gemeinde for many decades after the group had left Russia. Numerous hand written reproductions were made of this work and circulated among the members of the Kleine Gemeinde in Russia as well as later in America. Unrelated archival work by this writer in the Blumenort area in 1981 brought forth a handwritten copy of this work in no less than three collections of Kleine Gemeinde writings, those of, Cornelius P. Janzen (1863-1941)<sup>5</sup>, David L. Plett (1863-1953)<sup>6</sup>, and Mrs. Klaas P. Reimer (1874-1963)<sup>7</sup>. Another handwritten copy of this treatise was included among the writings of John E. Friesen (1881-1976), a Blumenort area farmer<sup>8</sup>. In addition a copy of the published edition of **Faith and Reason** was included among the papers of Abraham R. Penner (1874-1956)<sup>9</sup>. All of these individuals were born during the last years in Russia or during the very first years in Manitoba.

This generation appeared to have a deep appreciation of the work as well as an understanding of its relevance to daily discipleship and simplicity in Christ. **Faith and Reason** was also well-known to the leaders of the Kleine Gemeinde. A complete copy of this writing is prominently featured by Aeltester Peter Toews in his **Sammlung . . . Zur Historie der Kleine Gemeinde der Mennoniten**<sup>10</sup>. In addition a copy of the published edition of **Faith and Reason** was located among the writings of Jacob F. Isaac who had replaced Abraham L. Friesen as Aeltester of the Nebraska/Kansas Kleine Gemeinde in 1917.<sup>11</sup> But with the passing decades **Faith and Reason** as well as a mass of other Kleine Gemeinde literature fell into obscurity.

Fortunately **Faith and Reason** again came to light when it came to the attention of Dr. Robert Friedmann in 1948. The article immediately caught his scholarly interest with the result that he prepared and published a translation in the April 1948 issue of **The Mennonite Quarterly Review**. He also included a brief introduction which provided a scholarly assessment of the treatise. Friedmann's translation of **Faith and Reason**, together with his introductory comments, are published in their entirety as Chapter Fourteen. A few of the footnotes have been deleted because they were based on the somewhat misleading and incomplete historical material available in 1948.

Dr. Robert Friedmann was of the opinion that **Faith and Reason** by Heinrich Balzer was one of the most stimulating statements in Mennonite literature.<sup>12</sup> In view of this statement it is of interest to refer briefly to the man who rediscovered these writings. Dr. Robert Friedmann (1891-1970) had served in the Austrian Army during World War One. After the war he pursued his doctoral studies at the University of Vienna where he was introduced to a number of Hutterian writings by coincidence. These writings sparked his own conversion to the faith as well as a lifelong interest in the study of Anabaptist-Mennonite and Anabaptist-Hutterite history and theology. Dr. Friedmann is best known for his scholarly **Mennonite Piety through the Centuries**, published in 1949 and **The Theology of Anabaptism**, published in 1973.

The translation of the pastoral Goethe era German used among the Russian Mennonites during the 1830's is always a formidable task as many of the words used are no longer in current dictionaries. The sentence structure at the time was often involved and cumbersome as was also the thought structure employed by Balzer to express a complex theme. A sound translation is difficult for anyone not familiar with the vocabulary and subject matter. All in all, Dr. Friedmann has achieved a masterful translation of this thought provoking work. It is indeed fortunate for the descendants of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde that **Faith and Reason** came to the attention of a leading scholar such as Dr. Friedmann. His endorsement of the treatise attests to the veracity of Kleine Gemeinde teaching and practice relative to the original Anabaptist-Mennonite vision.

### 13.05 An Epistle to Heinrich Rempel in Altona, 1835.

In this epistle Balzer develops his theme of "simplicity in Christ". By nature man is allied with the forces of the evil one and only the mighty regenerative power of the grace of God can redeem him from its clutches. Consequently Balzer views the Christian life as a constant struggle to remain Godly minded instead of worldly minded. To accept the new teachings is tantamount to a voluntary surrender.

Balzer also defends his secession from the Orloff Gemeinde with the assertion that the history of Christendom demonstrates the need for separation in certain cases. This occurs at the point where the Gemeinde is no longer bonded together as one bread and one wine. At such a point all those who still seek to be zealous must withdraw and regroup so that not all will be lost. Such an action

requires tremendous sacrifice. Balzer also defends the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde, her leaders, and teachings against the pietism propagated by Rempel. Balzer's writing now turns rapier sharp, striking at the indefensible soft spots in Rempel's position.

In closing Balzer refers to the Savior's loving invitation to the wedding feast of the Lamb which is only in effect during the present dispensation of grace. This loving entreaty to experience the joy of discipleship and gladness of a righteous-minded Gemeinde is also extended for Rempel. The righteousness working power of grace will triumph unto eternity. This letter to Heinrich Rempel is a fine example of the traditional Anabaptist-Mennonite epistle written in the Pauline missionary model.

"A letter of reply from Heinrich Balzer to the school teacher, Heinrich Rempel in Altona":

"Beloved Friend! I have read and reread your letter to me of the 31st of the previous month many times, and indeed with great sorrow and inward regrets. That in these last and sorrowful days Satan, through his devilish schemes and plans for seduction, has been successful in leading the people unto eternal damnation: By the presentation of such magical enchantment through which so many people are bewitched and become the slaves of Satan and sin; which they remain unto the end and on the day of Judgement and fiery passion of God they will eternally have to carry his unquenchable wrath.

"In spite of the most violent assaults and attacks made to that end the evil one found it impossible to eradicate the true Christendom during the days of barbarism. The blood of the martyrs was a rapidly growing seed for posterity. But Satan prefers the Christendom of the world, through which, according to all appearances, the totality of man is divided in order that he may serve both God and the world simultaneously. Through his Satanic ingenuity he has contrived to bring this into acceptance among us.

"Inherently man is the fellow citizen of Satan for man is inclined unto the world and its usages. Man revels in vanity and finds satisfaction in sin. He lives in drunkenness, gluttony, ostentation, pride, covetousness, deception, lies, fleshly indulgence, in the exercise of revenge, and pleasure in the affairs of the world. At the same time man has learnt to speak gently and eloquently of the ways of Christianity. He beguiles with sweet words and magnificent speech. Colossians 2:4. Through their spiritlessness they are misled like Eve by the serpent and their minds are dislodged from the simplicity in Christ. 2 Corinthians 11:3.

"It was a heart-rending experience for me, beloved friend, that through your letter I had to learn to know you as one of the class of mankind described by the apostle in such doubtful terms. And oh, how sorrowful are the thoughts, when one must see and hear that our, at least in name, fellow confessionists to a great extent are so completely submitting themselves to this Christendom of appearances and delusions; and when they allow themselves to be led by the devil unto eternal damnation through such deceitful ways.

"My sincere love for you inspires me to present the undisguised truth to you. It may well please the Lord in His grace to seize you out of egotistical intoxication and down from the heights of self elevation and allow you to become a fool of this world together with the apostle Paul in order that you might become wise. My beloved friend, you state that you give your whole-hearted approval to what I have said in the exposition regarding the differences between understanding and reason (**Faith and Reason**, See Section 13:04) and in the lyrics regarding the fall of the Gemeinden. If this is your honest and conscientious appraisal, then I question the reason and grounds for your surprise that I have departed from these evil practices.

"Either you do not regard manifest sin as such an offense unto God as He Himself has stated 'Your sins and iniquities separate you and your God from each other', Isaiah 59:2; or you do not understand the bonding and unification of a Gemeinde through the mystery of holy communion; or you have stated something without being fully cognizant of the complexities of the matter; or you are a manifest mocker in the eyes of God and mean something other than what you have said. From your writing I am convinced that one of the foregoing must be attributed to you. The result to me in any case is that you become a person of doubt and worthy of our sympathy. I heartily wish that you might truthfully be converted during this dispensation time of grace and receive eternal salvation in the hereafter.

"Every earnest Christian can vividly depict and demonstrate the desolation of our people in one point after another by observing their deeds. The logical and irrefutable conclusion is that a reformation is necessary in order that we do not all together run unto our ruin. Nowhere since the very time of the apostles does history demonstrate the feasibility of a rectification of the church. All of church history, from the time of the apostles to the present, demonstrates that no such restitution has taken place and occurred without a parting and separation from the fallen assembly. A leavened dough and the bread which is baked from it cannot possibly be made sweet and unleavened through human skill and design. Wine which has been pressed largely out of faulty grapes that had become sour and bitter cannot possibly become sweet, sharp and spirited. This is inherent in the pregnant holy mystery of the Lord's Supper of bread and wine. A Gemeinde is joined together by this holy bonding just like the bread with many kernels and the wine with many grapes are united into one body. 1 Corinthians 10:18-18.

"The sour substances penetrate throughout the whole and likewise in the spiritual realm so that each believer, to a greater or lesser extent, partakes of the evil living and manifest vices and other

sorrowful afflictions, and becomes a party to their sins and also to their punishment, if they do not put these matters away from themselves, 1 Corinthians 5:13; Revelations 18:4; and Numbers 1, 2. Unless of course the deed was done together with the traitor, Judas, who had made a decision only for his heart and not for actual practice. i.e. A deed which is only done for appearances sake in which case the individual is only eating and drinking unto his own damnation. 1 Corinthians 11:29.

“When the general fall of a Gemeinde has evolved to the point that this bonding no longer occurs, then the Lord speaks and says, ‘Come out from among them, and be ye separate . . . and touch not the unclean things; and I will receive you’. 2 Corinthians 6:17; and in Timothy we find that ‘in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth, and some to honour and some to dishonour. And if a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master’s use, and prepared unto every good work’. 2 Timothy 2:20-21. And in 1 Timothy 6:5 it is commanded, ‘and from such withdraw thyself’. For this reason the Lord also says to the prophet Jeremiah, ‘Therefore if you cling yourself unto Me I will hold Myself unto you, and you shall remain My minister and if you shall teach the pious and separate them from evil you shall be My teacher and before you fall unto them they shall sooner fall unto you’. Jeremiah 15:19. To this the prophet also said ‘Oh that I had a wanderer’s refuge in the wilderness; that I might leave them, my people, and go from them! For they be all adulterers, and an assembly of treacherous men’ Jeremiah 9:2.

“The pious have always found it necessary to depart and to separate themselves from the sinful assembly. This was evident before the deluge and also later during the restoration of Israel. And even when too great an intermixture with the world had occurred because of too much complacency, the Lord awakened men who received courage and strength in order to purify the people from the pagan abomination. This is particularly true of a certain Mattathias who was unable to further battle the enemy which had infiltrated into the city, who then cried throughout the city, ‘Whoever is zealous of the law, and maintaineth the covenant, let him follow me’. 1 Maccabees 2:27. All the God fearing Jews then gathered in the wilderness where they commenced to do battle with the evil one and to save the people from its desolation. If such a separation from the city filled with the enemy was necessary for the physical people of God, how much more necessary is it not in the spiritual realm where the evil one has gained such a great strength in manifest sin through various vices and other sorrowful afflictions.

“Consequently it was necessary to depart and secede in order that our Gemeinde could be led back to the foundation and original constitution of the church. And to separate it from the world and its usages as the apostle says, ‘And be not conformed to this world’. Romans 12:2. It cannot be unfamiliar to anyone knowledgeable with respect to the history of the church, that such a separated life will encounter great resistance and be subjected to mockery, scorn, blasphemy, slander, and if God acquiesces, then even persecution. For this reason the Lord has already prophesied that there will only be few partakers which has always been richly evidenced by experience. Such submission is directly contrary to human nature. Man will not place equal value on honour and prestige, insult and shame, and on joy or enmity. Consequently it is no wonder that only few associate themselves unto the same: When it is despised without measure as such a rejected circumstance in the eyes of the world, and when they love the praise of men more than the praise of God. John 12:43. Whereby man must deny and forsake father and mother, brother and sister, and wife and children for the sake of the name of Jesus. Luke 14:26.

“Beloved friend, you say to me that you are very amazed that a man such as myself, as you say, with such deep insights and knowledge regarding the teachings of God, can come to a decision to leave a Gemeinde which he perceives to be striding down the path unto destruction, and then to join a party which in my opinion is on the way unto perfection! What shall I say to this? Is this honesty or deception? The second part of your letter gave me grounds for the entertaining of doubts regarding the first alternative. But the Lord knows this best. What is your meaning, beloved friend? Are no gifted commanders necessary in a battle such as ours where we must march so brazenly in the face of the enemy? Nor can I accept this commendation in even the slightest way, for everything which I have is from pure grace. Thanks unto the Lord! Would that I might expend the talents which He has lent to me, only and alone unto His honour and the increase of His Gemeinde.

“And yet I must say that we consider those at our head to be very wise and circumspect men. Our commander is the great King of all kings. His worshipful name is JESUS CHRIST. Among the first generals of our army stood the beloved Paul, a man by comparison with whom I stand as a little child in knowledge and insight. Menno Simons also stands out as one who is worthy of emulation among many other very qualified and renowned warriors and heroes of the faith. He was followed by many gifted and talented men of whom I could enumerate a great number from the annals of history. All of whom battled for the righteous believing remnant and whose leading and guiding was done with courage and strength.

“The Lord in the present time period, which is on the eve of the day and perhaps already in the last hour, now allows one more loud and earnest invitation to echo forth in order to summon the people unto the wedding feast. How sad that for such a long time I regarded this summons so superficially and unworthy of any examination, and that so many others continue in this view thereby causing so much damage to their souls. I would also say that we presently have very wise men standing at the wheel who in fact are also despised by the world, but who I find to be very powerfully sealed with the word of God through His Spirit. They are deemed to be unqualified and unordained

by the world, but they are abundantly ordained and qualified by the armour of the Godly Word to place themselves at the head of the spiritual legions and to lead them courageously into battle against the evil one. They have eyes which have been enlightened through which they are able to gaze far deeper into the mysteries of the Gospel and the perversity of the world than those with their philosophy, cheap grace and deluded secularism of the worldly learnedness which you offer.

"Beloved friend, you err when you say that I consider our Gemeinde, which you hate as a faction and sect, to be on the road to perfection. We do not hold ourselves out as if we have already seized hold of the truth or that we are already perfect. Rather we earnestly seek the truth in order that we may apprehend the same, after we have first been apprehended of Jesus Christ. Unto Him the glory in eternity. Philippians 3:12. On account of my secession you consider me as a hireling. You cannot find it within yourself to admit that I would have been unable to make a decision to leave my Gemeinde without having been motivated by the most extreme necessity. I do not believe that you are qualified to properly judge even half of my inward sorrow which I expended in this regard and my views regarding the Gemeinde which developed therefrom. For then your pen would not have been quite so ready to commit such a loveless judgement against me to the innocent paper.

"What is a hireling? Answer: one who receives fixed secular remuneration and who endures more for the honour of this world than for the shame of Christ. Such a one would not place himself with all his might against the infiltrating desolation of the evil enemy: To battle the one who is truly a vicious wolf against the soul. Instead, the hireling is accommodating, he praises his flock and himself, goes along into the delusion, inspires the vanity of fantasy as much as another, through his pipe of tobacco he provides the youth with even greater encouragement unto this vice as one of his erring sheep. And so on in many matters. Could such a one not be called a hireling? I will allow all God-fearing and righteousness-believing followers of Jesus to judge by the Word of God.

"But how deluded is the judgement of the world! Whoever abandons the sinful associations of this world, whoever truly looks directly into the countenance of the wolf, whoever strikes valiantly and courageously against the hellish dragon with the staff of the Godly word, and who calls out unceasingly to the poor lambs, and demonstrates how they are to guard themselves against the evil one in order that they will not be consumed, one who personally leads his flock into the face of rejection, who spares no endeavour nor exertion and who rejects all earthly gain, if only he might guard and preserve the poor embattled Gemeinde which is in danger of being overwhelmed and to tear them from the clutches of Satan's revenge. He must be called a hireling? O sorrow! The world has been completely blinded. A sorrow for their great desolation!

"I gladly admit that in the Gemeinde from which I left there were still some members who were earnest with respect to their salvation and who would dearly have listened to me. If they remain true in this I also hope that the Lord might open their eyes even further in order that the fall of the majority may become manifest unto them, and then that because of fear for their sins, they will not need to be lost; and that they will no longer want to be called brothers and sisters with manifest sinners and joyfully thereafter to follow my example to find a likeminded fellowship in the midst of this desolation, and then to unite with the same. That altogether we might be strengthened and bonded together in the apostolic regulation (polity), in our solemnly accepted fundamental beliefs in the new way of the spirit, and that with all diligence, although in great weakness and imperfection, and yet far distant from wanton, purposeful, freedom unto evil and sin; to press forward so as to follow the Lord on his narrow path of self-denial and obediently to carry his cross.

"Dear friend. By what standard do you attain the view that the evidence of the living Spirit is truly not to be found in this Gemeinde when this Gemeinde is completely unknown to you in the spirit? Possibly because this Gemeinde does not want to have any fellowship with drunkards? As you for so many years now have fallen so far beneath the dignity of a man, let alone beneath the dignity of a Christian, for which you have not even once been separated from the Gemeinde. All of us together were so blind!

"Beloved friend, we may talk and write graciously and elegantly of the purity of heart, but of one thing be sure! God is not mocked! If the heart is pure, then the entire walk will inevitably also be pure. As ye have therefore received the Lord Jesus, so walk ye also in Him, says the apostle. Colossians 2:6. And the Lord says, 'by their fruits may ye know them'. Matthew 7:20. The Holy Spirit teaches us so correctly, flee from the godless and do not abide with unrighteousness, according to the Wisdom of Solomon 1:5. So then by what light have you examined our Gemeinde? At the most through the light of reason which you honour so highly, and which has ascended to an almost preeminent stature in you through philosophical delusion; and because of which you are truly unable to see for yourself, as one who is lost in a mist during a weak moonshine and who is generally deceived by any circumstance which may arise in the distance.

"Allow yourself to be warned, beloved friend, that the Gemeinde which has so severely been ridiculed by you, will not be called forward on the judgement day in order to testify against you as a contemporary and impartial witness: For it would testify through its honest conduct and praiseworthy deeds, as you yourself have described them. Take heed of this, if your eyes will not be opened during this dispensation of grace. I do not find it surprising that you are unable to find within yourself the distinction between the reason of mankind and evangelical faith. It is simply hidden too deeply for sinners of your kind as you describe yourself, to simply come upon such treasured mysteries in the middle of a road of vice. If you would not so willfully resist the Lord, you would only remain on

the vapour road of vain-learnedness and worldly philosophy until the Lord in His grace would draw you unto something better.

"Your unworthy comment regarding A., H., and K. does not merit any rebuttal. The impelling impression which I received from this is that your experience is like that of Demetrius the goldsmith, who together with his fellow craftsmen, was afraid that because of the preaching of Paul he would lose his livelihood, which he had because of the completion of the pagan temple of worship in honour of the goddess Diana.

"O vanity! Why do you deceive those who love you for a handful of barley. You believe that we are striving for ignorance with all our might and that we are disguising this under the wonderful phrase "simplicity of the heart" and that stupidity and boorishness must thereby triumph. Have you given any thought to what you have said? I am afraid not. Or does it matter to you whether it accords with the Holy Scripture or not, if only you can say something which bursts out before the world. Does not the apostle say, 'Where are the wise? Where are those learned in dogma? Where are the worldly wise? Has God not made foolish the wisdom of this world?' 1 Corinthians 1:20; 3:18.

"Let no one deceive himself. He who would be wise among you should become a fool unto this world in order that he might be wise. The Lord Jesus says, 'I praise you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and the prudent, and that you have revealed them unto babes. Even so Father, for it seemed good in Thy sight.' Matthew 11:25-26. For we would rather be fools before the world and considered as coarse and ignorant, and be wise in the sight of God, than to be fools and idiots in the eyes of God and then be esteemed by the world because of magical, enlightened, refashioned (gebildete) and cosmetic worldly wisdom.

"Beloved friend, with respect to your comments about alien books published by other confessions, I must say that our ancient and worthy predecessors who were knowledgeable in the ways of salvation, advised us that one should be as careful of such books as of strange (false) coinage through which one can easily be overwhelmed and deceived and accept base metal of little worth instead of gold or silver. One should guard as much against alien books as against false coinage. This is the reason why we are so careful and devote great attention in order that we would not be tossed to and fro by the winds of all manner of foreign teaching. That this necessary watchfulness would carry us to the extreme that we, as you are afraid, would therefore reject the Holy Bible because it has been translated by a member of a foreign confession, seems to have been mockingly spoken by you. Your statement does not seem to be entirely free of a joy in hurting us. If matters with us should come to such a state, then the world would truly have found a proper ground for which to hate us.

"But we have the firm knowledge and are convinced that our hated teaching is the true way unto heaven. All the disciples of Jesus have walked along that way and through the grace of God we also endeavor to continue thereon until the end. For this reason we have a great burden to seek, to admonish and to invite all mankind that they might forsake the wide road of sin in order to walk with us and all the pious upon the narrow road. Therefore we invite one and all to enter, for the wedding feast is nigh and the meat has been prepared. Come! We say unto them. Everything has been made ready.

"Everything from the side of God has been brought unto abundant fulfillment for a reconciliation and union with him. All that is lacking are the people that they should come and forsake their sins and submit themselves unto Him with a purified fear of God, to yield their entire life unto Him until the end. Oh, how blessed is the one who is able to find this great treasure of life. O! How joyful is the sojourner when he is able to meet many fellow pilgrims who are inspired and compelled by the same Spirit, and together with whom he is able to travel in the most beautiful harmony of love and unity. If only all the true minded spirits in the entire colony, yes, in the whole world, knew the over abundant joy of a righteousness minded Gemeinde in the Lord, and the comfort and solace which the believing Christian enjoys in the ever secure battlements of the spiritual Zion. For then, all of them without hesitation, would join together and say with joy:

Nun, wir wollen uns verschreiben,  
Unserm Heiland treu zu bleiben;  
Auch stets fuer einander fleh'n;  
Und zugleich auch wo wir koennen,  
Andre zuchen zu gewinnen—  
Jesus—Lasz' es doch gescheh'n! AMEN.

"In closing I warn you beloved friend Rempel, take heed for yourself in order that you would no longer belong among those of whom Solomon speaks in the book of Wisdom, chapter 2:12-17:

"Therefore let us lie in wait for the righteous; because he is not for our turn, and he is clean contrary to our doings; he upbraideth us with our offending the law, and objecteth to our infamy the transgressings of our education. He professeth to have the knowledge of God; and he calleth himself the child of the Lord. He was made to reprove our thoughts. He is grievous unto us even to behold; for his life is not like other men's, his ways are of another fashion. We are esteemed of him as counterfeits; he abstaineth from our ways as from filthiness; he pronounceth the end of the just to be blessed, and maketh his boast that God is his father. Let us see if his words be true, and let us prove what shall happen in the end of him.' etc.!!

"May God grant enlightenment to your eyes, and teach you to recognize the dangerous situation of your soul. In order that during this beautiful period of grace you might perceive the salvation working

power of the gospel through Jesus Christ and also to experience the same in your heart, That you might thereby approach the eternal death as a spark escaping from the fire. May this be granted, God!

"This is my heartfelt wish for you. AMEN!! Please receive this with affection and love, from your friends who wish you salvation unto eternal life."

"Heinrich Balzer" Tiege on February 10, 1834.

### 13.06 A Letter to H. W., A Former Brother, 1835.

Heinrich Balzer continued his defense of the faith. In his *Epistle to H. W., A Former Brother, 1835*, he defended the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde refusal to partake in the arresting of offenders and the guarding of criminals. To this end he develops the evangelical teaching that the state and the church are entirely separate authorities although both are constituted of God. The believer must seek to be Christlike in all respects and is not excused from sin merely because these actions are executed in the service of the state. This position was directly contrary to that of the Protestant reformers who taught that killing, stealing, and other crimes were not attributable to the account of the individual if performed in the service of the state. Even Martin Luther had initially recognized the necessity of the separation of church and state.

Balzer goes on to warn the pietist Mennonite leaders that the greater their departure from the evangelical foundation of the apostles, the greater would be their submission to such teachings of the world. Satan is cleverly scheming to gently mislead the leaders of Christendom. The infiltration of the teachings of worldlings was far more dangerous than a brazen frontal assault by Satan.

A letter by Heinrich Balzer to his former brother H. W.:

"Beloved brother H. W.! I wish you all the best; firstly, unto your soul and in your spiritual circumstances, and also physically. My love for you and your wife compels me to forward a few lines to you. The reason being that you are unable to come to the conclusion that it is not proper for the disciple of Jesus nor allowed, to report common worldlings and evil doers to the authorities and to transfer them to the authorities for punishment, even though the followers of Jesus have no precedent from the New Testament for so doing. For the all wise government has been authorized to maintain order among the children of the world. But this is not proper for the children of the peaceful Kingdom of Jesus. This authority is given only unto those who are still children of the world, into whose hand are also given intelligence and enlightenment, in order that they may govern the unruly generation.

"But unto his own the Lord says, 'But it shall not be so among you.' For there is more than enough to be done in practicing the evangelical church discipline, that is in the Christian Gemeinde, that such worldlings should not germinate among them. This spiritual regulation has only been entrusted unto the faithful and not to the world, for it lies without the boundaries of the physical kingdoms of the world. This is also the reason why you do not understand the matter.

"Now take note of the transformation from one to the other. Going from the world unto Christendom there is a positive separation and distinctly decided change and conviction. There is the power of the born again will, motivated by the Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ. But integral to the change from Christendom to the world is found a falling asleep, a losing of power, a drifting unto slumber, two-heartedness, a doubtful spirit and a subtle ever increasing inclination to be worldly-minded and to be conformed thereto.

"May our present leaders beware: the more that we depart from the evangelical apostolic foundation, and the regulation and practice of discipline which has been instituted by our holy forefathers for their spiritual descendants, and the more that we fall asleep, and become weak and demonstrate ourselves to be two-hearted; to the very same degree we will increase in the contrary power and might of the worldly regulation. The further you go in this the more you will fall aslumber, until the enemy has completely led you over to the world; and then the dragon has attained the victory over you. For this reason the Christian Gemeinde can and must take note of the germination of the evil root and not merely of the outwardly offenses of an erring member which would otherwise demonstrate a sudden transformation. For Satan does not make an instant frontal assault, rather he sneaks into the trenches of the spiritual Zion on tiptoes.

"What better scheme would Satan be able to devise and implement than to darken the spiritual eyes of those who are to watch over the Gemeinden? In order that they would not see the dangers from afar and instead wait only for the direct frontal assault. In the meantime Satan has been working diligently to bury your power through his infiltrating spies and servants and thereby to dissipate your power in order to destroy you. Yes, this is precisely how Satan will take you captive, by a secret contrivance against the citizens of Zion, through the creation of doubts about the soundness and purity of its order, regulation and constitution. And in its place to create a favourable disposition, indeed, to constitute a preference and obligation, for the regulation and discipline of the evil enemy. Oh, what a well maneuvered contrivance of the cunning enemy, if he is actually able to benumb the leaders with these blinkers. He is far better able to cast them down by this means than by a frontal assault which even the most foolish guardians would be expecting!!

“Now then, my beloved friend W., you do not trust the Gospel, the Lord Jesus Himself, the holy apostles, and the manifold testimonies of our forefathers, who have sealed this nonresistant, pure Christian foundation with much suffering, blood and death; nor do you trust our insignificant testimony. Rather you allow yourself to be impelled unto doubts and even unto the rejection of our faith, by your own reason.

“For this reason I feel compelled by love to present to you the words of Martin Luther in this regard, which he wrote in an evangelical admonition and encouragement, even though he did not practice this himself. His words are recorded in *The Cronik* of Peter Janzen Twisk, Second Part, page 241, and translated they are literally as follows;

‘There shall be no government among the Christians. Rather each and every one is to be submissive to each other as Paul says in Romans 12. Is it actually possible that there can be such people who would not constitute a government? Although man would readily tolerate this, as the nature and disposition of the will is such that he does not gladly suffer overseers, nor would anyone be superior nor want to be. But when this equality is not present then there are no true Christians’.

More of such testimonies by the venerable ministers can be brought forward. But I believe that this will be sufficient for anyone who wants to see. May the Lord at all times grant us enlightened eyes that we might be truly watchful over the flock which has so dearly been entrusted unto us, and continue to be so. In order that Satan would not mislead them through his infiltrating spirits of deception.

“I commend you together with your beloved wife, unto the gracious enlightenment of the Holy Ghost, and this small and insignificant writing unto the best, and that you would receive the same in love. From your friend whose heartfelt wish is the best of everything for you.”

“Heinrich Balzer” Tiege, the 18th of March, 1835.

### 13.07 An Epistle to David Epp in Prussia, 1835.

Heinrich Balzer brings his defense of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith to a convincing strength with his *Epistle to David Epp in Prussia*. David Epp (1779-1863) was a minister of the Heuboden congregation in Prussia from 1817-1862. He was a very influential minister during his early ministry, successfully promoting certain mission interests.<sup>13</sup> He was a brother of Claasz Epp, another prominent Prussian Mennonite leader whose son, Claasz Epp emigrated to Russia in 1853. Here Claasz Epp Junior, later led a group of Mennonites to central Asia where he pronounced 1889 as the date for the second coming of Christ. David Epp emigrated to Russia in 1862. This David Epp had been converted to the teachings of pietism. In a letter of 1822<sup>14</sup> he pleads with the Molotschna Grosze Gemeinde leaders to support the Bible Society project notwithstanding that the writings propagated by these societies were generally contrary to the teachings of the Gospel.<sup>15</sup> It is apparent that David Epp was no friend of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith.

Mention is found of this David Epp in the correspondence between Aeltester Abraham Friesen and his brother Peter von Riesen in Prussia regarding the Menno Simons *Fundamente Buch*. These books, which had been published by the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in 1834, were confiscated by the Prussian Mennonite Aeltesten and ministers in 1835. This episode will be dealt with at greater length in chapter sixteen. In a letter to his brother dated May 18, 1836, Aeltester Friesen mentions that he has read two letters written by David Epp to Heinrich Balzer in Tiege, Molotschna. Aeltester Friesen goes on to note that in these writings Epp completely rejects the fundamentals of faith of the first nonresistant Christians. In this correspondence Epp apparently also attacks the teaching and faith of Aeltester Friesen and mentions that he “does not think that there could be another person in the Kleine Gemeinde who was as misled as Abraham Friesen”. Epp also goes on to offer that he would gladly send a hundred (“gospel”) tracts to Russia to convert this Friesen from his delusions.

In the present epistle Balzer is replying to a letter from David Epp. It appears that Epp is quite offended that the Kleine Gemeinde leaders, who were also literate and articulate men, did not immediately abandon the faith of their fathers to storm over to the particular brand of pietism and millennialism propagated by him. *The Epistle to David Epp* also demonstrates that Balzer shared the zeal of Abraham Friesen to spread the Gospel and that he was more than capable of debating and promoting evangelical faith against even the most committed and capable pietist leaders. For the sake of clarity the extensive footnotes to this letter by Balzer have been inserted in the text in brackets.

“A letter of reply to an inquiry from the Honourable David Epp, a Minister in Heuboden, Prussia, and an ever willing answer in accordance with the teachings of the apostle Peter: Regarding my secession and the inspiration of the same. (H. Balzer). Tiege the 21st day of April, 1835.

“Beloved Friend:

“On the 24th of March I received in good order your letter of February 26th of this year and have perceived your questions and desires from the same. Why have I separated myself from the Gemeinde in which the Lord had appointed me as a guardian? And why have I given myself over to the so-called ‘Reimers Gemeinde’? In this respect you bid me to openly and clearly state to you



the reasons which have inspired me to this step.

"However, even the small hope that this declaration will serve for the building up of the fallen Zion, and almost all my courage and pleasure in this duty to provide a willing answer in accordance with the teachings of Peter, 1 Peter 3:15, are dashed when I review your writing and far more so when I perceive the spirit which inspires you and which has dictated this letter for you. Psalm 12:2-3. (For in the present sorrowful time of the soul there is only little empathy for the true Christian life on the narrow path.)

"And yet I find comfort and strength in the pious and unrelenting men Ezra and Nehemiah. 1 Kings 22:22 and Nehemiah 4:22. How with courageous and heroic spirit they built the House of the Lord and the desolated walls of Jerusalem in the face of so much criticism, mocking and so many obstacles, including the false Jews as well as the heathen. Ezra 4:12-13 and Nehemiah 6:17 & 19. For they desired to build by themselves, separated, and not intermixed with the ones fallen into desolation and with the heathen, nor with the Israelites. Ezra 4:3.

"The material for the reply to your inquiry is to be found clearly and unequivocally stated in the discernments of Menno Simons and Abraham Friesen whom I have both come to treasure very highly and who are bound together with each other in one spirit. At one time I also condemned the teachings of these men just like you. But at that time I stood in heed of the world. Acts 13:4. For as Paul said unto the Jews, 'Behold ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which you shall in no wise believe, though a man declares it unto you.' (Which is the general desolation of the nonresistant Christians and in fact at this time the practice in general stands in opposition to these teachings. Reason: because the spiritual leadership is asleep so that the worldly discipline can enter in against the evangelical teachings according to Mark 10:43; Matthew 18:17, and 1 Corinthians 5:13).

"Through the grace of God my inspiration in this was so powerful that it shattered my heart, so that I was able to turn from my endeavours which like yours were directed on a course to the wide road of damnation: The same was sufficient so that I was able to set a new course in the opposite direction. Because of the great distance between us it would be too difficult to set forth all the individual grounds of this inspiration. According to what you have already demonstrated you would in any event condemn the same as fanaticism and madness. (For they consider the Lord Jesus to be a Beelzebub, and Paul to be a disturber of the peace, and Menno Simons for a heretic, and us to be the rioters and creators of sects. Matthew 10:16. Satan hath withdrawn the distinction between Christianity and the world. Consequently, Christendom is neither cold nor hot and therefore it will be spit out according to Revelation 3:16; 2 Timothy 2:21; John 15:19; Lamentations 4:1-2; and Psalm 80:13-17. The ruins of the Anti-Christ have set the abominations of desolation in the Holy place, wherefore it is time to flee. Matthew 24:16-17).

"Beloved brother. If during the transcribing of the words of Jesus which he says to his disciples, 'Behold, I send you like sheep among the wolves', you had not allowed yourself to be seized by such a perverse spirit, you would also have been in a position to perceive these two completely distinct species which according to their natural characteristics are also torn asunder in their spiritual substance: And consequently you would not make such great efforts to create an illusory Christendom from the sheep and wolves; that is to say from the disciples of Christ and the peoples of the world. Perhaps you have never yet given thought to the words 'We are called to rebuild the fallen walls of Zion, and not to flee therefrom'. Nor have you considered that what Zerubbabel said to the intermingled Jews in the literal building of the Temple, 'It is not reasonable that we and you together should build the house of the Lord, but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel', might also apply just as well in the spiritual realm. Jeremiah 15:19; Ezra 4:3; 1 Peter 2.

"Therefore we are commanded, 'Come out from among them and be ye separate saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty'. 2 Corinthians 6:17-18. Likewise in the fine words of the Apostle, 'Ye shall punish the gainsayers and not yield to them'. (And a going out is required where the desolation has become so great that he is no longer recognized by the spiritual leaders, who promise peace when there is no peace, and who place pillows up to the arms of the people, and kerchiefs upon the head of every statue. Jeremiah 8:11; Ezekiel 13:18; Jeremiah 8:22; Titus 1:9; Ezekiel 3:17; Jeremiah 46:11; and Acts 20:29).

"Has it escaped you that in general the guardians on the walls of Zion, here as well as there by you, are in need of the salve of Gilead in order that they might be able to recognize the gainsayers in their disguises. For even though inwardly they are raging wolves with sharp fangs to tear asunder and disperse those who appear to be the poor sheep of Jesus, they are wearing sheep's clothing. Matthew 7:15-16; 2 John 10. And for that reason they are everywhere received and accepted as beloved brothers in Christ. In addition the spiritual punishment instituted by the Holy Gospel is as good as revoked except for a spiritually impoverished, ungodly and powerless form which is generally all that has remained of the same. Matthew 18:15 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6. Thus become applicable the words which the Lord spoke unto his prophet, 'All his watchmen are blind, they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs who cannot devour anything, sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber'. Isaiah 56:10.

"My beloved friend. With this Christendom of the world which you advance and pursue so zealously, as can be seen from your writings, you are falling into a veritable labyrinth or garden of errors.

1 Kings 18:21; 2 Kings 17:33, 34, 41; Isaiah 19:11-15. You address me as 'beloved brother in the Lord' even though you know full well that I stand together in one body with Abraham Friesen who after all in your judgment, is wallowing in a high degree of blindness, and who is possessed of a pitiful ignorance and evil intention, and a deficiency for the proving of the spirits as to whether they are of God. (These are the properties of a decayed pharaoh, and the same spirit is also to be found in you. Overly afraid disciples of Jesus take note: That you stand in the same degree with the learned ones during the time of the Reformation who proclaimed the nonresistant Christians as being so evil and vicious, and who regarded them to be the garbage of the world: And you counsel the authorities unto persecution, which would still occur if God permitted.

"From trustworthy authority I am convinced that the authors of these devotional books justify war and the shedding of blood, and that therefore they stand in one mind with those who perpetrate bloody wars. See P. Lobers *Geschichte* and *Wilmer's Journal*, first quarter page 161. Matthew 5:39; Ephesians 4:18; Matthew 5:44; 1 Peter 8:9; John 18:36 and Romans 16:17-18. Or do the sheep of Jesus in the present time have wolf's fangs? And have they acquired their wild nature? O what a confused Christendom! And the nonresistant Christians are also headed in this direction. See Hunzinger's book *Zur Verbesserung der Mennoniten*, Second part, section four. And it is so sad that the penetration of large firm lumps by virtue of those men is currently viewed in such a light hearted manner. 2 Timothy 4:10; 2 Timothy 3:15; Ecclesiastes 12:11.

"Have you not given complete freedom to the bearing of arms, the pursuing of wars, the swearing of oaths, the taking of revenge, lust for power, conducting legal process, worldly freedom, vain honour, child baptism, extravagant ostentation, drunkenness, pursuit of idle amusements, godlessness, and more of the same among yourselves there? Indeed, which in many respects are contrary to the obligations of the Christian. Titus 1:16. For Paul says 'And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather punish them.' Ephesians 5:11. The foregoing is sufficient direction for us, so that we separate ourselves from the spiritual Babel in order not to partake of these punishments. Revelations 6:2-5. **He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Gemeinde!!!**)

"I not only call him (Abraham Friesen) my very beloved fellow minister, but also my beloved brother in the Lord spiritually bonded together in the faith. Therefore how can the two of us be brethren in the Lord? This is truly a mockery for which I punish you in full earnestness, together with those who are more despicable and who make this more terrible than the natural wolves: Because as their weapons of plunder they use only the weapons and instruments which have been instituted by the all-knowing Savior. (For even the malicious humanity who are unfit (or unable) to live according to the Gospel and the example of the Lord, and who rather walk according to their own pursuit of revenge and their own essence; these provision themselves with all the most terrible instruments for their plundering, choking and murder, and they also conduct themselves directly contrary to the meek and gentle hearted example of the Good Shepherd and in direct opposition to the character and nature of Jesus the Little Lamb.) With these you unite yourself as a brother, in the most intimate way, if only they come your way with sweet words and magnificent speech. Indeed, if they come in sheep's clothing. And you consider everything to be fine and beautiful provided that it is good for flattering and can write and speak of the awaking and the inwardly ways of Christendom.

"You give no heed to the fact that the true hearted Gemeinde of Christ was reconstituted on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets during the 16th century, through pious men and through the empowering grace of the Holy Spirit. This Church is falling into desolation because of the deplorable seeking of love from the world and the false Christendom. And according to their spiritual circumstances to again become united with the world, so that they would actually retain the appearance of the ways of godly salvation but have lost the power thereof.

"The certain proof that Menno Simons has written the unadulterated truth about the faith of the Lutherans in his inspired memorial, is the life and conduct of two Lutheran churches which are situated in our neighborhood. I believe that the same also holds true for your brethren there, if you are still able to see spiritually and not merely according to their words, and if you would rather wish to know them by their works. Consequently I am convinced that the same holds true for the other matters which you find so inconvenient in his writings (M. Simons) and which you find to be so wrong.

"With the wish to you of a true spiritual rebirth, I bid you to receive this small and insignificant written reply in love from me whom you consider as a trespasser and to accept this for the best together with a greeting from me and my wife. And I subscribe hereto as a weak pilgrim towards eternity, who dearly wishes to receive salvation."

"Heinrich Balzer"

### 13.08 A Poetic Encouragement unto the Brethren, 1836.

Heinrich Balzer's *Poem of Encouragement unto the Brethren* provides a fitting conclusion to his written ministry. His previous writings had defended the faith against his former brethren and against outsiders. Now he addresses his abundant ability to his own brothers and sisters in Christ. This loving poetic encouragement is a step by step guide for the operation of the Gemeinde which will lead unto the Heavenly Jerusalem. The scripture references in the margins are noteworthy as this is representative of a sound Anabaptist-Mennonite writing of the period.

In a brief introduction, Heinrich Balzer explains his motive in preparing the poem. "This poem has been composed as an encouragement for all true lovers of the Gospel who constitute and bind themselves together as a body in Christ for the sake of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit." Balzer concludes by noting that the poem is a gift from "your insignificant minister and servant of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ".

Balzer starts his **Poem of Encouragement** by referring to the love of Jesus which binds his disciples together in the battle against the might of Satan. The banner of Jesus is at the head of the embattled legion. The faithful must beware of the cunning enemy who will repeatedly counter attack even though repulsed. The evil one will seek to beguile the elect and to lull them into sleep. His tools are greed, pride, deceit and indifference to daily discipleship. The Gemeinde must cling together firmly as the body of Christ in order to triumph. In the heat of hand-to-hand combat anyone isolated from the brethren will quickly be vanquished. Follow the leaders for they guide according to the Word of God. By virtue of such direction the army of God can strike mighty blows. The soldiers of Zion must be fully armoured with the helmet of faith, the battle cry of love and the fortress of grace, so that Satan cannot harm them. The faithful must keep their eyes fixed upon the Savior whose power is manifested through his word to which they must be true. Those who have fallen departed from the word and became ensnared in the chains of death. Believers must be bonded together in the Gemeinde if they hope to persevere.

It will happen that one or the other is smitten on the battlefield. The faithful must bind the wounds of the fallen and see to it that they are not completely vanquished by Satan. The wound must first be opened and cleansed with the salve of pure love so that it may heal through and through. It will also happen that an infection will spread its poison throughout the Gemeinde. After prayerful consideration the doctor may tearfully have to amputate the diseased member in some cases. This must be carried out lovingly for the punished member is not to be driven unto spiritual death but rather unto life. The ban must be applied correctly for it has three purposes. First, that the sinner would be shamed unto penitence and return to the Gemeinde. Second, to maintain the purity of the Gemeinde. Third, the Kingdom of God must not become subject to ridicule through the mode in which it is exercised. The love of God is to be evident in the Gemeinde and therefore the infiltration of evil must be opposed vigorously. The spirits must be carefully proven by their fruits.

Balzer closes by affirming the principle that if the Gemeinde is to persevere it must resolutely continue in unity and in separation from the world. "Walk worthily in the sight of God and continue in prayer and supplication and then no harm will befall you". Do not build on false assurance nor trust Satan even for a moment. Those who wish for assurance need only keep their eyes on the Savior. Those who cling to His life-giving power and earnestly study His word, will not be deceived. This is how the blessed saints of antiquity persevered in the face of the bondage, pain and death, and therefore they are worthy examples for the believer. Do not be discouraged in the face of adversity for in the end the Holy Jesus will receive His own unto His Father's house.

1. "Brueder! Uns verbind't zusammen, *Acts 4:32* / Ein gemeinsam Loos und Theil; *Eph. 4:3-6* / Jesu heisse Liebesflammen / Sind das feste Band und Seil; / Dasz wir, als verbund'ne Glieder, / Sinken einig vor Ihm nieder.

2. "Diese treue Jesusliebe, *Jer. 50:5* / Ist viel staerker als der Todt; / Sie verbind't durch warme Triebe, / In Leid, Freude, Trost, und Noth. / Brueder, die vereinigt stehen, / Und von Welt und Suend' ausgehen.

3. "Kaempft ihr Brueder, in dem Glauben, *2 Tim. 4:7* / Kaempft getrost fuer Christi Reich! *Eph. 6:10-17* / Schreckt euch nicht vor Satan's Schnauben, / Und sein Wuethen, wenn auch gleich / Ihr bei Tag und Nacht mueszt kaempfen, / Seine Macht in euch zu daempfen.

4. "Unser Herzog, Jesus, streitet *Col. 2:15* / Selbst mit uns in diesen Krieg; / Sein Panier ist ausgebreitet, / Ueber uns zum vollen Sieg; / Denn er hat den Kampf errungen, / Und der Hoellen Macht bezwungen. *1 Cor. 15:7*

5. "Doch wohl achtet, treue Brueder, / Auf des Feindes maecht'ge Schaar; / Er vereinigt je stets wieder / Seine Kraft, wenn er auch war / Schon so oft von euch geschlagen. *Luke 4:13* / Traut ihm nicht; er wird's schon wagen,

6. "Euch vom neuen zu bedriegen, / Mit viel tausend Listigkeit. *1 Pet. 5:8* / Bald um euch sanft einzuwiegen, / Und zum Schlafen recht bereit, *2 Cor. 11:14* / Euch das Suendenbett zu machen; / Dasz ihr nicht zum Heil koennt Wachen. *1 Cor. 11:20*

7. "Geitz, die Wurzel alles Uebel, *1 Tim. 6:10* / Wird er uetern in euch wen n: / Eure Herzen mit dem Nebel *Mark 4:19* / Dieser Welt deust ueberzieh'n. *Mark 10:24* / Dasz ihr sollt auf Gut der Erden, / Mehr als Gott vertrauet werden. *Tim. 6:17*

8. "Wollust, Fleischeslueste stecken, *Romans 7:18* / In das boese Fleisch und Blut; / Diese wird er so erwecken / *Tim. 5:6* / In euch, wenn ihr nicht recht gut, / Werdet im Gebet verweilen; *Jas. 4:1* / Dasz ihr nach der Suend' werd't eilen.

9. "Hoffart, Satans Grund und Wesen, *Wisdom 10:14-15* / Gottes Augen groeszter Feind; *Prov. 8:13* / Welche Sich die Welt erlesen, / Doch der Fromme stets beweint: / Wird in euch auch Fruechte tragen, *Jer. 13:17* / Wenn ihr nicht werd't tapfer schlagen. *Sirach 10:7*

10. "Luegen, und Betrugereien, *Sirach 13:14* / List und Falschheit ueberall, / Wenn ihr nicht mit Ernst werdt scheuen, *John 4:44* / Jede Art in diesem Fall: *Col. 3:9* / Wird euch maechtig so nachlaufen, *2 Thes. 2:11* / Wie ein Feindes Heer in Haufen.

11. "Trunkenheit und Schwelgereien, *1 Cor. 5:11* / Uep'ger und leichtsinn'ger Stand, *1 Cor. 6:10* / Wird, wenn ihr euch werdet weichen, / Auch das boes' gesell' ge Band, *Ps. 1:5* / Mit der Welt in ihren Schenken, *Jer. 15:17* / Euer Herz von Zucht ablenken.

12. "Traegheit in Berufs Geschaefen, / Wird euch luesternd auch nachgeh'n, *Prov. 8:9* / Wenn ihr nicht mit allen Kraeften, *2 Thes. 3:10* / Werd't in euerm Wirken steh'n, / Um mit allem Ernst und Ehren, *Ps. 28:2* / Euer Brodt euch zu beschaeren.

13. "Ueber alles wird der Boese, *1 Cor. 13:13* / Glaube, Hoffnung, Liebeskraft, / Damit sich in euch aufluese, / Jeder Tugend Eigenschaft, *2 Pet. 1:5-9* / Euch zu rauben sich bemuehen, / Um euch ganz von Gott zu ziehen.

14. "Darum wacht, getreue Brueder, *Mark 14:38* / Wacht getreulich in dem Streit; *Col. 3:13* / Haltet euch als Christi Glieder, *Phil. 2:1, 4* / Stark und fest in Einigkeit; *Col. 2:5* / Ordnung, treu zusammen halten / Musz in Leibe bei uns walten.

15. "Denn je fester wir umschlungen *John 15:12* / Sind, mit Jesu Liebesband, *John 6:34-35* / Desto besser wird errungen, / Unser Sieg, so Hand in Hand. / Wagt euch nur bei Leib und Leben *Gal. 6:9* / Nicht auf eigne Weg' zu geben.

16. "Folgt die Fuehrer, denn sie leiten *Heb. 13:17* / Euch mit unsers Herzog's Wort. / Diese Ordnung hilft uns streiten, *2 Thes. 2:15* / Und bewaehrt an jeden Ort; / Dasz das Heer von Tag zu Tage / Zions Feinden maechtig schlage. *2 Cor. 10:3*

17. "Ach! Ihr treue Zions Streiter, *Rom. 13:12* / Waffnet euch doch recht gerueszt. / Seid in froher Hoffnung heiter; *2 Cor. 10:4* / Denn es eurem Gott gelueszt, *Eph. 6:13* / Euch das Feld im Kampf zu geben, *1 Cor. 9:25* / Und die Kron im ew'gen Leben.

18. "Halt' das Glaubensschild vor Augen, *Eph. 6:16* / Stoeszt damit den Feind zurueck, / Seine Pfeile die nicht taugen, *1 Pet. 5:9* / Brechen gleich im Augenblick: / Wenn mit kuehnen Glaubenshaenden *Jak. 4:7* / Wir uns stets zu Jesu wenden. *Heb. 12:2*

19. "Wenn das Feldgeschrei der Liebe, *John 15:9* / Toenend unser Herz erfuellt, / Wird gelaehtmt der Feinde Triebe, / Und wir werden eingehuellt: *Rom. 5:5* / Ja, die freie Burg der Gnaden; *Ps. 91:2* / Das der Feind uns nicht kann schaden. *Heb. 10:24*

20. "Kaempfer! Auf die Feinde achtet, *Ps. 3:2* / Merkt auf ihre schlaue Kunst. *Ps. 64:7* / Wenn ihr sie nicht recht betrachtet, *Prov. 3:1-5* / Und stets in des Heralds Gunst, *Gal. 3:1* / Werdet treu und redlich ringen, / Wird er euch mit List bezwingen.

21. "Laszt des hoechsten Herrn der Herren *1 John 5:8* / Hoechstes Kriegsgesetzes Kraft; *John 15:14* / Niemals aus den Augen fern; / Denn sein's Wortes Eigenschaft: *Phil. 2:16* / Ist die Regel die uns leitet, / Und die Macht die mit uns streitet.

22. "Brueder! Haltet die Gebote *John 8:31* / Unsers groszen Herzogs Wort, / Fest und stark bis zu dem Tode, *Rev. 20:10* / Es treib' euch an jedem Ort; *Phil. 2:12* / Dasz ihr moegt' Mit Furcht und Zittern *Heb. 6:6* / Vor das untreu sein erschuettern.

23. "Merkt! Wenn ihr im Feld erliegt, *Josua 7:4, 5* / Und das Heer erschlagen wird, *Josh. 7, 12 & 15* / Dasz der Feind im Schlagen sieget, / Der dazu sein Schwert schon guert't, / Nichts, als das ein freches Herze, *1 Cor. 5:6* / Euch durch Untreu dies verscherze.

24. "Und wenn im Kampffelde fallen, *2 Makb. 12:34* / Ein'ge eurer Gliederzahl: / Merkt, wie sie so theu'r bezahlen, / Eiden Goetzens-Schatz-Diebstahl. *1 Sam. 15:23* / Nichts als freches Uebertreten / Fesselt sie in Todesketten. *2 Makb. 12:46*

25. "Darum bind't das Band zusammen, *Col. 3:14* / Streitet allzumal vereint, / Dasz nicht Luecken wo entstammen; *1 Cor. 10:17* / Die benutzt gleich der Feind. *Hesek. 13:5* / Stemmt euch maennlich in die Orden, *Amos 9:11* / Laszet euch nicht der Feind ermorden.

26. "Wird wo einer je verwundet, *Gal. 6:1* / Von des Feindes Ist get'rich, / Bist, dasz ih  
ihn gleich verbindet, *Sirach 8:6* / Mit das reine Liebes-Seil. *Matt. 18:35* / Ist er nicht sehr scharf  
geschlagen, *Matt. 18:15* / Koennt ihr's noch mit Pflastern wagen. *1 Pet. 4:8*
27. "Ist jedoch schon tief gedrunge, *Matt. 18:16* / Feindes Lanzenstich und Schlag, / Merkt  
dann— das niemals gelungen *Prov. 23:25* / Fine Kor ohn' Ungemach; *1 Thess. 2:5* / Dies musz dann  
der Arzt betrachten, *Jak. 3:14-16* / Und nicht auf die Schmerzen achten.
28. "Erst musz man die Wunde rein'gen *1 Tim. 5:20* / Und von Auszen offnen frei; / Dar-  
nach klueglich wohl vereinigen, *Eph. 5:11* / Arzenei die heilsam sei. *2 Tim. 2:25* / Ist es gleich was  
beiszend, herbe, *Tit. 1:13* / Besser doch, als das man sterbe.
29. "Sollte doch in solchen Faellen, *Matt. 18:17* / Wo die Wund' gefaehrlich ist, *Tit. 3:10*  
/ Sich was Boeses zugesellen, *Gal. 5:9* / Und ihr seht dasz sich ergieszt, / Dieses Uebel immer weiter,  
*2 Tim. 2:17* / So merkt, treue Zionsstreiter.
30. "Das ein kluger Arzt dan (schmerzlich), *Gal. 5:10* / Das verderbt' und faule Glied, / Von  
dem Leibe schneid't, und gaenzlich *Mark 9:45* / Es absondert, und somit / Von der Faedulniz ihn  
befreiet, *Gal. 5:12* / Die er als unheilbar, scheuet.
31. "Auch merkt dies: Ist Achan's Suende *Josua 7:20* / Unter eurer Gliederzahl, / Dasz ein  
Bann sich bei euch finde, *1 John 5:10* / Offenbar vergeiffter Fall: / So zeigt Zorn, Furcht, Eifer,  
Rache, *2 Cor. 7:11* / Um zu retten Gottes Sache.
32. "Schont um Gottes Jesu Willen, / Doch nicht einen Bann bei euch; *1 Cor. 5:13* / Ihr mueszt  
Gottes Willen erfuellen, *Deut. 8:7* / Sein Gericht Amt geistlich, gleich / An den Uebertreter ueben,  
/ Besser koennt ihr ihn nicht lieben. *2 Cor. 9:10*
33. "Merkt nur recht, Ihr Glaubensbrueder, / Was hier geistlich ist gemeint: *1 Cor. 2:15* /  
Dasz nicht durch den Bann die Glieder, / In den Tod gestuerzet seind. / Nein! Ihr eignes Widerstreben  
*Jude 15* / Das beraubt ihr giestlich Leben.
34. "Da sie nun bei Gott gefallen, / Durch die freche Suend in Todt, *Jude 8 & 19* / Und ihr  
Geist doch dereinst mallen, / Nicht moecht' in die ew'ge Noth, *Luke 15:32* / Von Gott abgeschieden  
bleiben, / So mueszt' ihr den Bann recht treiben. *1 Cor. 11:31*
35. "Merkt euch diese dreien Gruenden *Matt. 16:19* / Die die Ursach' sind vom Bann,  
*2 Thes. 3:14* / ERSTLICH mueszt ihr darum binden, / Damit der verbannte Mann, *2 Cor. 2:6-8*  
/ Moege schamroth bueszend werden, / Noch allhier auf dieser Erden.
36. "Ihr bezeugt ihn dann frei offen, *1 Tim. 1:20* / Dasz ihn Satan's Loos und Theil, / Durch  
sein suend'gen hat betroffen, *1 Cor. 5:5* / Und verscherzt sein Gnadeneil. / Damit er im Fleisch  
verderbe, *Heb. 10:26* / Und der Suendenlust absterbe.
37. "Zweitens: Hat der Bann zum Grunde, *1 Cor. 5:6* / Dasz ihr nicht versaeuern sollt,  
*Gal. 5:9* / Durch dergleichen boese Wunden, / Sondern als ein reines Gold, *Eph. 5:26* / Soll es heilig,  
sauber leben, / Und kein boeses Beispiel geben. *1 Cor. 10:32*
38. "Wird solch' gottlos, boeses Wesen / Ungestraft bei euch geduld't? *Micha 6:10* / Dann  
wird bald die Macht der Boesen, *Micha 7:15* / Zahillos sein bei euch gehuld't *2 Thess. 2:11* / Satanas  
mit seinen Kraefften, / Wird euch lachman die Geschaeften.
39. "Cananitisch; Voelkerschaften, / Suend und Greuel aller ort, *Josua 23:12-13* / Wird als  
Freundschaft an euch haften, *Rom. 3:5-8* / Und ihr werd't mit sie gepaart, / Von den Krieg in Frieden  
treten, *2 Chron. 36:6* / Merkt: das sind dann fuer euch Ketten.
40. "Mit den'n Babels Fuersten Herr'n / Euch fuehr'n zur Gefangenschaft, *2 Chron. 36:7-18*  
/ Dasz ihr ohne Kraft und Wehr'n / Wie die Reben ohne Saft, *John 15:2* / Geistlich trocken, fruchtlos  
bleibt, / Und nur blos den Namen treibet. *Isaiah 50-56*
41. "Drittens: Mueszt ihr eifrig stehen, / Fuer des Herren Nam'n und Ehr; *Jude 10* / Und  
nie ohn' Betruebnisz sehen, / Dasz er wird geleastert sehr; *1 John 5:19* / Von der Welt, die da im  
Argen / Lieget, ohne Mueh und Sorgen.
42. "Tragt ja nun bei Leib und Leben, / Doch nicht das Geringste bei; *Luke 14:29-30* / Dern  
Spottfeuer Kraft zu geben, *1 Cor. 5:1* / Dasz die Ursach' bei euch sei: *Genesis 34:30* / Wenn sie  
laestern, spotten, hoehnen, / Ueber Sein Wort sich erkuehnen.
43. "Ihr sollt als ein Licht hell leuchten, / Auf dem Berg in Friedensstadt; *Matt. 5:16* / Wie  
die Frommen stets bezeugten, *Ps. 15:1, 2* / Mit dem Wandel frueh und spat, / Dasz sie Gottes Kinder  
seien, *Heb. 12:1* / Die sich mit der Suend' nicht freuen.
44. "So mueszt' ihr auch jetz noch trachten, *1 Pet. 2:11, 12* / Ohne boes' Geschrei zu sein;  
/ Ja, ihr mueszt' mit Fleisz drauf achten, *Acts 21:24* / Dasz ihr niemand einen Stein, / In dem Wege  
legt zum Fallen, *1 Cor. 9:20* / Durch ein boeses, fleischlich Wallen.

43. "Darum trut von euch die boesen, *1 Cor. 6:13* / Die nicht nach des Herrn wort, *2 Thess. 3:11* / Richten ihren Gang und Wesen, *James 2:17* / Dasz ihr moecht' an jedem Ort, / Mit der Tat und Wahrheit zeigen / Dasz in cuern Streiter Reihen.

46. "Sich nicht duerfen mit einschleichen, / Von des Feindes Dienerschaft; *1 John 2:19* / Die durch Heuchelei erreichen / In dem Lager feste Kraft; / Denn sie sind euch zum Verderben, *Phil. 3:2* / Wirken nichts als Tod und Sterben.

47. "Traut nicht ihre schoene Worte, *Rom. 16:17, 18* / Dringt in ihren innern Grund; / Und betracht' von welcher Sorte, / Ihre Fruechte kennbar sind. / Sind sie Gottes Wort entgegen *Matt. 7:15-23* / Dann laszt euch doch keines wegen.

48. "Mit ihr ein in einem Bunde, *Col. 2:18* / Sie verruecken euch das Ziel. / Haltet euch mit gutem Grunde / Von der Welt in aller Still', *John 15:19* / Abgekehrt, stets einsam, feste, / Dann besteht ihr ganz das beste. *2 Cor. 6:17*

49. "Seid einfaltig, klug und weise, *Matt. 10:16* / Wandelt wuerdiglich dem Herrn, *Col. 1:10* / Denn auf dieser Himmelsreise, / Ist Gefahr und Noth nicht fern *2 Cor. 11:26* / Wachtet mit Gebet und Flehen, / Dann wird euch auch nichts geschehen. *1 Thess. 5:23*

50. "Werd't nicht sicher, traut dem Feinde / Doch ja keinen Augenblick; *Isaiah 32:9* / Denn viel Tausen um euch seinde, *Eph. 6:12* / Seitwaerts, vorne und zurueck; *Ps. 25:19* / Ueberall wo ihr euch wendet, *Ps. 35:7* / Hat ihr Fuerst sie hingesendet.

51. "Wenn ihr wollt recht sicher gehen, / Bis ans End' bestehen fest: *Heb. 12:2* / Mueszt ihr stets auf Jesum sehen. / Denn Sein Vorbild ist auf's Best', *1 Pet. 2:21-23* / Euch vermoegend Kraft zu geben, *Phil. 3:12* / Fortzudringen, zu dem Leben.

52. "Dringt in Sein gottseelges Leben *Eph. 3:16-21* / Immer fester, tiefer ein. *Acts 17:11* / Forschet fleiszig auch daneben, / In des Wortes heiligen Schrein, *2 Pet. 1:19-21* / Laszt euch recht am Herzen liegen, / Dann werd't ihr euch nicht betruegen.

53. "Wie die Heil'gen vor'ger Tage, / Goettlich waren hier gesinnt; *Jer. 6:16* / Und in welcher schweren Lage / Sie hier machen Sturm und Wind: *Sirach 39:1-2* / Stark im Glauben durchgestanden, *Heb. 11:38* / In Gefaengnisz, Noth und Banden.

54. "Dasz geliebte treue Brueder! *Ps. 7:7* / Das betracht' von Herzensgrund. / Denn sie waren Christi Glieder *Heb. 12:23* / Und mit Gott in einem Bunde; / Folget treulich ihrem Leben, *Phil. 3:17* / So wird euch dies Segen geben.

55. "Seid bestaendig bis an's Ende, / Haltet eure Krone fest; *Matt. 10:22* / Dasz euch nichts davon abwende, *Rev. 3:11* / Und dereinst als wuerd'ge Gaest' *Matt. 22:11* / Werd't in jenem Mahl empfangen, / Dahin trachtet mit Verlangen. *Matt. 25:10*

56. "Laszt euch nicht die Mueh' gereuen, / Wenn es gleich was sauer wird *Acts 14:22* / Ihr mueszt hier dem Herrn euch weihen, / Dort wird euer Seelenhirt, / Jesus, hochgelobt, gepriesen, / Euch des Vater's Reich erkiesen.

"AMEN"

"Heinrich Balzer"  
Tiege, January 9, 1836.

## 13.09 Conclusion.

It has already been noted that the Balzer writings, and **Faith and Reason** in particular, were highly treasured in the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. These writings were avidly read and circulated among the Kleine Gemeinde and their neighbours through the form of handwritten copies. Unfortunately the Kleine Gemeinde interest in its own literature started to decline after its arrival in America, where it soon encountered many problems similiar to those of the Grosze Flemish Gemeinde when it settled the Molotschna in 1804. By the close of the first World War these writings, including those of Balzer, were very much neglected. By the 1930's the young leaders in the Gemeinde were looking to American fundamentalism (dispensationalism) for their spiritual inspiration so that the writings of the forefathers were largely forgotten and relegated to the dust bins.<sup>15a</sup> Fortunately a number of individuals remained true to their spiritual heritage and preserved many of these writings for posterity.

It is equally unfortunate that the writings of Heinrich Balzer have received only little attention in the general Russian Mennonite historiography. In his introduction to **Faith and Reason**, Dr. Friedmann mentions that in 1888 the work was published in five parts in the periodical **Gemeinde Unterarm Kruez** by John G. Stauffer, an independent publisher and printer in Pennsylvania. Dr. Friedmann mentions that Abraham T. Friesen (sic), a teacher of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde, submitted a copy of **Faith and Reason** to Stauffer for publication.<sup>16</sup> Likely this would have been Abraham L. Friesen, the Aeltester of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Nebraska. Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen

was a very literate man who supported and initiated a number of publications by that group. According to the **Mennonite Bibliography 1631-1961**<sup>17</sup>, **Faith and Reason** was also published as a separate booklet by Peter Toews in 1891. Again the printer is John Stauffer of Quakertown, Pennsylvania. It appears that a strong interest in the work of Balzer continued on both sides of the Canadian border at least until the end of the century. No doubt this is the edition of the Balzer work which was found among the papers of Aeltester Jacob F. Isaac as well as in various Manitoba collections.

In spite of the foregoing publication activity, no reference to the writings of Heinrich Balzer is made by Peter M. Friesen, the usually well-informed Russian Mennonite historian. This omission was repeated by subsequent historians until **Faith and Reason** was rediscovered, translated and published by Dr. Robert Friedmann in 1948. (See Section 13.04). Dr. Friedmann, who was one of the few academics to have studied the Anabaptist-Mennonite writings in a scholarly manner, considered **Faith and Reason** to constitute "a remarkable attempt to formulate a philosophy of Mennonitism".<sup>18</sup> He was also of the opinion that this writing was one of the most stimulating statements in Mennonite literature.<sup>19</sup>

Other historians have taken a very different view of Heinrich Balzer and **Faith and Reason**. Dr. John B. Toews, writes as follows of **Faith and Reason**: "The tract, while displaying considerable mastery of German prose, is reactionary—Balzer is incapable of appreciating the expanding Mennonite world. His appeal is to the past, and his intellect, though of high quality, assumes an ultra-conservative stance. He possibly symbolized the Mennonite mind of the mid-nineteenth century—certainly not illiterate, but incapable of adapting a historic faith to new circumstances."<sup>21</sup> It might be noted that Professor Toews also takes the view that "the 'Jakob Enns' quarrels with Klaas Wiens (Steinbach) and Klaas Reimer (Kleine Gemeinde) were hardly the dialogue of gentlemen nor were they even sustained by theological debate of merit."<sup>22</sup> Toews reverently cherishes the pietist educational philosophy which was gaining hold in the Molotschna during the 1830's and consequently opposed by Heinrich Balzer and his fellow Anabaptist-Mennonites. The same innovation was also bitterly opposed by the reactionary cultural Mennonites represented by the Grosze Flemish Gemeinde under Aeltester Jakob Warkentin and later Aeltester Heinrich Wiens.

Another view is adopted by James Urry, a professor at the Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand. In an article published in the **Journal of Comparative Studies in Society and History** in 1983 Urry summarizes the position of Heinrich Balzer as follows: "According to Balzer, an understanding of God could neither be achieved through rational inquiry nor by the accumulation of 'worldly knowledge', a proper understanding of God could come only through knowledge of the Scriptures and through living a simple and separate life. The desire to seek 'knowledge' as a form of revelation could only lead men further from God and the proper way of life. In Balzer's vivid words, Mennonites who sought such a path were at risk of being caught 'stealthily in the snares of reason'."

Urry goes on to note that the appeals of men like Balzer could not halt the flood of "progress". The economy boomed and prospered and by the first World War a number of the Mennonites who had remained in Russia had become wealthy. They took great pride in their schools and "few now argued that attainment of detailed knowledge of the world was unnecessary and most struggled hard to ensure that their children received the best education available". Urry states that the changes from the 1830's to the end of the century were not merely a "change in attitude towards knowledge and whether or not knowledge was necessary for the continuation and the development of life, but also a fundamental alteration in the concept of knowledge itself".<sup>24</sup>

In his 1978 doctoral thesis,<sup>25</sup> James Urry develops some of these concepts. In his conclusion he notes that it was indeed the school system which had finally served to break down what he refers to as the old "closed" order. Thereby the Mennonites who remained in Russia also adopted the 19th century European reliance on technological and intellectual advancement, and a faith in unimpeded expansion and cumulative progress. In the former days the closed order had "acted to reinforce the concept of the people of God; people were defined by faith and all outsiders were excluded. By 1880 faith was not the firm foundation of life, but merely one form of identity among a number of features which went to make up the Mennonite identity . . . The old order, after submitting the members to the ideal of community, had upheld the totality of the order by appeal to the one Way, for only together could the people of God hope for salvation. The introduction of individualism allowed members to seek their own paths to salvation, often through the belief in personal redemption."<sup>26</sup>

In other words, the bonds of evangelical faith and submission to the Gemeinde of Christ were replaced by other ties. These included a common fear of the Russian world surrounding the Men-

nonites which was becoming increasingly hostile. Very important was a sense of identity as being different economically, historically, and culturally. The educational system was a crucial bond in the development and reinforcing of this new attitude towards self and the surrounding world. "Religious authority was increasingly seen as pertaining to but one aspect of life, no longer to the totality of existence."<sup>27</sup> By the end of the 19th century the Mennonites in Russia had completed a transformation from a people separated by their faith, to a people separated by their peculiar cultural and socio-economic circumstances. In short, they had become an ethnic group.

But the new order was closed minded in its own way. The security of a provident land enhanced and developed by the struggles of generations of the forefathers had created a shimmering mirage which was more fantasy than fact. Professor Urry closes his study with the following comments regarding the instantaneous demise of the Russian Mennonite society in 1917:

"If the settlements still gave the impression of closed off worlds, it was an illusion. The separation of the Mennonites from the world about them was the result of historical processes and of their own status rather than because of the design of some total system of discourse or distinctive institutions founded on clearly defined premises. But the security of their position, privileged and prosperous for many in the Russian Empire, gave most Mennonites the impression of separation and encouraged the idea that their faith was upholding their position. How much, and how deeply, they had opened their lives and minds to the world around them and how dependent they were upon its meanings and support, was only to be revealed to them when the very fabric of this larger world began to collapse. These events, and the Mennonite response to them, belong though to another century and to a different story. Once destroyed, however, the Mennonite commonwealth proved impossible to recreate, given the attitudes and values of its members. The vestige of its once completeness was abandoned to elusive memories of a world, an age and a people, which had been vanquished by forces they never understood."<sup>28</sup>

From the foregoing it is evident that considerable differences exist in the interpretation of the views so forcefully expounded by Heinrich Balzer in 1833. Unfortunately both Toews and Urry make the mistake of assessing the 19th century Russian Mennonite world only in terms of an old order and new order. Neither view properly allows for a third order which sought to reinstate the New Testament church as represented by the Anabaptist-Mennonite vision of the Reformation.

Many questions regarding the writings of Heinrich Balzer remain to be considered. What were the sources of "apostolic primitivism" represented by his ideal of the Church of Christ. What were the intellectual sources of his philosophical conceptualization? Why was a minister in the pietist Orloff Gemeinde reading the German philosophers in a community where the intellectual level was more commonly evidenced by the reading of religious fantasies represented by Albrecht Bengel and his pronouncement that the second coming of Christ would occur in 1836? By comparison the predictions of Heinrich Balzer have been proven by history to be totally correct and therefore his writings are deserving of further examination.

The teachings of Heinrich Balzer must also be viewed within their *Kleine Gemeinde* context. Balzer takes a stricter approach in his view of evangelical discipline and objective piety than does Klaas Reimer, or Abraham Friesen in his later Aeltester period. If carried to an extreme these views could be used to develop a Mennonitism with a good tinge of Calvinistic legalism such as is found among some of the more Orthodox Swiss-American denominations. The teachings of Balzer could be interpreted to lead to an emphasis on outward formulae such as were advocated by John M. Breneman (1816-1895) in his book, *Hoffart und Demut*.<sup>29</sup> But the validity of such an interpretation is doubtful when **Faith and Reason** is considered within the context of the historical milieu in which Balzer wrote. On another level, **Faith and Reason** can also be interpreted as a philosophical justification for a religious community based on a physically separated, isolated settlement. This would be an unfortunate misinterpretation and a radical departure of the *Kleine Gemeinde* ideal which reaffirmed the Anabaptist-Mennonite vision of the church of Christ as a spiritual body separated by its heroic battle against the forces of evil in a hostile host society. The ramifications of these variant interpretations become very evident in the unfolding history of the Mennonite *Kleine Gemeinde*.

The complete text of **Faith and Reason**, as well as the commentary by Dr. Robert Friedmann are set forth in Chapter Fourteen. The same is reprinted with the kind permission of the Mennonite Quarterly Review, Goshen, Indiana.

#### FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER THIRTEEN. HEINRICH BALZER.

1. Aeltester Peter Toews, *Sammlung*, op.cit., 69. All the Balzer writings quoted in this chapter are included in the *Sammlung*.
2. Dr. B.J. Unruh, op.cit., 366.



3. Peter Toews, *op.cit.*, 304.
4. *Ibid.*, 54.
5. Cornelius P. Janzen Collection, courtesy of Mennonite Village Museum/Klaus P. Janzen, Blumenort, Manitoba.
6. David L. Plett prepared a collection of poems and historical writings for each of his children. The various collections reviewed by this writer were courtesy of Isaac K. Plett; John D. K. Plett/E.M.C. Archieves; Mrs. A. J. R. Barkman; Betty Plett and Peter L. Plett; and Mrs. Cornelius K. Plett. These collections included a transcription of **Faith and Reason**.
7. Mrs. Klaas P. Reimer writings courtesy of Mrs. Peter K. Penner, Steinbach, Manitoba.
8. John E. Friesen Collection, courtesy of Roy. Loewen/Rev. Jack. P. Friesen, Blumenort, Manitoba.
9. Abraham R. Penner Papers, courtesy of Mrs. Wm. P. Wiebe, Steinbach, Manitoba, 1981.
10. Peter P. Toews, **Sammlung**, *op.cit.*, 88-117.
11. Courtesy of Henry Fast, Steinbach, Manitoba, who has made significant contributions in identifying Kleine Gemeinde primary source material in Kansas and Nebraska.
12. Robert Friedmann, **Mennonite Piety Through the Centuries**, *op.cit.*, page 259.
13. C. Neff, "David Epp", ME 2, 234.
14. Franz Isaac, *op.cit.*, 95.
15. Peter Toews, **Eine Seltsame Begebenheit**. (Hochstaedt. Manitoba. 1911). 22
- 15a. Considerable philosophical and theological change had occurred since the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde had departed from Russia in 1874. Therefore it is helpful to refer to the 1930's remnant as the Kleingemeinde in order to note the changes which had taken place.
16. Dr. Robert Friedmann, "Faith and Reason: The Principles of Mennonitism Reconsidered in a Treatise of 1833", *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, Volume XXLL, April, 1948, Number 2, 75-93.
17. Nelson P. Springer and A.J. Klassen, **Mennonite Bibliography 1631-1961**, (Herald Press, Scottdale, Pennsylvania, 1977), 474.
18. R. Friedmann, "Faith and Reason", *op.cit.*, 76.
21. John B. Toews, "The Russian Mennonite Intellect of the Nineteenth Century", in **P.M. Friesen and His History**, edited by Abraham Friesen, (Centre for M.B. Studies, Fresno, California, 1979), 5.
22. *Ibid.*, 3.
23. James Urry, "The Snares of Reason—Changing Mennonite Attitudes to 'Knowledge' in Nineteenth Century Russia", in **Journal of Comparative Studies in Society and History**, Volume 25, April, 1983, 306-307. I am grateful to Harvey Plett for refering me to this article.
24. *Ibid.*, page 307.
25. James Urry, "The Closed and the Open, Social and Religious Change Amongst the Mennonites in Russia (1789-1879)", Doctoral Dissertation for the University of Oxford, London, England, 830 pages.
26. *Ibid.*, 731-740.
27. *Ibid.*, 747b.
28. *ibid.*
29. J.S. Umble, "John M. Brenneman", ME 1, 418.

# Chapter Fourteen.

## Faith And Reason:

### The Principles Of Mennonitism Reconsidered, In A Treatise Of 1833 Translated and Edited by Robert Friedmann.

Is it possible to speak of a "philosophy of Mennonitism"? At first thought one would answer this question negatively. As yet not even a conclusive "theology of Mennonitism" has been formulated, although it has frequently been attempted. How then is it possible to present the simple, unsophisticated faith of the Anabaptist-Mennonite fathers in a philosophical frame? To do so would seem a contradiction in terms. And yet the remarkable essay presented here in an English translation, represents essentially such an undertaking. Its author is Heinrich Balzer, a Mennonite minister, who in his later years was associated with the Kleine Gemeinde (Mennonite), in Orlov on the Molotschna (Russia).

Balzer writes entirely in the spirit of the sixteenth century founders. And yet, he approaches his subject, the decline of the Mennonite Church and the possible means of its internal revival, not from a theological angle but rather from a semi-philosophical one. He does not primarily preach morals, or the sinfulness of a world estranged from God, but he tries to prove that the root of these evils (which today we would call "secularism") must be found in a confusion of two seemingly abstract concepts: *Verstand* and *Vernunft* (understanding and reason). These terms, however, represent more than mere philosophical concepts; they indicate attitudes, frames of mind, basic evaluations of approaches to the problems of life. It appears that the author was not unfamiliar with the philosophical trends of his time, particularly with German Idealism<sup>1</sup> and the rising liberalism in thought and science. He is conscious of all this, but looks at it not from the inside as one of their number, but from another level as one who deplors this way, and criticizes it. In his Christian mind he sees the hand of the great Enemy in the success of these "humanistic" developments. The use of the afore-mentioned concepts in his argument, making them responsible for historical developments, is the outstanding feature of this essay. In a sense the entire argument is a great indictment of modern civilization which is founded on human reason rather than on faith in God's grace and guidance. The ancient teaching of the Apostle Paul, taken up by the Anabaptists and Mennonites, "not to conform oneself to this world," has found here a quasi-philosophical vindication.

The Christian faith in its concrete, existential form, as a living frame of mind, is submitted to a stimulating analysis, not in the way of Schleiermacher, the idealist, who calls faith a "feeling of absolute dependency"; but rather in the way of Pascal, the believer, who calls faith the "reason of the heart" (*raison du coeur*). Balzer, who hardly knew this seventeenth century French Catholic religious, nevertheless speaks the same language, calling faith the *Verstand des Herzens*. All deviations from the path of pure and genuine discipleship result from an overcultivation of reason, something which since the days of the Renaissance has been called *Humanism*. To this Humanism "man is the measure of all things," and not God. When reason becomes dominant in all spheres of life, faith, or (intuitive) *understanding* as the author prefers to call it, is watered down and eventually destroyed. Naturally, reason is useful in the daily affairs of life, and therefore merits acknowledgement; it is man's "natural light" and as such it also is a gift from the Creator. But beyond this scope reason, if unchecked, holds dangers in store. It is destructive rather than creative through its techniques of analysis, doubt<sup>2</sup> and unrestrained curiosity. Thanks to human ingenuity, science and technology have brought us all the way to the atomic weapons, but little demonstration is required to show that in this process God has been lost, and that today the powers of darkness dominate the scene.

In spite of shortcomings presently to be discussed, Balzer's study is by and large sound, providing a possible philosophical foundation for the Mennonite faith as it was developed by the early Swiss Brethren and Menno Simons. After two thousand years of Christian as well as secular history we still face the same antithesis and the same dilemma. Two sets of values guide our lives which do not quite agree, one comprising the divine and eternal, reaching beyond man's capacity, and the other one encompassing the rational and secular, giving man self-assurance and pride of intellectual autonomy. Modern man is hardly willing or capable of denying the secular in favor of the Christian set of values. But he should become more aware of the hidden temptations and dangers of the secular way, though it is certainly not an easy task to keep from making human reason an absolute and last instance. Balzer, of course, knows these problems very well. Although using a semiphilosophical language he nevertheless endeavors to stay on that other level from whence he can judge the world

of reason. He does so by virtue of his *understanding*. But he knows that the temptations of reason are continually creeping into his mind. In the last chapter of his study he warns against higher learning for the youth, quoting Paul's statement that "knowledge puffeth up" (1 Cor. 8:1).<sup>3</sup> And then he continues: "Everyone knows by his own experience the tremendous difficulties in this denial of one's reason and intellectual autonomy, a denial so much needed for salvation and yet rendered so hard by misunderstood education and enlightenment." What a problem for our entire educational philosophy!

That Balzer was quite in line with original Anabaptism can be proved by the unexpected coincidence. In his section on "Scriptural Testimonies" he quotes Paul in 2 Corinthians 10:5, as an outstanding witness for his thesis: "bring into captivity every thought [*Vernunft*] to the obedience of Christ." It is reassuring to find that in 1571, Peter Walpot, a Hutterite Elder, used exactly the same text as his chief argument against Polish anti-Trinitarians (Unitarians), the rationalists of his day. A comparison of Walpot's letter (published in the *Geschichtbuch der Hutterischen Brüder*)<sup>4</sup> with Balzer's philosophical essay shows a good deal of conformity. It is true that in his study Balzer does not make obedience the center of his argument as Walpot so emphatically does. But in his farewell hymn, to be quoted later on, obedience becomes a cardinal principle to Balzer also.

Likewise Pilgrim Marpeck, although educated and versed in theological controversies, does not think very highly of secular learning and that which it implies. In his letter of 1544 to Caspar Schwenckfeld he speaks pointedly of "the unlettered son of a carpenter whom your philosophy has fabricated into such a high Christ." It would be easy to multiply such quotations against *Hochgelehrsamkeit* (secular learning). It is obvious that Balzer is quite in line with a tradition of his church though he did not know it. (sic)

Although philosophical in his approach, Balzer was not trained in abstract thinking, and for that reason his study shows shortcomings which make interpretation and translation difficult. First of all his expression and style is often cumbersome and involved. In the translation it was necessary to break up long sentences and to reformulate statements the meaning of which was somewhat confused or hazy. Occasionally it was necessary to risk even a guess rather than to omit the passage altogether. Secondly, Balzer tends toward a certain oversimplification which brings the issue too much into a strict antithesis of black and white. Certainly, the blending of Christianity into Western Civilization is a much more complex phenomenon than it might appear from Balzer's fervent appeal for simplicity, nonconformity, obedience, and husbandry (as the most conducive occupation for an earnest Christian).

Thirdly, Balzer is not quite consistent in the use of his two basic concepts *Verstand* and *Vernunft*, the description of which is at times vague and somewhat iridescent. One might plead, however, that it is here where Balzer shows his typical German background. For to a German (particularly of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries) these terms are very popular though used mostly in a different way, usually taking *Verstand* with the meaning of *Vernunft*, and vice versa. No comparable antithesis or combination of terms exists in the English language.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, our translation was faced with a serious handicap which needed to be overcome if the text was to be intelligible. Fortunately the author presents in section IV a series of "Scriptural Testimonies" which provide a lead to an adequate translation. Wherever Luther in his German Bible used the word *Vernunft* (Balzer inconsistently has *Verstand*), The King James' version uses the term *understanding*. As a matter of fact this *understanding* is something different from faith (though related to it) as well as from understanding as it is used in everyday language. Yet, it comes the nearest to what the author wanted to convey. To prevent confusion and ambiguity, however, and to indicate that the word stands here as a technical term with a special meaning, it will be printed in the present context always in italics.

In concluding these introductory remarks, a brief synopsis describing the deeper meaning of the basic antithesis of the essay is in order. By *Verstand* Balzer means man's cognitive faculty behind his faith, knowledge through faith, or in other words, the faculty to know God and His truth. Another term for the same principle is *understanding* (*Verständnis*); another is "the mind as illuminated by the Holy Spirit." We might repeat here again Pascal's "reason of heart" by which he does not mean emotion or sentiment, but rather a vision of the eternal truth. Sometimes in English it is also called a "sense for eternal values," although it is a sense only in a figurative way. Actually it is a mental faculty, a capacity of understanding and judging. It is always of an intuitive character and not discursive. That is what makes its description so difficult.

On the other hand, what Balzer calls *Vernunft* and what is translated here as reason, is the faculty behind our reasoning. It is the "reason of the head," the intellectual frame of mind which does

not seek values and eternal truths but rather scientific relations and laws. In Biblical language it is the "natural light." It gives man a strong consciousness of his intellectual autonomy and power. In philosophy and the liberal arts it functions as the main tool. In the great decisions of life, however, it leads nowhere; therefore doubt and skepticism are its natural outgrowth. Both faculties are necessary to man. Their mutual relationship and possible confusion, as well as the resulting effects, will be the main theme of the following study.

A few words should also be said about the author and his manuscript. Not much is known about him. He was a preacher of the Mennonite Church in Orlov on the Molotschna as mentioned above. In his congregation he faced a double temptation: On the one side was a trend toward rationalism, liberalism, and a watering down of Christian principles in favor of secularism and full participation with the world. On the other hand was emotionalism, pietism, and a form of private edification and sanctification, which Balzer likewise declined in good old Anabaptist fashion. Both these trends are discussed in the following study. There remained a third way, however, and it was this which attracted his attention and eventual consent. This was the conservative way of strict adherence to the Biblical commandments and to the pattern of the forefathers. In 1812, one Claas Reimer and a few followers had withdrawn from the main church body and started the *Kleine Gemeinde* on extremely conservative foundations. Today (1948) this *Kleine Gemeinde* still exists, more or less in its original form, mainly in Manitoba, as a little island which has resisted the march of time.<sup>6</sup> A major issue in the controversy between Claas Reimer and the main body of the Mennonite Church in the Molotschna was the question of service on the local police force. In other words, could Mennonite Christians perform the functions of the secular authority in the administration of their autonomous colonies? Balzer alludes to this controversy in his last chapter. In his criticism of the church Reimer certainly was on Biblical ground, but in his fanaticism he overreached himself and accordingly failed to obtain a large following.<sup>7</sup> (sic)

In 1833, Balzer decided to leave his old church and to join the *Kleine Gemeinde*. We learn the reasons for this step from a long farewell hymn of fifty stanzas written in 1833, and published by John G. Stauffer of Quakertown, Pennsylvania, in his periodical *Die Gemeinde unterm Kreuz* (September, 1886). From it we reproduce the following lines by way of illustration.

Gottes Geist sprach unablässig in mein Herze durch sein Wort:

"Du musst von der Welt dich gänzlich reissen . . .

Willst du zu dem Leben gehen, so muss ich dich folgsam sehen."

Abgeteilt ein kleines Herd'chen hiess er schon seit ein'ger Zeit

Aus der grossen Zahl der Mächt'gen sich aussondern durch Bescheid.

. . . Diese Herde ist ganz eigen, sie besteht aus freier Wahl,

Jeder unter ihr muss zeigen, dass er ist ein Glied der Zahl [derer]

Die gehorsam wollen sein und sich üben zart und rein,

Nach des Herren Wort zu schmücken, und im Kreuzeweg sich bücken.

The treatise on *Verstand und Vernunft* was written at about the same time as the above hymn. One might guess that it was intended as a vindication of Balzer's decisive step which might easily have been interpreted as a lack of love or care for the larger church of which he was a minister. In this treatise, the author sets forth his vision of the "true" Christian church and its need for strictness. In the concluding chapter he even develops a kind of program for such an ideal church.

The text upon which the following translation is based also has an interesting story. The original manuscript, which had never been published, was in the possession of Abraham T. Friesen; a teacher of the *Kleine Gemeinde* in Manitoba.<sup>8</sup> Friesen made a copy (of 44 pages 4") and sent it to John G. Stauffer, an independent Mennonite publisher and printer of Quakertown, Pennsylvania. The latter printed the treatise in his then widely read periodical, *Die Gemeinde unterm Kreuz*, in five installments, from May, 1886, to January, 1887. Nothing is known regarding response by the readers. Since the print was rather poor, the style difficult, and the ideas new and unfamiliar, the publication most likely escaped wider attention. A manuscript copy of unknown origin was also found among the papers of John F. Funk of Elkhart, Indiana, and is now in the Mennonite Archives of Goshen College. For these reasons Balzer's treatise in its present form might rightly be called a rediscovery and a genuine enrichment of our knowledge of Mennonite thought and literature. Its contents, moreover, constitute a genuine challenge, and deserve wider discussion.

# Understanding And Reason. Simple Opinions Regarding The Difference Between Understanding And Reason, Discussed According To The Teachings Of The Gospel

By a teacher of the Mennonites in the Molotschna [Russia], 1833.  
[Heinrich Balzer]<sup>9</sup>

## I. Introduction.

Each century has its particular way of attacking the Christian truth of salvation. The great Enemy of mankind [Satan] is tirelessly busy in an effort to destroy the Kingdom of Light as the history of Christendom so clearly shows. The first centuries of our era give ample proof of this conflict of the true faith with the adversaries of Christianity who so vehemently denied the divinity of Jesus. At a later period the Enemy attacked the fundamental truths of the Gospel by blending them with secular philosophy against which the witnesses of truth had to strive with great labor and pain. Still later [during the Middle Ages] the Enemy tried to deceive [*überlisten*] the church of Christ with many erroneous doctrines, human laws, the teaching of "sanctification by works," and the adoration of saints. For a while the true teachings of the Gospel were almost buried under this rubble. Modern times again supply ample proof that the Enemy has found even more refined ways and means to overthrow the great evangelical truths.

Unfortunately, the history of the church shows that the Enemy has been rather successful with these tricks. There exists an acute danger of a complete overthrow of the Kingdom of the Peace of Christ; like a slow pestilence the Enemy penetrates all of Christendom with this deadly disease, making it unhealthy in faith and numbingly cold in love. For that reason our Saviour says, "When the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:8; Matt. 14:12). Inasmuch as injustice increases the love of many will grow cold. The result of this baleful disease is quite obvious for every friend of the truth. To trace the origin and location of this pestilence, however, requires the combined art and skill of all the physicians of the spiritual Zion. And they certainly need the great truth in order to apply the proper remedy once they have found the roots of all these ills.

To find them is not too difficult if you but look with a simple mind at the present condition of Christianity. You might ask me what, after all, constitutes the core of this great ill? To this I have to answer as follows: the Enemy has succeeded in dazing the simple eye of faith by confusing the faculty of the heart [*understanding*] with that of reason.<sup>10</sup> In this confusion I recognize the very source of all the trouble. In teaching the truths of the Gospel the apostles worked for the growth of *understanding* of the heart, whereas modern times stress primarily the development of reason [*Vernunft des Kopfes*]. This is an evil because it slowly and softly coaxes, stuns, and deludes Christendom, cancerously eating up all the fundamental truths of the Gospel. By this the stage is being set for the rising of the "son of perdition who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God" (II Thess. 2:3, 4).

Also in our own Mennonite Church the Enemy has been successful not only by breathing upon her this fatal disease so that the center already suffers its consequences; but also by boldly attacking the Christian simplicity of our faith with the purpose of overthrowing our basic principles. For all these reasons I, the lowest of the guardians of our church, feel constrained in love and duty toward my brethren and coreligionists to call their attention to these facts, to insistently warn them, and to prove to them with the holy Word of God my simple understanding that the ever spreading great corruption of entire Christendom has its very source in the confusion of these two forces: *understanding* and reason [*Verstand und Vernunft*]. In the following pages I want to present to my brethren my good advice as to how to work against this corruption and its consequences. It is my deep desire to contribute by this writing at least a small stone to the construction of the spiritual temple of Zion; to stem the insidious attack of Satan; and to assist in the healing of our church from all these creeping ills and bringing her back to the original and firm foundations of our holy forefathers. For our goal is to reach one faith and one knowledge of the Son of God. Only he is a perfect man who follows the perfect example of Christ. Amen.

## II. Man Is Created to a Threefold Life of the Body, the Soul, and the Mind.

From the holy Word of God we learn with many proofs that the life of man has a threefold character: first is the physical life; second the life of the soul or [rather] of the senses; and third the spiritual or mental life. According to the terms of the Scriptures we could also say that man is built of body, soul, and spirit. The physical or, as we also could call it, animal life animates our body, makes it moving and fit to all the functions of this world; if it is taken away the body falls down and is dead. This physical life man has in common with all living creatures. The psychic or sensual life is of a totally different character, since it is immortal and dominates the physical life. This second life, or, what amounts to the same, the human soul evinces its activities through thinking [reasoning], and governs and directs the physical life by way of the five senses. As a matter of fact other living creatures also show this kind of life, only with this great difference that the all-bountiful Creator has endowed the human soul with reason, the natural light, by which man can reasonably consider the affairs of this world, judge his own actions, and make a good and rational choice between right and wrong.

The third, the mental or spiritual life, too, was given to man by his Creator. It represents that part by which the great Lord has tied Himself the closest to man, and by which man received the greatest privilege of all creatures. However, because of man's disobedience to God's commandment,

the warning (Genesis 2:17), "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," came true, and this life died and was lost. Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, however, this faded out [spiritual] life was retrieved and made available again to the reborn ones. The true knowledge, or the "reason of the heart" [*Verstand des Herzens*] is revealed through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to those who genuinely repent from their sins, deny them [*ihnen absterben*], and conduct their lives in accordance with the word of Christ in whose redemptive death they believe. Out of grace the Father of Light will give them the right wisdom and *understanding*.

### III. The Great Difference Between "Understanding" [Reason of the Heart] and Reason [Natural Reason].

The mind of man, or his *understanding*, consists in a true and correct knowledge of God's will regarding man, as it has been revealed clearly and simply in the Holy Scriptures. This mind becomes illuminated in a reborn person through the divine power of the Holy Spirit, and the more a man opens his heart to the working of the Spirit of God, the more the mind will be illuminated and inspired. For it was through the fall of man that his *understanding* was darkened. Eph. 4:18.

Reason, on the other hand, is a natural light with which the good Creator has endowed the soul of every human being to a greater or smaller extent. This reason was not lost through man's fall; yet in consequence of the fall it became corrupted in such a way that a man who indulges in the vices of sin will become quite foolish [and irrational] in his actions and judgments. This natural reason is restricted exclusively to activities of this world; that is, to what one can see, judge, test, and decide upon. These are the affairs to which natural reason applies and in which it can be of great avail as a useful light. But that which belongs to our salvation, and which according to the Scriptures can be grasped only through faith, requires a simple obedience to the Gospel that lies completely beyond the limits of reason. Furthermore, because of the deep fall of man by which he became corrupted in body, soul, and mind, the [natural] reason also was spoiled and became outright hostile to God and His will. Therefore, in a reborn and faithful heart, animated by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit alone, this reason must be subordinated to the faith, and be brought under its obedience [*Kindschaft des Verstandes*].

### IV. Scriptural Testimonies and Proofs Regarding the Antithesis of "Understanding" and Reason.<sup>3</sup>

Of the Lord Jesus, Luke says that "all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answer" (Luke 2:47). Likewise the Apostle Paul says of himself, "Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ" (Eph. 3:4). And in the epistle to the Colossians (1:9) the apostle points out that he does not cease to pray for the believers that they might be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. Somewhat later (Col. 2:2) he professes his struggle that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God the Father and of Christ. Again the apostle comforts his beloved disciple Timothy with these words: "The Lord give thee understanding in all things" (II Tim. 2:7). And finally the book of Revelation says this: "Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast" (Rev. 13:18).

These texts may suffice to prove that the saintly authors of the New Testament had a high opinion of the *understanding* [or mind] of man, and that they saw their main duty in its development through the preaching of the Gospel, as well as through prayers that the Holy Spirit might illuminate the believers. On the other hand, what the New Testament has to say about [natural] reason shows that this reason is considered as belonging to a lower rank, in no way of the same class as *understanding*, and not to be confused with it. Rather, the attainment of salvation requires the denial and the taming of the reason and of other natural endowments without, however, restricting their use in their own domain. It is the same as with our body: we cannot do without it, and yet it must remain subject to the will of the reborn man. The following texts<sup>11</sup> give the clearest testimony to this point.

In II Corinthians 10:5, the apostle exhorts the believers of Corinth: "Casting down imagination and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every *thought* to the obedience of Christ."<sup>12</sup> In Ephesians 2:3 we read: "Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." And the great benediction of the Epistle to the Philippians (4:7) says: "And the peace of God which passeth all understanding<sup>13</sup> shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Col. 1:21: "And you that were sometimes alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works. . . ." On the other hand, the Apostle Peter discusses the domain of natural reason as follows: "Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with your wives according to knowledge"<sup>14</sup> (I Peter 3:7). And since it appears a matter of fact that believers, sanctified by the Holy Spirit, would not give their body to any licentiousness, the Apostle Paul beseeches the brethren in Rome (Rom. 12:1) that they present their bodies "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" [Luther: *vernünftiger Gottesdienst*].

### V. Comparison and Contact of the Two Faculties of "Understanding" and Reason and Their Consequences.

*Understanding*, or knowledge of the heart illuminated through the Holy Spirit,<sup>14</sup> moves man by its convincing power to accept all those teachings of the Gospel which are necessary for salvation. It is only by way of simplicity of faith [*Einfalt des Glaubens*] that these teachings can be adopted

of this world and their philosophy is made understandable to man by the grace of the Spirit of God through illuminated knowledge [*erleuchteter Verstand*] in Christ Jesus. Through this faculty of *understanding* [faculty of faith] man receives the deepest insight into the otherwise inaccessible light of the mystery of God (I Cor. 2:9, 10), and is redeemed from the dominion of darkness. It transfers man into the Kingdom of the Son of God and prepares him as an heir of eternal salvation.

Reason, on the other hand, is a natural light and (with a few exceptions) is common to all men. Through secular learning it can be developed to a high degree. Whatever goes beyond its concepts and judgments, reason puts to doubt; the truth of salvation in and through Christ is to it nothing but folly. Reason considers itself strong enough to make man live a virtuous life; it teaches him [self-contained, autonomous] morals, and for that reason promotes pride, conceit, and complacency. It is true that reason shuns vice; but at the same time it does not oppose sensuous drives and the appetites of the flesh. Reason tends after conformity with this world; is passionate in all enjoyments of life; but sullen, impatient, and irritated in affliction and suffering. The more refined and enlightened reason becomes through secular learning, the more it doubts and opposes the working of the grace of the Holy One in man, thus making man a very fit citizen of this world. If God would not discipline man through law and conscience, reason would work itself down to greatest folly and unreasonableness, merely by its unchecked and limitless sensuous lust. This was more clearly proved by the [history of the] first world [before Christ] and likewise by the philosophies of the heathen.

#### **VI. Simplicity Is the Very Element of "Understanding," but to Reason It Is Obnoxious, Since Reason Works Through Sensations, and Can be Led Astray Through Imagination or Fancy.**

The grace of the Holy Spirit convinced the believers of the first centuries in their *understanding* and knowledge of the heart that they would live more happily in this world by giving themselves completely to the simplicity in Christ. In this way they received the grace of God in abundance, and thus managed to live in this world bearing poverty, misery, contempt, exile, affliction, and tribulation. Brotherly love made them like a great family, and no one wished a privilege for himself at the expense of another. Worldly honors, high repute, elated rank, and the pleasures of social life they regard as vanities, as mere sham and smoke. The lowest rank in society seemed to them the fittest. They shunned company with people of high standing in this world, and rather kept to the lowly and poor. The riches of this world they held detrimental to salvation; their greatest joy was to support their poor coreligionists. (Reading and writing they considered as a useful training for the propagation of the Gospel.) Higher learning, however, worldly scholarship and philosophy, they eschewed and fled intentionally. They delighted in the simplicity of God's Word but were ignorant of sophistication. In their inspired *understanding* they considered the affairs of this world not as their particular domain, and therefore were far from hurting anybody for the sake of gain in this field. On the contrary, they rather preferred to suffer injustice and to allow themselves to be deprived and destituted of their belongings. They waived all claims in this world, and there is not one instance in the history of the early Christians that they resisted violence. They found fault if anybody among them pleaded for possession in this world, for they knew all too well that their kingdom was not of this world. That is what we call "living in simplicity."

On the other hand, reason finds such a life almost unbearable. Its endeavor is always "enlightenment"; its aspiration, reputation in this world; its happiness, a great amount of riches; its treasure is gold; its unrest is pursuit of dominion; its drive is worldly honor and position. Men of this type find their way rather by search into the mysteries of nature and reflecting upon them; their method is observation, analysis, experimentation, and logical deduction. Through their imagination they come down in their standards until they commit follies obvious to everyone. To such a life flattery is most pleasant and applause delightful. The simple Word of God is too naked and too meager for the intellectuals, and they are bored by a simple sermon expounding that Word. But all those sensuous, pretty, and made up "truths," or rather lies, they find most useful in the entertaining and education of the people; and they prefer any fictitious (or even true) story, if only nicely dressed up, to the plain Word of God. Diversions of every kind, comedies and other [stage] plays, they like and find most enjoyable. If they suffer any harm they get aroused and cry for vengeance and reprisal. They disdain acts of violence, but to get one's claim through litigation they find all right; and, if need be, to defend one's right even by force they find completely in accordance with the Gospel. Whatever in the teaching of the Lord Jesus and His apostles disagrees with reason is polished away by sophistry and cleverness. Their love does not reach farther than to equals. To love one's enemy and to do good to those who offend you seems to them like a thorn in the eyes. With perspicacity and meditation, reason follows every trail toward the perfection of earthly well-being, and its main spring of action is selfishness. To think of death is a bitter pain to reason, and it is prone to scoff at hell and eternity as long as an acute conscience does not convince it day by day. Heavens are of little interest to reason, and it knows no greater pleasure and delight than the lust of the flesh.

#### **VII. The Effects of "Understanding" Can Be Observed in the Heart of Man; Those of Reason, However, in His Head.**

*Understanding* animates the heart of a believer, and it is here that one can observe best its consequences. When in a reborn heart the Holy Spirit exclaims the "Abba, our Father," divine gifts effuse into the believer and enter his *understanding*. They fill him with a new wisdom and a knowledge of Jesus Christ. The more and the freer the heart of man is opened to the Spirit the more knowledge

will he gain, the greater riches of divine gifts will he receive, and the more will his heart be prepared as an abode of the Triune God. It is the inward man, as the Holy Scriptures call it, which has been revived by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And it is this newborn man who through faith in the Lord keeps striving after greater perfection in the growth of grace, life, and *understanding*; in other words, he works toward a growth in sanctification. If man concentrates upon his heart (the faculty of the inward life), he experiences in his prayers and sighs a contact and conversation with God. It is by this experience that the Holy Spirit reveals to human *understanding* the true and correct knowledge of God's intentions toward man through Jesus Christ, and thus makes man obedient to His divine will. The effect of this *understanding* in Christ Jesus will soon spread from man's heart to all his actions and make him fit to carry on a divine (or sanctified) life in simplicity and truth.

The changes, on the other hand, which are effected by the influence of reason can be observed in man's head and the organs of his five senses. As long as man stands outside the influence of the Holy Spirit—either because he is not yet capable to receive it through repentance and change of heart, or because he has left it in weakness, distraction, or lack of alertness—he lives in the natural state, and stands under the guidance and influence of reason only. This can be easily recognized by watching the source from which one's willing is directed, whether it is the heart or the head. Is he slow to pray and rather attracted by worldly things which make it hard for him to think of God and His holy words? Then one can certainly draw the conclusion that this man is not standing in the divine life but rather governed by natural reason. With a certain amount of self-introspection man quite distinctly perceives the psychic or the sensuous tendencies in his thoughts which work everything up in the head and passionately penetrate also the lusts and appetites of the flesh.

### **VIII. It Has Been to the Harm of Christendom that Man Has Confused the Development of These Two Faculties of Our Soul; for Thus the Early Simplicity [of Christian Life] Has Been Lost.**

As long as Christians tried to live pure and simple lives according to the teachings of the Gospel, with the view alone toward eternity, they carefully avoided conformity with the world. The development of heart and *understanding* was their main concern, and for that they needed no other rule and guidance than the plain Word of God, and (of course) prayer. They mutually instructed and exhorted each other, and edified each other in brotherly love. Education of the children was one of their main concerns and they observed a strict and firm discipline of the church [*Gemeinde*]. To that end the church received plentifully the needed gifts through the Holy Spirit; that is, through the inspiration of the *understanding*. Ample proof of this are the bold speeches and the deep insights of the poor and unlearned fishermen of Galilee, by which they defended themselves against high and low; they demonstrate that these men had actually reached a high degree of knowledge [of the divine things].

But when men began to blend the simple teachings of the Gospel with all kinds of interpretations and expositions, and to match them with philosophical tenets, then they began to conform themselves to this world in all things; and from that time on the main thing was not the development of heart and *understanding*, but of head and reason. Everyone studied much of science, for everyone wanted to be the most learned, the most enlightened, the most honored, the most respected one. In order to most perfectly attain this end they established universities and schools of higher learning where worldly scholarship found a home, and where the cultivation of reason found mighty sponsors. Even the heralds of the Gospel were taken hold of by this passion for worldly learning, and they confused and mixed up *understanding* and reason, the cultivation of the heart and the enlightenment of the head, to the greatest harm of Christendom. Rationalism was declared the greatest triumph of Christianity.<sup>15</sup> Christian simplicity was labeled mere ignorance and dumbness, and the genuine evangelical faith was looked upon as an absurd superstition. On the other hand, they implanted into the Christian churches sophistication and unbelief with all their destructive effects.

### **IX. In Menno Simons the Church Received a Worthy Tool for the Restoration of the Simplicity of Christendom in Its Original Purity.**

No reformer of the sixteenth century visualized the old simplicity of the early church more convincingly than did Menno Simons, the revered reformer of our church. Thanks to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit he recognized with the clear eye of *understanding* the pernicious error of [official] Christendom, and shunned all secular learning and all conformity with the world. He left his former estate [of priesthood or clergy] and turned to a flock of poor, lowly, and despised confessors of Christ. Firmness, humility, simplicity, and dauntlessness made possible his great undertaking to stand against tremendous odds steadfastly and never wavering. Under the rubble of the many errors of [historic] Christianity he rediscovered the simple teachings of the Lord and His apostles (which had been muddled by human interpretation and reasoning), namely, that believers should not think of vengeance, resistance, oath, secular learning, and the great things of this world, but rather should keep always to the lowly and meek ones. To our great blessing he restored again the simplicity of the early Christians in its original purity. In these teachings the church [*Gemeinde*], which he collected, found such a peace of mind and heart that it feared neither tribulation nor death, neither fire nor sword, but firmly and steadfastly defended the simplicity of the Gospel through suffering and nonresistance.<sup>16</sup>

### **X. In More Recent Times the Spirit of This World Entered Also Into Our Church with Its Cunning to catch It by Way of Reason, and Now Threatens to Deprive It of the Simplicity of the Fathers and to Lead It Into the General Corruption of Our Times.**

As long as our church lived under persecution and oppression, the unadulterated teachings of



the Gospel were upheld with much blessing. The Lord awakened her men who resisted the intrusion of the Enemy with vigor and vision, thus firmly establishing the fundamental principles of the church. But as soon as the church began to enjoy peace with the world, and even protection and privileges, Satan succeeded in entering it and ensnaring the former simplicity of Christ in order to catch it. Infatuated by reason and the riches and good things of this world, members of the church began to consider these things as no longer harmful for salvation, and therefore tried to obtain them by every possible means. One became enmeshed in big business and thus assumed duties and responsibilities which made worldly learning unavoidable. One necessity engendered another, and one need gave rise to a next one. The big trading connections made it absolutely necessary to study business administration, geography and political science. Reading of daily newspapers became a necessary and tempting habit, and made people familiar with the great politics of this world. They thoroughly enjoyed observing revolutions and the overthrow of kings and states.<sup>17</sup> Thus many of our good Mennonites gradually became conditioned to the doings of this world without even noticing it. This new secularism also produced the desire for a better, that is a more refined education for their children. These members, being at home with the world and having gained distinguished ranks, naturally also wanted learned preachers with higher education, who in turn changed the church in its very foundations, making it more conformed to this world. Eventually there was a desire for full equality in privileges and freedoms with all the other denominations.<sup>18</sup> To this end the principles of the Mennonite Church were adjusted to the requirements of this world by way of rational arguments so that civil and war services could now be accepted without hurting one's conscience. God be thanked that our church here [in Russia] has not come that far.<sup>19</sup>

To a certain extent, however, the Enemy has been successful even here in bringing the church into fermentation by this "leaven" of conformity and equalization, and in confusing the old simplicity of the holy forefathers, and in catching it stealthily in the snares of reason. The peace of the church has been destroyed. Pride, ostentation, vanity, greed for money and lust for wealth, avarice, drunkenness, luxury, vicious life, masquerades, obscene songs, gambling, and above all the miserable smoking of tobacco—they all have become passionate habits of the Mennonites to such an extent that in their denial they would not even recognize any praiseworthy advantage over the pitiable Nogaians<sup>20</sup> who know no greater bliss in this world or in the hereafter than the gratification of their lusts. That it has come thus far in our church truly taints the revered name of Mennonite.

#### XI. Conclusion. [The Organization of the Ideal Christian Church.]<sup>21</sup>

It certainly is contrary to our tested principles for one member of the church to give strict orders to another one (who serves as a liaison officer to the authorities) and in case of disobedience and obstinacy bring him before the congregation to have him excommunicated and considered an unworthy member. The ban, however, should be used with all the authority proper to it, for there is no stronger discipline than shunning. Since the church [*Gemeinde*] of Jesus Christ considers itself here in this world not as a world citizenry but rather as a spiritual people directed by powers from above, it develops through the ministry of the Word a spiritual priesthood as well as (among members) a spiritual brotherhood. There are no other offices. Members who serve the worldly affairs of the church should consider themselves only as liaison officers between the authorities and the elders [bishops] who direct the ministry of the Word [*Lehrdienst*]. They must never think of themselves as separate, so to speak secular functionaries with any kind of authority to arbitrarily direct the church according to the laws and powers of the state. Inasmuch as they are brethren in the church, such an assumption would mean an act directly against our tenets and would involve the destruction of our spiritual fellowship.

One should not forget the exhortation of the Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Romans (12:16): "Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate." The lowest estate, that of a husbandman, is the most conducive one for the preservation of genuine simplicity in Christ. In it we can find a plentiful livelihood through industry and diligence under the blessing of God. And we should be satisfied in finding food and clothing; striving after greater wealth or a position of high distinction in this world would spiritually be only too harmful for the church. For expansion in [the realm of] the good things of this world certainly entails a restriction in spiritual benefits. "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Matt. 16:26). Goods of this world beyond the standards of our assigned estate are surely incompatible with the simplicity of our holy forefathers and the teachings of the Gospel, for they demand something from man which he cannot possibly fulfill in loyal pursuit of our principles. And therefore, once he has grown fond of these things he is ready to sophisticate [*Künstelein*] the truths by means of reason, to reformulate them in ambiguous clauses, and at the end to find them altogether dispensable, rather than to part from the goods of this world.

As to the school system one must be on the alert lest the young flowers of our church become biased against our principles which later on would make it difficult for them loyally to follow our tenets. In particular one should be on guard not to expand the necessary instruction beyond such subjects as reading, writing, arithmetic, singing and anything else useful and handy for the simple practice of a husbandman. Whatever belongs to higher learning brings forth nothing but sophistry, unbelief, and corruption of the church; for "knowledge puffeth up" (1 Cor. 8:1). Reason gets its strength and sustenance from this learning, and soon simplicity is bound to be abandoned. Therefore I counsel and implore each member of our church to make it not too difficult for his own child to find his

salvation in innocence. Everybody knows by his own experience the tremendous difficulties in this denial of one's reason and intellectual autonomy [*der eigenen Höhe*], a denial so much needed for salvation, and yet rendered so hard by misunderstood education and enlightenment. Once in this way the young man can be pulled out from the craze [*Taumel*] of this world only with harm and loss, much pain and anguish, and perhaps never. 1 Cor. 1:26, 27.

The discipline of the children should be taken care of with evangelical earnestness. They should be supervised as much as possible lest they fall into all kinds of pleasures and company at an early age; also so that at weddings and other such occasions they are not prompted into wild and turbulent doings so obviously in contradiction to our publicly confessed principles. I implore and heartily advise you not to be indifferent in these matters, as much as it is pleasing to the unregenerate man, and as much as human reason might label it harmless entertainment. Sometime we will be required to give a strict account of all our doings.

[I must also give warning against another danger of the life of this world.] One often comes into contact with other denominations<sup>22</sup> which contend that serving in the army and in civil service, that practicing the sword, oath, and vengeance are quite evangelical. Among them one meets members, be it by correspondence or personal contact, who are genuinely awakened and confess a strong faith in Christ Jesus. Now then, be on your guard lest you fall into the error of undervaluing your own principles out of courtesy, brotherly love, and misunderstood impartiality, and in the end accept a confession strictly opposed to these principles. Otherwise one easily grows accustomed to everything springing from reason (and to what is pleasing to our corrupt nature) so that one hates to let it go. The excuse is always at hand that one has kept the faith in Christ Jesus (although this faith has been nothing but a hiding place). It is so easy to comfort oneself by saying that in the last analysis everything depends on just this faith and nothing else.<sup>23</sup> Satan might well allow such a confession of Christ, a confession that one believes, even if one does not practice the works of Christ. An earnest Christian will never separate faith and works. As surely as he founds his salvation exclusively on his faith in Christ, so surely he also endeavors to fulfill the commandments of the Lord; otherwise all his faith is vain. Let no one be deceived by the argument: If others can accomplish it, I too can do it. "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23).

We certainly do not judge other Christian confessions; they stand or fall before the Lord. They act according to their faith and their knowledge, and they will have to give account for both. For us [Mennonites], however, who have this particular knowledge through the grace of God, having accepted it on our knees as the very truth of the Gospel, it is and remains once forever our duty and responsibility to stay loyal to our confession in word and conduct. This one heed well!

Salvation is received in grace through faith in Jesus Christ only, for salvation is nowhere but in Him. The Judge, however on that day [of judgment] will judge, beautify or condemn, exclusively according to our works. Here is wisdom; happy the man who can grasp it with a simple heart. "Everyone be certain of his case and doubt not, for he that doubteth is damned" (Rom. 14:23). It is nothing but doubt and hypocrisy if I publicly confess to believe one way, but privately speak and act another way. A spoken doubt of mine prompts in my weaker brother (who leans upon me) a kind of certainty and, chainlike, works on to other brethren until it becomes a complete certainty of which I myself have been the cause. Thus I become guilty before God.

One must be on guard in the selection of one's reading material, particularly if the book is nicely made up, and makes a strong appeal to both the converted and the unconverted, be it true or fictitious. That which is externally tasteful easily undermines the taste for the simple things and for the Word of God. Eventually it displaces the original simplicity in Christ, particularly with our adolescents. Still farther goes the effect of reading newspapers. It is the intention of Satan to condition these young people for the doings of this world, and they will be captured by this fabric of truth and falsehood which is always so pleasing to the senses. I exhort and admonish everyone to take care of that, both with the youth and with himself. Reason is striving for an all-out victory, and Satan will not rest until the simplicity in Christ (as it exists here and there) is choked up, or at least suppressed, until that which still prevents the full revelation of the Enemy be done away altogether.

Since it is primarily the ministers<sup>24</sup> who are responsible for the upkeep of the principles [of our church], it is absolutely necessary that they should counsel the church in love and harmony regarding the recent events, and that they discuss and establish their respective arguments in mutual regard and concord. Different opinions on subjects apart from our basic principles should be considered as valuable and useful, and no one should despise another for his views. In case of approaching danger God's grace will open the eyes of one or another brother that he may enter more understandingly into the truth and become more conscious of it than others. It is up to these [particular] members to stand on the walls of the spiritual Zion and blow the trumpet of alertness and vigilance, and to take care of all affairs in mutual love. And it is up to the other members to test their message in peace and love, and to become attentive to the voice of God [in them]. Above all, however, one must be on guard against any lack of love or mutual regard. Love works unity; unity gives firmness; firmness protects decline.

"I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Rev. 3:13-18).

H. Balzer

Note. This article was reprinted by permission from the *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, Goshen, Indiana.

## FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER FOURTEEN. FAITH AND REASON.

by Dr. Robert Friedmann, except as noted.

1. The teachings of the great thinkers Immanuel Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, and Schleiermacher. German Idealism is a rational metaphysics making the *Vernunft* (reason, Logos) absolute.
2. Renes Descartes, the founder of modern rationalism, made systematic doubt of our knowledge the fundamental method in philosophy or, more correctly, in epistemology.
3. Who would not think here of the well-known attitude of the Amish who try to prevent their children from going through high school, not to speak of college?
4. See Robert Friedmann, "Reason and Obedience: an old letter of Peter Walpot (1571) and its meaning," *Menn. Quart. Rev.* XIX, 1945, pp. 27-40. The inner connection of Walpot's letter and Balzer's study is indicated by similar titles "Obedience and Reason," when discussing Walpot, and "Faith and Reason," when discussing Balzer. Actually Balzer seems to continue Walpot's arguments. The two documents have much in common.
5. It was a consolation to find that other translators faced the same difficulty. When Professor Otto Manthey-Zorn of Amherst College began to translate Kant's *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Ethics* (published by Appleton-Century press, New York, 1938) he, too, had to decide how to make this German peculiarity of thinking intelligible to English readers. In his excellent introduction he writes on this subject (pp. viii-x): "The differentiation between *Verstand* and *Vernunft* [so much used by Kant] is most troublesome for us. Both of these terms we translate quite properly by 'reason,' and in English there is at least no popular distinction between them or rather there are no English terms that can express the difference as immediately as do the German terms. The two terms do overlap in German and even in their use by Kant himself." He then goes on to interpret the two terms "*Verstand* (in German philosophy) is the rational faculty as applied to the experience of the senses; its adequate translation would be reasoning or thinking. *Vernunft*, on the other side, is something quite apart from experience. It is the supreme human endowment and faculty of finding principles; it is the source of ideas and ideals. It supplies the unconditional to the conditioned reasoning, and it is the faculty that enables man to act in accordance with supreme principles. It is reason proper. . . . It is the German equivalent to our ordinary appeal to sound 'common sense' [this I would challenge—R.F.]. Since reason is wholly independent of experience, Kant objects to calling it a sense. It is an endowment not unlike to what we call a 'high moral sense.' Compared with it *Verstand* then is the 'lesser reasoning'. The ideas of reason produce the 'intelligible world,' whereas reasoning deals but with the world of experience." So much then for our philosophical comment. From a Biblical standpoint the distinction would most likely be drawn up in a different way.
6. [This statement is hardly plausible in view of presently available source material. D. Plett]
7. See C. Henry Smith, *The Story of the Mennonites* (Berne, Ind., 1945), pp. 422-425. Smith quotes a pamphlet of 1838 with five main points of disagreement between the Kleine Gemeinde and the main body of the Mennonite Church in Russia. [Footnotes 6 and 7 in the original *Mennonite Quarterly Review* article are obviously based on the limited historical materials available in 1948 and therefore are omitted here. D. Plett]
8. The Friesen family originally came from Danzig. At that time the name was Von Riesen, but later it was contracted into Friesen. See Cornelius Krahn in the *Mennonite Weekly Review*, February 20, 1947 (Youth Page).
9. All additions in brackets are by the editor and translator. (Dr. Robert Friedmann)
10. *Die Ausbildung des Verstandes wurde mit der der Vernunft verwechselt.* Concerning the distinction between *Vernunft* and *Verstand* see the introductory remarks.
11. Here our translation meets an unexpected handicap since the Lutheran German Bible, used by Balzer, renders the text often with quite a different meaning than the English King James version. Compare, for instance, the remarks in notes 12 and 13.
12. II Cor. 10:5 in Luther's translation, "Nehmt gefangen alle Vernunft unter den Gehorsam Christi." The English Bible speaks of the captivity of every *thought* where Luther uses *Vernunft* (reason). This changes the meaning since reason is stronger than thought (or opinion). To a student of the English Bible this text would hardly appear as a fit argument, while it represents a very strong point for the reader of the German Bible.  
It is highly significant that Balzer uses this quotation as a witness for his thesis. More than two hundred sixty years ago the Hutterite Elder Peter Walpot used the same quotation in a similar context as a defense of the strictness and order of his church. It was almost his main argument. Compare Robert Friedmann, "Obedience and Reason: an old letter by Peter Walpot (1571) and its meaning," *Menn. Quart. Rev.*, XIX, 1945.
13. Luther has *Vernunft* (reason), using the term inconsistently, once for *understanding* and once for reason proper. The King James version on the other hand uses in these quotations five different terms, namely, thought, understanding, knowledge, mind, reason. Balzer's antithesis is best represented by the couple: *understanding* and reason.
14. *Der Verstand, oder—was eines ist—die durch die Erleuchtung des Heiligen Geistes gewirkte Erkenntnis des Herzens.* Blaise Pascal uses in his *Pensees* (published after his death in 1662) time and again the term "reason of the heart" (*raison du coeur*) for the same idea. The English term *understanding* is somewhat ambiguous.
15. At this point it is good to keep in mind that this treatise was written around 1833, at a time when a wave of "liberal" philosophy and "rational theology" swept Europe. David Friedrich Strauss' *Leben Jesu* (1835) might be called the representative book of this trend. It takes away the divinity of Christ and humanizes Him.
16. Notice the brevity of this section and the absence of any quotation from Menno Simons' writings. It appears as if the author had but a faint idea about Menno Simons and his works. A knowledge of Mennonite history hardly existed at that time although both Dutch and German editions of Menno Simons' works were available among the Molotschna Mennonites. In view of this general ignorance of the primary sources one has to welcome this testimony of allegiance to the origins and to the spirit of the fathers of the Mennonite Church. Basically Balzer is right with his historical argument.

17. Balzer wrote his paper at a time when Europe was going through a series of violent revolutions and upheavals. In 1830, Paris saw the so-called July Revolution when Charles X (Bourbon) was dethroned and Louis Philippe of Orleans was made king. The same year saw a revolution in Brussels, and the breaking away of Belgium from Holland (August to November, 1830). Also Poland had its first national though abortive revolution at this time (1830). A bloody Polish-Russian war followed (1831). Much unrest against the Metternich system pervaded many countries of Europe.
18. What was the author thinking of at this point? One should guess primarily of Russia where privileges were so much in the foreground of discussion. But the next paragraph seems to contradict it. In Holland the Mennonites enjoyed full equality; in Prussia the church had great privileges, as yet unchallenged.
19. In 1833. (Note by D. Plett. This reference would appear to be to the apostacy from the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith which had occurred in Holland and which in 1833 was already well advanced in Prussia. In these countries the Mennonites had abandoned nonresistance, and many other evangelical teachings.
20. Nogaians, a native tribe of nomads in Southern Russia who had their grazing grounds near the Molotschna, and thus had come in close contact with the Mennonites. Much strife ensued. Cornelius Cornies, the famous Mennonite agronomist, tried hard to teach the Nogaians husbandry and a settled life, yet with little success. See any Mennonite history, for instance the book by J. P. Friesen (1911).
21. This supplementary title has been added to clarify the subject of the concluding chapter which is less theoretical and more practical. Balzer was, of course, thinking of the *Kleine Gemeinde* as such an ideal Christian church.
22. The Southern Ukraine was the area of settlement of a good number of German colonists, almost exclusively Lutherans. A lively contact existed between these Lutherans and the Mennonites. See again any history of the Mennonites in Russia.
23. An unmistakable allusion to the German Lutheran Pietists. It was just this Pietism which later on effected a strong revivalistic movement among the Mennonites (Pastor E. Wüst and the *Brüdergemeinde*). The *Kleine Gemeinde* was strictly anti-Pietistic (somewhat like the Amish church in America); in other words, it followed more the old Anabaptist pattern of church life and piety.
24. Balzer says *der Lehrstand* which would mean the "rank of teachers." He meant of course, "teachers of the Word of God," what we today call minister (or preacher). In the title of this tract Balzer calls himself a "teacher," but in his long farewell hymn he speaks of himself as "preacher"

# *Part Five.*

## *Consolidation And Growth*

### **Chapter Fifteen.**

## **Abraham Friesen, Evangelical Missioner**

#### **15.01 Introduction.**

In 1823 Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) was elected as a minister of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. This event heralded the commencement of a quarter century of balanced consolidation and steady growth for the Kleine Gemeinde. During this period the founding endeavours of Klaas Reimer and the theological contributions of Heinrich Balzer were drawn together and given unified direction by Abraham Friesen. This was the classical age of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. The history of these years, as viewed through the writings and ministry of Abraham Friesen, will be dealt with in chapter sixteen, **The Golden Years 1824-1849.**

The present chapter fifteen will consist of a biography of Abraham Friesen, who was undoubtedly one of the most significant Russian Mennonite leaders of the 19th century. This examination will consist of the following: First, his personal history and recommitment to the cause of Christ. Second, several aspects of his faith and evangelical ministry. Third, an assessment of the historical significance of his leadership as Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde. Fourth, a closing view of Abraham Friesen through a message delivered shortly before his death. At the same time it is noted that two aspects of his ministry, namely, books and publications and socio-economic practice, are of such importance that they will be dealt with separately in chapters seventeen and eighteen.

Little is known of the childhood of Abraham Friesen who was born in West Prussia in 1782. He was the second son of Abraham von Riesen (1752-1810) and Margaretha Wiebe (1754-1810). According to the information of Dr. B. H. Unruh the family was successful and prosperous. The elder Abraham von Riesen was a farmer (and miller) in the area of Kalterherberg, in the Danzig district.<sup>1</sup> As a young married man the younger Abraham von Riesen and his bride left their home in Prussia together with his parents and undertook the lengthy and arduous journey to southern Russia. On the 15th day of June, 1805, the emigrees arrived in the Molotschna Mennonite colony in Southern Russia and commenced to settle and establish the little village of Orloff which was to become one of the most progressive of all the Russian Mennonite centres.

His parents settled on farm No. 10 in the same village and both his mother and father passed on to their eternal reward only five years later. Three of his younger brothers and one sister were still at home with his parents at the time of settlement. The various connections of the extended von Riesen/Friesen family to Prussia, Berjansk, and within the Molotschna colony have already been referred to in Chapter Ten. It was here in the village of Orloff that Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) and Johann Cornies (1789-1847) came to know each other. They were neighbours and contemporaries although Cornies was born some seven years later and died two years earlier.

Abraham Friesen was married to Katherina Wiebe who was born in 1781 and who survived her husband by only six years as she died in 1855. The couple had a large family of whom six children lived to adulthood and founded their own families.<sup>2</sup> In the year of settlement Abraham Friesen Junior, had taken up a full village farm number eleven in Orloff and, no doubt with assistance from his parents and younger brothers, the farm prospered. By 1808, the time of the census of the Molotschna settlement, the young couple already owned 1 horse, 2 cattle, a herd of 47 sheep, and 13 loads of hay. In addition of course they owned a full village farm of 178 acres and buildings. The ownership of such an enterprise at the young age of 26 must have provided a good degree of financial security to the growing family. The young couple was prospering not only in the economic and familial sense and apparently was also well liked in the village and the surrounding district. In 1817, at the age of 36, Abraham Friesen was elected as a deacon in the church building in the village of Orloff.<sup>3</sup>

#### **15.02 Faith and Conversion.**

The prosperity and secular success was more apparent than real for within himself Abraham Friesen realized that something was missing. Although he was a respected leader among the pro-

gressive and pietistic Orloff church community, he became conscious that a complete commitment to God was lacking in his life. He explains the situation at greater length in a "Letter to the Brothers and Sisters"<sup>4</sup> which he wrote in 1820. In this writing he refers to his former association with the Grosze Gemeinde and to the lamentable condition of his own soul. Abraham Friesen explains the situation as follows:

"Beloved friends, those of us who call ourselves brothers and sisters in the Lord. I frequently become very concerned when I give consideration to our circumstances and how we shall subsist when it will be necessary for us to give an account for our housekeeping. Now beloved friends, I do not mean to refer to you alone, for I frequently become anxious with respect to myself. I do not despair that I am not able to love, honour, fear, and serve the Lord earnestly enough, however, I have good intentions a plenty but am deficient in the doing.

"It also occurs to me just now that when Paul came to Ephesus he found certain disciples there to whom he said, 'Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?' And they said unto him, 'We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost'. And he said unto them, 'Unto what then were ye baptized?' And they said, 'Unto John's baptism'. But when they heard from Paul that they should believe in Jesus they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, and when Paul had laid his hands upon them the Holy Ghost came upon them.

"When I reflect regarding the foregoing I hardly know how to help myself. I have not been baptized unto the baptism of John for then I could also do what these disciples at Ephesus did. Indeed, I represented that I believed in Christ and I was baptized thereupon. But I can not comfort myself that the Holy Ghost came upon me at that time. I was far too wicked at the time so that the spirit which teaches righteousness had to turn away from me.

"O beloved friends! I frequently think to myself that if the Aeltester and the ministers (Lehrer) and also the Gemeinde, would not have believed my verbal testimony and had not baptized me before I had denounced the world and all its ways, they would thereby have advanced the salvation of their own souls as well as mine. For my life and conduct was not hidden from the people. I clothed myself according to the fashions exactly like the children of the world, which is an abomination before God. I smoked the pipe of tobacco so that the fumes sometimes ascended from the nose and mouth, which to me symbolises those who are damned in hell. The Apostle John says, 'the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever,' Revelations 15. As a penitent sinner I partook of associations where nothing but singing, laughing, playing, and vain empty sinful gossip was carried on, and notwithstanding I was able to remain as a member in the Gemeinde which was supposedly also the Gemeinde of God."

Here Abraham Friesen describes his former conversion which had not resulted in a self-denying submission to the Lordship of Christ. Although Abraham Friesen had accepted Christ as his personal Saviour and had been baptized in accordance with the teachings of the Flemish Gemeinde, he had not yet received a full understanding of the regenerative power of the grace of God. Having described his personal experience, Abraham Friesen goes on to explain the changes which now took place in his heart:

"Oh! Beloved! Is it not a great pity when this befalls an individual? The thought has often pressed tears from my eyes. Oh, that it might have occurred with such great sorrow as is written concerning Peter. Matthew 26, 75. And if the individual commits himself to the Gemeinde so thoughtlessly and so uncircumcised in the heart, mind and thoughts one can easily imagine how Satan will present all sin to such a person as being only very trivial. If only the sin does not become too gross for the world. One reflects in this sense as to how loveless and uncovered each and every sin and each and every thought must seem before God who sees inside our hearts. Through this Satan can very much hinder the individual.

"Nevertheless, the compassion of God for me was all sufficient. And, I firmly believe, he has compassion for all. Even for those who give heed to His entreaties and knocking in the eleventh hour. But in no case is it the meaning here that one should live in the world in joy, pride, and luxury, until the last hour. This has deceived the rich man, the corn grower whose fields yielded abundantly, and also many others. Quite to the contrary it is said that today when you hear my voice harden not your heart.

"Oh beloved friends! Do believe that it is very hard to be freed from the world after one has served it for a long time. It is even much harder to obtain the assurance of salvation. My anxiety was very great when our Lord God allowed me to be shocked by a threatening criminal judgment against me and all the time my heart was so hardened that I was not so readily able to weep bitterly together with David and Peter. As a result I had to go through many a day without comfort as to whether I would still be able to receive grace from God. The thought often occurred to me that perhaps I had strayed too far away.

"Thereupon I commenced to search in the Holy Scriptures, and I also read many a book

by our forefathers such as: the large **Martyrs Mirror**, the **Confession of Faith** by George Hansen, the sermons of Jakob Denners, and finally also the **Foundation Book** by Menno Simons. Whereby grace now and again returned to me so that I came to understand that the beloved Saviour wishes to receive the sinner if they truly convert themselves to him. I can safely say that the Lord Jesus allowed me to perceive how gladly he wishes to redeem us sinners from the power of Satan, if only we desire to be obedient to him. This has frequently softened my heart so that I was able to bemoan my misdeeds and mistakes to him in sorrow, whereupon I received comfort in my soul."<sup>5</sup>

As a consequence of the heartfelt stirring of the Holy Spirit Abraham Friesen came to a new knowledge of his Lord and Savior. Through his earnest study of the Holy Scripture as well as the writings of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith he came to a deeper understanding of the meaning of the regenerative grace of God. This resulted in a more complete submission to the Lordship of Christ as a result of which Abraham Friesen in 1818 also left his former fellowship in the Grosze Gemeinde and joined the Kleine Gemeinde who shared his understanding of the gospel.

Having explained how the penitent sinner will always be received in grace by God, Abraham Friesen goes on to reflect with respect to the evangelical concept of salvation. He starts a very effective presentation by using a dream to illustrate his views:

"At one time I had a dream that I had prepared myself to ascend up unto a high mountain. After I had proceeded for a short distance the mountain became very steep so that it seemed impossible for me to climb any higher. But when I turned about and wanted to go back I quickly had to cling to the earth for otherwise it seemed as if I would plummet down into the precipice. When I looked upwards it was as steep as a sheer wall. I can hardly express how anxious and fearful this made me. Nevertheless I clung firmly so as not to fall down, and after a tremendous battle I was finally able to descend from the mountain. Then the joy was exceedingly great. Usually I do not care much for dreams but this one did not leave my thoughts.

"It always seems to me that one must work for salvation with a similar earnestness and clinging firmly. Yet I will not conclude this from my dream rather the apostle Paul says 'work, so that ye will be saved, with fear and trembling'. And Peter says 'govern your life in fear during the time of your sojourn here'. For this reason I am also concerned for myself and my fellow brethren. If only we could change ourself about and live according to the will of God and not according to the desires of man. Indeed, I have much to be concerned of for myself.

"But beloved friends. If we stand in true communion with each other, then we are many in the body and must protect each other. So do forgive me and know that I write you in this way for no other reason but that I feel a great responsibility and love towards you."

Thus Abraham Friesen explains his conviction that a Gemeinde which stood together in love could overcome all hurdles and obstacles. He exemplifies the deep concern and love of an Anabaptist-Mennonite leader for his flock. "Hold together", is his message. "Together we will overcome". Abraham Friesen then goes on to explain the effect that the love of God should have in the lives of those who truly have been converted.

"For my conscience convinces me that matters are in a sorry state with us if we cannot abandon, the magnificent refinements in clothing and in our residences, and the worldly associations in feasting, as if we were in contentment with them in drinking and smoking tobacco. For in fact we have gone out of our former association for the reason that we did not wish to partake together with those who repaid evil with evil contrary to the teachings of Peter and Paul, and who work against evil with evil contrary to the commandments of Christ, and who do not overcome evil with good. Romans 12.

"But beloved! Why did we leave our former association? I do hope that we did not do so for any other reason but that it was the commandment of Christ. Matthew 10 and Mark 6. And as the Lord has considered us to be of such worth that he has separated us, are we then not also responsible to conduct ourselves in humility and insignificance towards him. We know that God resisteth the proud and that what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination to Him and that He avoids the wicked. Therefore if matters with us should devolve to the point that God would resist us, and that the spirit which teaches the truth would seek to avoid us, and that God would have an abomination for us: What would we want to do then? For without him we can do nothing.

"Oh we would then be most miserable indeed! For then we would have become a shame and disgrace for the world, and we would be separated from God and we would have to await the return of his son with fear and terror. But on the other hand, if we have conducted ourselves as meek, humble, and lowly before the Lord while we still find grace, and patiently carry all the disgrace and reviling which we must bear therefore from those who are worldly minded; then we can raise up our heads and rejoice for our redemption draweth nigh. Luke 21, 28"

Regrettably many in the Mennonite society of 1820 maligned the members of the fledgling Men-

nonite Kleine Gemeinde saying that it was ridiculous that the group attempted to avoid the magnificent refinements and enjoyments of life. After all, such activities were not specifically forbidden by the Holy Scriptures. In the view of a significant part of the Mennonite population at the time, the Kleine Gemeinde were narrow-minded fools because of their evangelical emphasis on humility and simplicity. Abraham Friesen proceeds to rebut and refute these critics. He explains that everything must be done for the love of God and in his grace. Without faith it is impossible to please God.

"Beloved friends. I imagine that there will be those who will wonder and think that there really is not such a great danger, for the Holy Scripture nowhere forbids us to wear this or that article of clothing, nor do we find anywhere that the smoking of tobacco is forbidden. How can I invent such a great danger out of this? They also say that this has already been the practice in the church for a long time, among the ministers as well as the lay membership.

"I would bid these critics to truly and thoroughly search the New Testament with deep earnestness. For here it is to be found what the beloved Savior has prophesied about the end times. Not that matters may be so, but that matters will be in such a state, in order that his true followers will be forewarned and that they would not be deceived by the world. Great trials shall come upon us for there will be much leading astray including the very elect, if possible, saith the Lord Jesus. From such words we can readily perceive that the danger in which we live is very great.

"Yes, the danger is so great that it is completely impossible to save our souls without the gracious help and support of God. And this is my most ardent longing and desire, that we might live and walk in such a way that the Lord and his Spirit might be among us, with us and in us, for so long as we live. And I might add the words of Paul in Hebrews, chapter 4: 'Let us therefore fear, that we do not neglect to heed the invitation to come unto his rest, so that no one of us would fall behind'.

"Now beloved friends! I bid that no one who reads this would consider it for evil of me. My intention is certainly not that anyone should have to give up anything for my sake, nor to abstain from anything. Oh no, and I do hope that you will be able to perceive from this how I myself am full of sin, and wretched and that I have nothing righteous to present to my God. Because of this sin I must pray to God for grace and forgiveness.

"But we should and must do everything for the sake of Jesus alone. It must be done out of faith, for Paul says, 'For without faith it is impossible to please him'. Hebrews 11, 6; Colossians 3, 17. But if we do or abstain from something out of true faith then we know that we have done that which was our duty to do, and that at the same time we are and continue to be unprofitable servants. Luke 17, 10."<sup>8</sup>

It is remarkable that Abraham Friesen finds it necessary to review such basic evangelical teaching for the benefit of the scoffers in Molotschna Mennonite society at the time. One must conclude that the spiritual situation had certainly not improved since the excommunication of Klaas Reimer and Cornelius Janzen in 1812. In fact it appears that apostasy and moral decadence are well established and thriving. Having set the stage by a brief consideration of what must be the foundation of all forms of evangelical piety, Abraham Friesen now proceeds to set out what is encompassed by this principle of love and faith:

"It might be beneficial to refer to what the Holy Apostles mention with respect to vanity expressed in clothes, the smoking of tobacco, and other similar embellishments. For James says, 'know ye not that friendship with the world is enmity with God?' Whoever wishes to be the friend of the world will be the enemy of God. And John says, 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world the love of the father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life, is not of the father, but is of the world'. And Peter says, 'abstain from the fleshly lusts, which war against the soul', And Paul says, 'Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us therefore put on the armor of Light'. And more of the same in numerous additional verses. I am of the view that this encompasses everything which is unnecessary for the sustenance of the physical body, and that which is a hindrance or damaging to the edification of my neighbor and the furtherance of the salvation of my soul."

Having set out the general principle Abraham Friesen goes on to apply the same to one actual example. Namely, the smoking of tobacco which apparently was rampant among the Russian Mennonites at the time.

"Now we might consider if the tobacco pipe might not be the first example of that which the Apostle Paul admonishes, and in any event the pipe is an emblem by which one reveals friendship with the world. For surely a born again child of God would always be deeply grieved to observe such practices among the brethren. The same would seem to be the case with the new stylish clothes. If a God loving person perceives that a fellow believer has something about him which is still pleasing to the world then this must be a cause of concern for him, as to whether his brother or sister is always awake. For such a person thereby gives evidence that they are not quite ready to completely renounce the world.



"I bid that you interpret this writing in the manner of love. Thus far from me, a most unworthy servant."

Orloff, the 18th day of October 1820

"Abraham Friesen"<sup>4</sup>

In this writing Abraham Friesen has briefly summarized the situation in the the Grosze Gemeinde at the time of his spiritual awakening and renewal. He has also explained the motivation and the cause of his inward regeneration as the working of the infinite grace of God.

### 15.03 A Letter Regarding My Secession, 1820.

In 1820 Abraham Friesen also wrote a short epistle to his friends and former brethren in the Grosze Gemeinde. In this writing he explains the reasons for his leaving the Orloff group of the Flemish Grosze Gemeinde. This letter will provide us with another look at the conditions in the world of the Molotschna Mennonites. Here follows "A Letter respecting my Secession".

#### Beloved Friends:

"Because of the stirring of my spirit through the grace of the Lord I, a completely insignificant person, will compose this little writing to my beloved friends. And I would say with Paul, 'If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh'. Romans 11. The apostle says, 'quench not the spirit'. 1 Thessalonians 5, 19.

"Beloved friends. On the occasions when I speak of the things of which I will now write and of which I frequently talk, it often occurs to me that our association and your approval of me would be much greater if I did not refer to these matters. But if I did not do so then I would have to quench the spirit. And our Savior says, 'For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you?'. And should we fall silent when he wishes to speak through us, the words of Jesus that 'then the very rocks would have to cry out' would come into fulfillment.

"O yes, beloved! In Matthew 10, 27 the Savior clearly says, 'What I tell you in the darkness that speak ye in the light'. For this reason I have been disparaged: Because I admonished the Aeltesten and ministers that many aspects in the Gemeinde were not being conducted according to the commandments of the Lord Jesus. I have been very concerned in this regard that I had not done my part if I did not unequivocally declare myself to that effect. For in Malachi Chapter 2, we read that as they were departed from the ways of truth it was commanded that 'The Lord will cut off the man that doeth this out of the tabernacles of Jakob, both the master and the scholar together with him that offereth an offering unto the Lord Sebaoth'. Therefore the holy scripture and the conviction of my conscience compels me to join battle with the spiritual enemy. It has also been my frequent experience that I have been told as was Judas in 1 Maccabees 9, 9 'That we shall never be able to achieve anything, therefore let us abide for this time, etc.'

"According to those from whom I derived comfort for my spiritual sustenance it always seemed as if it was not yet quite the time. When so and so will no longer be here, then matters will again change. But sad to say, how have matters changed? One must truly bemoan from the heart that so much that is new and temporal must still be established. At the same time there is so little concern for the true salvation of the soul. Nearly all the proposals and endeavours which one sees and of which one hears in the present time originate from the new teachings and are effected according to human reason. No consideration is given to the words which the Savior says, 'Every plant which my heavenly father hath not planted, shall be rooted up'.

"If this was truly considered and believed many would dismiss their leaders who are blind in order that they not fall by the wayside. It is truly sorrowful for the poor souls who so thoughtlessly give out an impression which has a good appearance and yet which has no power. And Paul says 'that we are to avoid these'. Namely those who put on an appearance but who deny the power thereof. And what the apostle means by avoidance you may determine from what he has written to the Corinthians. 1 Corinthians 5, 10. Beloved reader! If you have given true consideration to that which Paul has said to Timothy and in many other places then you would not have partaken in this. You would then rather have remained in that which you have learnt and which you have been assured of. 2 Timothy 3, 14.

"And should anything arise which is contrary to the gospel and if someone does not want to be obedient to the word, you should remember that power has also been given to admonish and to punish the gainsayers (the rebellious ones). The might which Christ the Lord has given to his own is for betterment and not the ruination of the offender. 2 Corinthians 10, 8. But according to the punishment which you mete out to the disobedient and the fallen brethren it is crystal clear that it serves for ruination and not for the betterment. Just as your own conscience also convicts you in the case of the fallen Franz Thiessen in Schoenau or else you would not have him bound in chains and under guard. According to what I have been told you are afraid that through all the punishment and threats the fallen brother might come into doubts and shorten his own life.

"Oh, beloved teachers (ministers). I can not find any understanding in the entire New Testament that the Lord has taught his own such might nor given them such power. This is one of the most important reasons which has separated me from you even though many individuals including my close friends say that we have separated ourselves without good reason and that it would be better if we again joined together. But beloved brothers and sisters, yes, all of you who read this, do tell me: By reason of what authority can you give us such advice? In fact some of you admit for yourselves

that you have no hope that any aspect of the regulations which have been adopted may be broken away. Others approve of the same. They say, what other counsel is there to deal with people? Therefore it is hard to believe that these practices will be done away with. From this we are well able to note that we are coming into the time of which Paul speaks in 2 Thessalonians 2, 3-4.

"Now beloved friends! A number of people have said to me that they do not agree with the things which are contrary to the teachings of the Lord Jesus but which are tolerated in their Gemeinde. At the same time they remain in their association and also partake of holy communion together with them. Here again they must be reminded that the Gemeinde or the fellowship which is conducting the communion must also be united in spirit. Yes, like one bread which has been ground together out of many kernels. At the same time they suppose that they are not partakers of that which has been implemented in the Gemeinde contrary to the commandments of Christ.

"I was unable to comfort myself in this manner as otherwise I would not have had to depart from you. I say this only for myself and do not want to judge anyone else in so doing. But from the bottom of my heart and out of brotherly love, I would advise that you earnestly search the scriptures in this regard and that you consider everything for then this reason will also be made manifest unto you, if you are earnest in this.

"A venerable teacher (minister) by the name of Dirk Philips has written of this matter as follows: 'What many put forward in this regard that one may have outwardly association with the false service of God if the heart does not believe in the same is not valid here. No one should allow himself to be deceived with such words: **Item:** Everything which the scripture teaches with respect to the separation, namely, that one is to separate himself from all false worship of God, just as we read in 2 Corinthians 6, 17; Ephesians 5, 11; 1 Thessalonians 5, 11: Is to be understood that one is to do so inwardly with the heart which is shown on the outside through weeping. This is the light which cannot be hidden under a bushel, but which must be placed on a candlestick, so that it giveth light unto all that are in the house. This is the city which is placed on a hill which cannot be hid! etc. This true witness for Jesus, who was scolded and slandered for the reason that he had also separated himself from those who were minded of the world, says further, 'it has been commanded with ceremonies and teachings, etc.' (see the Dirk Philips **Handbook**) Thus far from Dirk Philips.

"Now I will close for this time and I bid all who may read this: Do not accept my word as sufficient in this regard. Rather at your pleasure refer to all the passages of scripture which have been cited here. And take to heart for yourself with a meditative spirit, the grounds from which this simple writing has come. I bid that you prove the same with nothing but the Holy Scripture: And that you do not accept grounds which are to the contrary no matter how good the appearances may be. Accept only that which can be shown from the Holy Scripture. For then I hope that you will realize that I have not addressed you falsely. Rather that I have addressed you in the truth. 'Grace be with you' according to Colossians 4, 18. Amen. With a heartfelt greeting I remain your friend.'" Orloff, in the month of June 1820 "Abraham Friesen"<sup>5</sup>

In this epistle Abraham Friesen has explained the reasons for his secession to his former co-ministers in the Grosze Gemeinde. He feels that he has not sufficiently done his part if he does not provide an honest explanation. His former colleagues have acknowledged the correctness of the doctrines which he has enunciated, but they are not prepared to work for the restitution of the same. Nor are they prepared to forsake a communion which is no longer seeking for evangelical purity. Abraham Friesen closes by stating that he does not wish to judge anyone with his departure. However, he admonishes everyone to prayerfully consider their own positions and to judge the same only by the Holy Scripture. The foregoing epistles of 1820 provide an intimate view of the early life of Abraham Friesen and his renewed commitment to the ministry of Christ.

#### 15.04 An Epistle to Heinrich Balzer, 1832.

Like his Anabaptist-Mennonite forefathers before him, Abraham Friesen adopted a ministry of preaching and writing based on the model of the Apostle Paul. Three writings will be used to illustrate the missionary activities of Abraham Friesen. First, The "Epistle to Heinrich Balzer", 1832 written to an outsider interested in the truths of the gospel. Two, "The Epistle to Abraham Enns," 1838 written to a former member who has turned away from evangelical faith. Three, an extract from the 1845 *Einfache Erklarung* in which Abraham Friesen defends and propagates the gospel to the general populace in the Molotschna colony and to the world at large.

In 1832 Abraham Friesen wrote a letter in reply to a previous letter by Heinrich Balzer who was a minister of the Orloff Gemeinde at the time. In his inquiry Balzer has referred to various points of practice of the Kleine Gemeinde and to the fact that the stark testimony of their lives has had a powerful effect on him and his Gemeinde. The nature of his concerns will become evident from the reply of Abraham Friesen. This Epistle deals with two particular aspects of the teaching of the gospel, namely, the judging of other confessions (war waging Christians) and the doctrine of the spiritual earthly "Kingdom of Christ". Here follows his 1832 reply to Heinrich Balzer:

"Beloved friend Heinrich Balzer: I have often considered your writing and find myself compelled to compose a short response to the same. You write that you are united with us in the understanding of the fundamental truths of the holy gospel to a greater extent than you had first supposed, and that therefore the bonds of love bind you with us as one people and one Gemeinde, although without our consent. At the same time you remain true to your Gemeinde.

"Beloved friend, do you think that the truth would impede our consent. Oh never, no way! But the sincerity of the Gemeinde does not subsist only in preaching, admonishing and punishing with the Word, but also in the separation, and avoidance of all vexatious and vain members. You, however, write that you wish to endure (carry) the offenses of your people. Oh my beloved Friend! This is totally impossible for humankind and is not founded on the New Testament. We are to endure each other's propensity to err and we are to carry each other's burdens in love, but I do not know when misdeeds and evil doers are to be tolerated in the church of Christ where the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 5, 2, would not be applicable to them. I would affirm that you can nowhere better carry out your duty and true work than in your own Gemeinde. We wish that you might regard this as your utmost obligation according to the unadulterated word of God and without respect of the person.

"You write also of our firm continuance in the teachings of the gospel against revenge, lying and deception, vanity and conformity with the world, and that thereby we have served as a model for you and your Gemeinde (Orloff). By this you affirm that our 'going out' was good and that our 'light is shining before men'. Nevertheless neither honour nor glory is due to us. Rather, our sufficiency is of God, who has also made us sufficient to be the ministers of the New Testament. 2 Corinthians 3, 5.

"But, you also write that we consider ourselves to be the only, faithful, (little flock) Gemeinde, and that we reject all other Christian confessions in accordance with our confession of faith. Beloved friend! I bid you. Here you have not correctly understood the meaning. You should properly have held back the word 'only' and the word 'reject'. But with respect to the rest, that we receive the baptized youth as if into the church of God, and impart comfort and courage to them in order that they will not fall, notwithstanding that our Gemeinde is small and therefore despised, and that they should seek to save their souls in the new Jerusalem, like a small Zoar. That is the truth.

"However, I do wish that you might give consideration to the circumstances which compelled us, and continue to force us to gather ourselves together in this Kleine Gemeinde. Yes, the original source of the inspiration for our separation, such as the exercise of force and revenge and the rejection of evangelical discipline. For then you would not so freely express the view that the source of our departure was our spiritual pride. Indeed there are so many Christians, and even those—as you say—who are supposedly bound together with us in one confession, who more or less live according to their own heathen will. They have almost cast away the rod of chastisement and prefer to practice the outwardly punishment so that the taking of prisoners has become a free matter among them. This is very tragic and lamentable indeed. For this reason we are unable to confess that such people belong to the visible church of the Lord. At least not according to the testimony of the Holy Scripture. Yes, by this we know that they have not continued in the salvation giving words of our Lord Jesus Christ. Consequently we cannot do otherwise than as the Apostle says, 'from such withdraw thyself'. 1 Timothy 6.

"You also charge us that we are completely incapable of submitting ourselves to an unprejudiced examination of the scripture. But we also have the Holy Scripture among us and according to the limited ability which our Lord has bestowed upon us, we at all times seek to dispose of ourself to its counsel and to practice everything for the best. Also we gladly wish to be advised if someone comes to our counsel with the word of the Lord. You have pointed us to several scriptures and said to us that we do not acknowledge them in practice. How is it that you seek to attribute this to us without first having discussed the same with us. For we gladly wish to dispose of ourselves to the commandments of the Lord because Christ has said, 'you are my friends if you do what I have commanded'. I do not say that we are perfect in this nor that we have seized hold of all truth but I can well and truly say that we are pressing towards the mark together with Paul. Philippians 3, 13.

"I also hope that you would not refer to us so hastily according only to your own information rather, that you would first discuss this and any other commandment with us, for then you might have found the matter to be different from what you have expressed here. In fact, you might have found the matter to be as you yourself acknowledged in the beginning of your letter regarding the fundamental truths of the gospel. Through such a discussion you might have realized other than that we supposedly believe, that no followers of Christ fulfill the prescriptions of the gospel, other than ourselves.

"You also mention that there are those among our members who pursue the world and mammon, as well as jesting, lightheartedness, the shameful disgrace of outwardly adopted submissiveness, hypocrisy and more of the like, and that not all of our members are free of the same. You also state that their attitude that they belong to the Kleinen (remnant) believing Gemeinde strengthens them in their spiritual pride and their self elevation. In this you are very much in error. I do not say this in the sense that there have never been such among us and that there are not such among us at the present but in the sense that these are not being strengthened in this erroneous belief. I say again that you are very much in error. Indeed, we have worked against this belief with all our might for a number of years by teaching and also punishing. Even today there are those who have been put out of the Gemeinde because of their outward humility and pharisaical service to God. Nor should

the entire Gemeinde be blamed or actually cast aside even if some of this might still continue contrary to our wills, for then the Corinthian, Galatian, Philippian and Colossian Gemeinden in the time of the Apostles would have to be rejected at the same time.

"You also write regarding the holding of a prayer at the graveyard during the burial of a corpse. I bid you my beloved friend! How can you make such a malicious judgment and say that this is evidence that the former pharisaical pride has blinded us. I bid you repeatedly, but not alone for our sake for we gladly forgive you, but for the sake of Jesus: I bid you, do give some thought to how you have expressed yourself here. Take heed! For the Lord Jesus himself has taught us how to pray and has also commanded us how we are to pray. And you are ascribing this to pharisaical pride? And in order to assert this you want to use the loyal Apostles and the first Christians? Ei! Ei! My beloved friend! What are you saying here?

"You write further that we deal contrary to the commandments of love and that in general we are doing wrong against our fellow men because we so firmly reject the teaching of the thousand year reign. Quite to the contrary we believe that we do so because of our love for our fellowmen and that according to the spirit of the Holy Scripture it is quite proper that we do so. But should we be in error in this, then would that God might open the eyes of our understanding. We hope that this is not the case for this spirit has never been understood in such a way by the nonresistant Christians.

"According to the writings of Menno Simons, the Muensterites also pointed and taught in this manner with great earnestness and they were terribly devastated on account of this teaching and were deemed fit for extermination. Therefore we also delineate against this teaching as something frightful and we do so out of love for our fellowman, in order that no one from among us would have to fall into doubting and error and think to themselves 'My Lord will not be coming for quite some time'. Or that they might think to themselves 'today is not yet truly the time of this reign of peace'. And consequently that they would commence to eat and to drink and guzzle to their fill and to beat each other, as we have so many examples before our eyes today, in the intention that they would only be truly converted to the thousand year reign after the entire population was living in peace. Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Acts 6, 1.

"Behold! In order to protect everyone among us against such a teaching we perceive the matter to be terrifying, just as frightful as it actually is in fact. When we are to take the kingdom of peace (Friedensreich) which was so dearly purchased for us by the blood of Christ over 1800 years ago, and of which he has appointed us as his stewards, and then to remove this kingdom of peace so far distant from us. So many thousands have had to die for this faith and still have to die. I ask of you, where does this leave our faithfulness and stewardship of the mysteries of God? 1 Corinthians 4, 1-2.

"I will take no part in such a rejection. I cannot consider myself to be very intelligent but nevertheless, I do have a knowledge within my heart that the reign of grace of Christ has already found its commencement and that the time (of His first coming) has brought the gospels to life in great might and clarity.

"Now that unrighteousness has seized the upperhand and love in many has grown cold, yes, now in fact the gospel is being preached in more or less the entire world, as a witness to all people and then the reign of Christ will come? But the day and the hour is not revealed to us. An angel of the Lord has also made oath that there is no thousand year reign and that after this time in the present there will be no more time. And no person can convince me to the contrary in this.

"Now I have declared myself to you with respect to your writing in a straightforward manner and according to the gifts which God has lent to me. In like manner we also counsel ourselves, as we are obligated. I have not done so out of hatred, in order to judge you, or to criticize you. Quite to the contrary, I have done so in an honest spirit and intention in order to present to you my fundamental sustenance which is far from perfect. If I have offended the Word of the Lord in any respect, then do let me know, for I dearly wish to follow the word of God. Should this teaching be in accordance with the word of God then we will firmly hold to our position without regard to what you think of us but only through the grace of God.

"Otherwise I bid you not to receive this letter as something evil of me. Even though you regard us as an aged, stinking, and rotting wound, I remain persuaded to wish you and your Gemeinde the exact opposite. When in a moment of solitude I consider my offenses and imperfections I find nothing wholesome in me. I am so full of the wounds and abscesses of sin, from the very soles of my feet to the top of my head. If it were not for the fact that Jesus, the compassionate Samaritan and physician of our souls, has appeared over us wounded and almost dead humanity we would have gone lost and also died the spiritual death. But he has poured oil and wine into our wounds and lovingly bound them up and has brought us to the tavern where our wounds are to be cared for until he comes again. And he has also paid the debt for us.

"Therefore I cannot do otherwise but remain true to this very gracious and loving God. This is in accordance with his holy word of the gospel by which we will all be judged on that day. When the Lord Jesus will descend from Heaven together with his angels in all his power and glory, he will give over to the revenge of the flaming fire those who did not recognize God and those who were not obedient to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Thessalonians 2, 7-8. In conclusion I say with Paul, 'Prove all things and cling firmly to that which is good' 1 Thessalonians 5, 21." Orloff, February 13, 1832 "Abraham Friesen"<sup>6</sup>

In the comments to his *Sammlung . . . zur Historie der Kleinen Gemeinde*, Aeltester Peter Toews adds the notation that Heinrich Balzer had originally been somewhat in the dark with respect

to the teaching of the thousand year reign. In fact, Balzer had immigrated to Russia in 1819 as a minister of the Friesian Gemeinde under Aeltester Franz Goerz<sup>64</sup>. This Gemeinde had already adopted pietist teachings in Prussia and so Balzer's original error is not surprising. Peter Toews has added the comment that there was absolutely no doubt but that Balzer later came to agree wholeheartedly with the evangelical view expressed by Aeltester Friesen. This missionary epistle of Abraham Friesen certainly bore manifold fruit. In 1833, the very following year, Rev. Heinrich Balzer left his so-called progressive and prestigious Orloff Gemeinde and became a devoted member and an earnest minister in the Kleine Gemeinde. The reader is asked to refer back to Balzer's subsequent treatise **Faith and Reason** (Section 14.XI) in which he endorses the view of Abraham Friesen that it is not Christian to judge other confessions. At the same time Balzer warns his fellow believers to be on guard against confessions which profess faith, but do not practice the works of Christ.

The 1832 Epistle to Heinrich Balzer is of special importance as in this writing Abraham Friesen clearly sets forth the Anabaptist-Mennonite position with respect to the teachings of Chiliasm. Abraham Friesen unequivocally rejects these teachings which contradict the most fundamental precepts of the gospel. In the view of Abraham Friesen those who adhere to such illusions fall into the terrible danger that they will no longer regard the evangelical teachings of Jesus as being paramount and supreme in their lives. By dreaming of a future kingdom these proponents are able to subvert the message of the gospel into a weak and ineffectual program of personal subjective piety.

From the previous experience of the Mennonite Church in Holland and in Prussia, Aeltester Friesen was only too familiar with the results of such a teaching. In his Epistle to Balzer, Aeltester Friesen has noted Matthew Chapter 24 referring to the beating of servants and the gluttony and drunkenness which will occur in the last times. Many false prophets shall arise and love shall wax cold. The Anabaptist-Mennonites referred to this historical evidence in support of their view that the amputation of discipleship from the gospel in favour of an emphasis on the individualistic conversion experience had consistently resulted in; the abandonment of self-sacrifice, meekness and humility; the pursuit of sensual desires for expensive lifestyles and prestige; the loss of identification with the needs of the poor and oppressed; and lastly the demise of a prophetic witness for peace and justice.<sup>7</sup>

This would bring to the mind of the Anabaptist-Mennonite the words of Jesus when he refers to a similar situation saying "Woe unto you, scribes and pharisees, and hypocrites, for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made ye make him twofold more the child of Satan than yourselves". Matthew 23, 15. Of course the Anabaptist-Mennonite would not say that the propagation of such an amputated gospel would not somehow serve a useful purpose. But there was always a danger that the process would amount to little more than the exporting of the spiritual bankruptcy of the evangelizing group. As a consequence the new converts of this "evangelization" would also pursue and fulfill their sensual desires, wage wars, ignore the needs of the hungry and oppressed, swear oaths, beat their servants and oppress whoever was lower on the socio-economic ladder, etc. The Anabaptist-Mennonite might note further that if these "new and improved" Christians would ever achieve their goal of "evangelizing" the entire world that there would be no little danger that God might not even recognize the end result as being a contribution to his kingdom. For such an "evangelized" world would not be altered in one iota from the "heathen world" which it would replace.

### 15.05 An Epistle to Abraham Enns, 1840.

The Aeltester of the Gemeinde of Christ was unable to devote his entire ministry to the winning of new converts to the fold as was the case in the "Epistle to Balzer". A good part of his endeavour had to be committed to the pastoring of his flock. This was his first and foremost responsibility. Through his fifth column Satan sought to subvert the very elect. As in the days of the Apostles, the Aeltester had a constant battle to maintain purity of doctrine and practice amongst those charged to his care. In keeping with the model of the Apostle Paul as the ideal missionary, the Anabaptist-Mennonite leader also fulfilled the task of admonishing his charges in the teachings of the gospel and the daily practice of the same.

This was an essential part of the ministry of Abraham Friesen. Many of his epistles and writings are admonitions to his own flock and to individual believers who are straying from the straight and the narrow. This was especially the case after his election as Aeltester of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in 1838. These epistles often served to formalize the discussions which had taken place during a preceding series of pastoral meetings. They served to publicize such matters once they had been dealt with, so that both the full gospel and implementation of the same were made manifest in the Gemeinde as well as to the world at large.

The "Epistle to Abraham Enns" of 1840 will serve to illustrate such a situation. Abraham Enns

was a second generation member of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde who had decided that its position regarding the attendance of debaucherous wedding celebrations, its position regarding the operation of his Wirtshaft, and its practice of excommunication and avoidance, were too strict. In a letter of February 8th, 1840 Abraham Enns renounced the Gemeinde.

“Beloved Ohms and Gemeinde!

“As I am unable to come to agreement with you through pleading and discussion, regarding my Wirtshaft, also regarding the practice of excommunication and shunning, and the attending at weddings; I hereby inform you that I no longer consider myself to be a brother among you. I also inform you that I presently intend to join the Grosze Gemeinde of which you will receive notice after I have been received by them.”

Your well-meaning friend

“Abraham Enns”

Neukirch, February 8th, 1840.”

In his reply Aeltester Abraham Friesen refers to numerous pastoral meetings which he had held with Enns in order to make him cognizant of his errors. It appears that Enns has attempted to influence many others in the Gemeinde seeking to persuade them of his views. In response, Abraham Friesen has composed a letter in which he explains various evangelical teachings for the benefit of his own flock. He also publicly refutes the false arguments asserted by Enns. He points out that the Kleine Gemeinde is practicing the doctrines of the gospel and not the rules of their own invention. He acknowledges that those who follow this narrow path have always come under ridicule. In closing he denies any assertion that those outside the Kleine Gemeinde are unsaved. The gospel, whether hard and unpleasant or otherwise, applies to all people and in the end it is the Word which will judge everyone.

#### **Epistle to Abraham Enns, 1840.**

“Here follows a declaration to Abraham Enns which refutes his obscured understanding and also sets forth our teaching unto the good hearted reader. Alas, ‘to whom shall I speak and give warning that they may hear?’ saith the prophet Jeremiah. ‘Behold their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken: Behold they hold the word of the Lord for a mockery and they have no delight in it. Therefore I am full of the fury of the Lord: I am weary of restraint and I will pour out my wrath upon the children in the street and upon the assembly of the young men with each other’. Jeremiah 6, 10-11. Sirach says that wisdom is a bitter root for the unbroken people, and the wicked do not abide in her for she is a hard taskmaster for them and soon they cast her away. Sirach 6, 21.

“As A.E. is also doing here. Why did you not want to accept the love of the truth for it was offered to you over such a long time and carried after you by us weak servants. Why have you not given heed unto the Godly wisdom which the gracious God for years has allowed to grasp for you in the Gemeinde in manifold ways? But you did not want to do so. If you had truly been without falsehood you would have been desirous of receiving the same. Indeed, he who is without falsehood will aspire unto wisdom and his descendants will prosper, saith Sirach. Although wisdom, at first, will present herself in a different manner and make him anxious and afraid, and prove him with her rod and try him with her chastisement until she finds him to be without falsehood, she will then come again and lead him on the right way and make him rejoice, and make manifest her mysteries to him. But if he is found to be false she will forsake him so that he cometh unto ruination. Sirach 4, 17.

“Behold! This is also your experience, as well as all those who are unable to submit themselves in obedience to Christ and his words, and who are therefore unwilling to receive any admonition and chastisement. Luke 21, 34; Romans 13, 13; 1 Timothy 6, 8-9; Luke 16, 19; Wisdom 29, 5-6; Matthew 18, 16; 2 Timothy 2, 20-21; 1 Timothy 6, 3-5. Therefore God has given them up unto the lusts of their own heart; and they walk in their own counsels. Psalm 80, 12. Indeed, you stand so firmly in the darkness of your heart, in your misled endeavours with respect to your Wirtshaft, never thinking that the holy Jesus hath said, ‘He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches’. Luke 16, 10-11.

“On the basis of your own benevolent disposition you have also decided that our separation is too strict, even though Christ and his apostles have commanded the same with such unequivocal words. Not only over fornicators, the covetous, railers, drunkards, or thieves, 1 Corinthians 5, 11; but also over boasters, the proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, the unthankful, the unholy, without natural affection, the unreconcilable, false accusers, unchaste, fierce, despisers of those who are good, transgressors, highminded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, having a form of Godliness but denying the power thereof: From such turn away (shun in the Luther translation). 2 Timothy 2, 3-5. And likewise, ‘If any man obey not our word, note that man by an epistle, and have no company with him that he may be ashamed.’ 2 Thessalonians 3, 14.

“According to the kindness of your heart, our avoidance appears to be far too strict, notwithstanding that this teaching was instituted by the Lord Jesus and his Apostles for the betterment of sinners and the salvation of their souls. You would like us to make the bed of sin soft and comfortable. According to your spirit you would want us to put pillows under the armpits of the sinners and offenders, and kerchiefs under their heads. Ezekiel 13, 3. What do you really mean? For the Lord called woe unto all the angry prophets of Israel who followed their own spirit. James 3, 1. How do you regard

yourself that you presume to censure, when nothing is commanded of you. Will you in fact not be comparable to those of whom it was said, 'to whom we gave no such commandment'. Acts 15, 24. These only seek to make matters comfortable for themselves according to the flesh. Galations 6, 12.

"Oh, but I bid you beloved brethren! Do not allow anyone to mislead you, and certainly not regarding avoidance. Do not follow Abraham Enns even though as he himself says, he has discussed and pleaded with us regarding the other three points and not gained in anything. Take heed of yourselves for him as the leaven for the pharisees, in order that he does not gain in anything from you. Rather follow the Apostle Paul and those whom we have as an example who have followed him, of whom men such as Menno Simons and George Hansen would not be the least. For they are men who have shared sufficient knowledge of these matters with us. Do not fear that we are too strict in all the four points which Abraham Enns has brought forward. For we are not to place pillows under the arms and kerchiefs under the heads of the assured people in order that they may comfortably continue to slumber in their sin and offenses and so that they might rest in the manner desired by A.E.

"No, never! The Lord calls misfortune over those who would do so. Ezekiel 3, 18. Because of the delusion of your heart you do not want to avoid the engagements (Verloebnisse) and weddings when they marry out of the Gemeinde. Instead, you are more inclined to strengthen them in their misery by partaking in such affairs rather than to testify to them together with Peter that 'it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they had known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them'. 2 Peter 2, 21. Indeed, you are personally more inclined to eat the vomit of dogs and to wallow in the mud with the sows after a cleansing, than to testify with penitence of the spiritual house to your beloved mother regarding her fall from the faith. And no one can be a disciple of Jesus without such testimony. Luke 14, 26. Song No. 211, verse 3.

"Which (spiritual) hatred will not become more evident nor be better understood, than if with purposeful opposition we sorrowfully hold ourselves back from them in order that we do not become partakers of other men's sins. 1 Timothy 5, 22. For one can become a partner in the evil deeds of others merely with a greeting. 2 John 11. How much more then are we not partakers, if we also allow ourselves to be found at such weddings and banquets during which the outward wedding in the flesh and the spiritual wedding is to be united as one spirit in Christ. Something must then be broken. I say that whoever attends these weddings freely and unhindered, such a one truly loves his mother more than the Lord Jesus Christ. Matthew 10, 37.

"Oh, my friend, say for yourself that your love is not false. Where is the abhorrence for that which is evil, and the cleaving unto that which is good? Romans 12, 9. To the contrary you cleave to all the evil and hate all that is good, and you yourself testify to the truth of this through your forsaking of the Gemeinde. Whereby you have strengthened and publicized this before the entire world. Oh misfortune! Oh what blindness! What shame upon sorrow! Such people, who do not give deeper penetration to the spiritual enlightenment, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the love for the word of God, and the power of the future city. Hebrews 6, 9; And who would rather cast all this to the wind and fall away from the same, and to consider as a mockery and sport everything which time and time again has been offered to you out of pure grace above so many others.

"Oh, who would have thought this of your beloved mother some three, four, or even five years ago? Oh, how your beloved father would be grieved and horrified if he was once more able to open his eyes from death to see how the family, with the mother in the lead and the children following in haste, is pressing towards the freedom of the world, towards glitter and pride and everything else which is to be found upon the wide road. Oh, but you should properly be ashamed of yourself for your unashamed blindness. In addition you have to come before God and us with your hypocritical tears in order that we are to spare your foolishness. As if you were planning your deep second thoughts. But praise be unto the Lord who makes such a spirit manifest to his miserable servants so that you were unable to win anything from us through all your talking and pleading. Which you allow to be heard in your own glistening writing to us.

"Alas! If only you yourself might come to learn of the matters against which you wanted to persuade us and talk to us. Namely, the word of God and the eternal truths which not only we, but all our beloved and learned of God ascendants in office (Voraeltesten), have maintained since the time of the Apostles. Not only among much opposition, hatred, and envy such as we presently have to endure from some, for they also persevered in the midst of persecution, imprisonment, and martyrdom. And with the help of God we also intend to endure unto the end in the truth which has once been recognized and established.

"Nor is it praiseworthy that there are always false comforters who are only to glad to receive such people as you are now also. For the Lord lamented of this during the time of Israel and said: 'They comfort my people in its misfortune, that they shall pay it little heed, saying 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace. But they would not confess their shame that they continued in such abomination. Rather they wanted to remain unashamed and did not want to humble themselves'. Jeremiah 6, 14-15. There were also those who practiced the truth in unrighteousness during the time of the Apostles. Romans 7, 18. During the time of Menno Simons there were Filix and Lemke among others, who were not the least in this regard. They also decryed Menno and his own as adulterers because of the evangelical separation (absonderung), scriptural avoidance, and the withdrawal of marital relations among spouses. There were also those who gladly received the ones who had been excommunicated from the Gemeinde of Menno Simons as beloved brethren without even an examination as to why

they had been separated. You can read about this in the large (Menno) Simons book, pages 484-488.

"Nor are we lacking in this in our present times. Nor are we lacking in scoffing and slandering about us and our imperfect zeal to pursue the truth and to cling thereto. However, I do not speak too strictly for those who are innocent of this and who are not manifest to us, and who would seek to lament and supplicate unto God for the abomination of our times. Compare with 1 Kings 19, 18. Nor is there any lack of those over whom the Lord calls out his woe, 'Who call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness, that put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter'. Isaiah 5, 20. Nor is there any lack of those who speak proud words which are without substance, and who promise freedom when they are themselves the servants of ruin. 2 Peter 2, 19.

"Behold, my beloved friend A.E., you are turning from all of this, and without being aware of doing so you are showing your back unto God, who has chosen you, and to his Gemeinde. Nor do you give heed to the warning which has been given unto those that sin willfully after they have received the knowledge of truth, Hebrews 10, 26. Nor do you fully consider the experience of Esau after he had sold his birthright for such a dish of lentils.

Indeed, as soon as we seek to instruct you from the Word of God the question quickly arises: Whether all those who are not in the Kleinen Gemeinde are damned and eternally lost? Whether we regard the others as unbelievers or in the category of the Catholics and Lutherans. As if you are without any understanding and do not know that all judging and damnation is forbidden unto mankind. Luke 6, 37. Even Jesus Christ the son of God did not want to judge anyone. Rather he said, 'If any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not, for I came not to judge the world but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him; the words that I have spoken the same shall judge him in the last day'. John 12, 47-48.

"Consequently we do not have a single word of God to the effect that the name Catholic or Lutheran, and whether Grosze or Kleine Gemeinde, will contribute in any way unto salvation or unto damnation; Galatians 6, 15; Or that we consider this or that offense more seriously or less seriously. Matthew 5, 19; James 2, 10. For these words apply to us all, 'Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. 2 John 9. And when the Lord Jesus was asked whether he meant that only few would be saved, he replied, 'Strive to enter in at the straight gate: for many I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. Luke 14, 24.

"This would also be our desire for you, that you would strive for the same, and not that we should judge those who are outside of us. 'For what have I to do to judge them also that are without?' 1 Corinthians 5, 12. We have enough to see to ourselves that we do not lose that which we have wrought. That we maintain a good distinction between the Holy and unholy, and between the pure and the impure. And that we hold ourselves only to God and his Word. For thus saith the Lord, 'Where you cling yourself unto me, I will hold fast to you and you shall continue as my minister. And where you teach the pious to separate from the evil people you shall be as my mouth. And before that you should fall unto them, they must sooner fall unto thee'. Jeremiah 15, 19.

"Thus far from me as an unprofitable menial servant of the Word of God. 'Prove all things and hold fast that which is good'. 1 Thessalonians 5, 21." Orloff, the 16th of February, 1840

"Abraham Friesen"\*

## 15.06 The Discipline of Love, 1845.

The full gospel teaching enunciated by Abraham Friesen in his "Epistle to A.E." sometimes also led to the separation or excommunication of a fallen member. The Anabaptist-Mennonites regarded such discipline to be the evangelical corollary of discipleship. In such instances it might become necessary for the Gemeinde and the Aeltester to follow the pattern established by the Apostle Paul, and to deal harshly and sternly with the fallen one before the whole Gemeinde was infected. One of the most common charges made against the Kleine Gemeinde was that they exercised this discipline too frequently and too strictly. In his *Einfache Erklaerung* published in 1845, Abraham Friesen tries to set out the evangelical basis of this ordinance and explains that the entire practice of the teaching must be founded solely on love, love for the individual, the Gemeinde, and the church of Christ. He poignantly questions whether those who leave manifest sins unpunished are really more tolerant and loving than those who prayerfully and earnestly seek to carry out their evangelical responsibilities:

"Secondly our separation is made the subject of reproach because we punish too harshly, without compassion, too quickly and for mistakes which are too minor. Gentle reader, if only you might give a little heed to the teaching of the New Testament and principally to the teachings and order of the Apostle Paul. For Paul is the foundation and master builder of all ordinances in the Gemeinde of our Lord, on which we others are to set our foundation and build. 1 Corinthians 3, 10. Accordingly I hope that we will quickly find that our discipline is neither too harsh, too incompassionate, nor too quick, and that we do not punish trivial mistakes.

"As soon as one brother sins against the other we follow the teachings of Jesus, as well as the teachings of Paul and John, when we then help such a one to become aright with a gentle spirit. Similarly if someone is unwarily overtaken by a mistake. If it is a mortal sin we also punish according to the will of John, that no intercession be made preceding admonishment. 1 Corinthians 3, 10; Matthew 18, 15-17; Galatians 6, 1; and 1 John 5, 16. Therefore I do not believe that we punish



mistakes which are too trivial. If for the sake of the illumination of this matter we take only one address by Paul in 2 Timothy 3, 1-5, we find that sixteen punishable matters are mentioned in these five verses alone: With respect to which the apostle in unequivocal words writes, 'and these shun'.<sup>10</sup>

"However those who give little heed to such teachings of the apostles say of us, that we punish trivial mistakes. Ah, my reader. Sixteen punishable matters are prescribed for us in these five verses. How many would one find if everything were to be enumerated which was stated to be punishable; Which I will omit to do for this time as I hope that this example will be sufficient to persuade you, and that you, dear reader, will be able to conclude that we punish neither too quickly nor that we punish offenses which are too trivial.

"Behold! And yet our opponents deem us to be incompassionate even when we only punish where we are commanded to do so by the Word of God. Perhaps they are able to delude themselves that in comparison, they act lovingly and gently towards their brethren when they overlook mistakes where the Word of God commands a punishment. 1 Corinthians 5, 6. All of these, those who are required to punish as well as those who should be punished, are in grave error.

"Separation is a great medium of love and very necessary to the salvation of the soul of man. As the apostle Paul says to the Gemeinde at Corinth; 'For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ. To deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of our Lord Jesus'. 1 Corinthians 5, 3-5.

"Here I will allow the kindly hearted reader to judge for himself. Who is acting more benevolently and more gently in this? Would it be those who because of fleshly love do not cut off the offending member and cast it from them until they, together with the offending member, must be cast into the fire of hell? Matthew 18, 8-9. Or are we the compassionate and gentle ones, who cut down the offending member, and soon cast it away, and who together with Paul deliver such a one over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. I hope that you will agree with the latter without any doubts.

"Oh, my beloved reader, the outlook for the souls of mankind presently appears to be very dangerous and lamentable, so that it is indeed high time to awaken. The apostle says, 'Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light'. Romans 12, 11; Ephesians 5, 14; and 1 Thessalonians 5, 6 *et seq.* Furthermore, we can see the great disorder which this sparing, contrary to commandment, has brought upon us even in temporal matters. Yes, what a stubborn and Godless life has arisen therefrom, so that in fact our government authorities were required to take measures so that the secular matters would not also degenerate into complete ruination. There are in fact daring and proud people who no longer wish to humble themselves to the government authorities, even though these have been given their power by the Lord and sovereignty from the highest, and are the administrators of his Kingdom. Wisdom of Solomon 6, 4-5.

"Oh how good and correct is the advice of Paul when he says, 'And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. 2 Thessalonians 3, 14. And again 'punish the stubborn; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will'. 2 Timothy 2, 25-26. The most entangled and Godless people themselves must be the most thankful to their ministers (Lehrer), and prefer that they would be exiled towards repentance and betterment while there was yet time; rather than that eventually they would have to experience the punishment of the government authorities; And over and above this that they would remain exposed to the unspeakable danger to the soul. Romans 13, 4; 2, 8-9.

"Oh what a sorrowful situation! Wretchedness upon wretchedness! And then certain ministers are so arrogant that they are not satisfied with their own miseries, and instead also involve themselves in our excommunications: By comforting those who have been separated in order that they should consider the same as a triviality. Jeremiah 6, 14. They even receive them into their membership as such who have been wrongly punished, and promise them freedom: For they themselves, as the apostle says, are the servants of corruption, and that unwittingly the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of man, who hold the truth in unrighteousness. 2 Peter 2, 17-19; Romans 1, 18.

"Many of these also rejoice that our separation does not bear much fruit in some instances. But for this our opponents will have to accept the fault and not we. Many of them make it very much their concern, if only they might find an opportunity somewhere to try to convince the members of our Gemeinde that they have been wrongfully punished. Ah, but how sorrowful this makes us, when we think of this leading astray. Yet we can see no other solution than that which the apostle says, 'Wherefore, come out from among them, and agitate nothing impure, and then I will receive you, saith the Lord Almighty' 2 Corinthians 6, 17.<sup>19</sup>

One of the greatest criticisms against the 19th century Anabaptist-Mennonites was that they practiced excommunication and avoidance. But it should not be forgotten that many of the excesses which occurred as a result were merely representative of the times and that contemporaneously American society bought and sold slaves, English society utilized child labour under subhuman conditions, and pietist groups banned and counter-banned each other. Physical punishment was everywhere strictly applied for the most minute offenses. Others, including many brands of pietism, were involved in waging

vicious wars against each other throughout much of the 19th century. Often these activities were pursued in the name of Christ (God and Country).

Abraham Friesen's exposition of evangelical discipline must be understood in its own historical context. As one contemporary Anabaptist-Mennonite writer has put it "Blunders of the past should not interfere with Jesus' command to bind and loose." In his book *The Third Way*, Paul Lederach, compares the rejection of discipline to giving up on marriage simply because marriages so frequently fail. Nor would such evangelical avoidance ever include the expulsion of an innocent and bewildered offender into a harsh and cruel world without an indefinite and dedicated follow up effort. Excommunication could never be an easy back door for the Gemeinde to rid itself of the obligations to offer "counsel, care and help in time of need" to the person, to which the Gemeinde had committed itself by originally accepting the individual as a member.<sup>11</sup>

Discipline in the Gemeinde of Christ was never to be employed for the achieving of political and socio-economic objectives as had been the case under Aeltester Jakob Enns. (See Chapter Eleven). At the same time his regime was indifferent to a plague of fighting, drinking, and disputation. When this manifest immorality became too gross, the offender was put away through the exercise of police power, but spiritual discipline was to be avoided at all costs. In his *Einfache Erklärung* Abraham Friesen goes on to reflect with respect to the shameful situation created by this omission. What a disappointment this had been to the Russian authorities who had fully expected the Mennonites to live up to their name. Abraham Friesen concludes with an admonition to the general populace of the Molotschna colony that each and every one should seek a safe refuge for their souls. He closes with the words of song number 197, which consists of an appeal to all believers to renew their commitment to Christ and to wage a victorious battle against the ways of evil:

"Only few pay more heed to the word of the Lord than to the earnest original intention of our Monarch which he imparted unto us through the Director and Lord Trapp, who was appointed by His Imperial Majesty himself. Psalm 81, 12. This eminent writing contains the following three points: First, that in as much as possible the Mennonites shall be concerned that they have good teachers and shepherds over their souls, who shall see to their salvation and that they practice a pious life. In order that their light would also shine before the people in Russia, and that they would see our good works and that they would praise our father in heaven. Matthew 5, 16. Second, that we should be on guard that no scabbed sheep would come among the flock, nor evil ones, living in gross manifest vices. For example, that no people given to drunkenness would come amidst our fellowship, through which the good name of the Mennonites in Russia would be brought into disgrace. Third, that at all times we should continue to cherish our most honoured protector in love and trust, with the firm assurance that until his last living breath he will be a good friend and promoter of the well-being of all pious Mennonites.

"Take note, beloved reader, of how the gracious God has directed the love and good-favour of such an eminent and powerful man. For among other things, Lord Trapp also testified that His Majesty had been moved to tears when he had to take his leave from one who had earlier demonstrated his love with the moistness of his eyes. Beloved reader, you may well imagine that many glorious monarchs long since deceased, as well as those who are still alive, have sought to further our temporal providence as well as spiritual well-being here in Russia.

"But one must stand disgraced when such a licentious, arrogant, proud, and fleshly life is practiced on our part. 1 John 2, 16. And what is even more, that so many scabbed sheep have snuck in amongst the Mennonites, such as those given to drunkenness, gluttons, and boasters; and those who guzzle, spite, bicker, and beat each other as well as those of other religious confessions in road houses. I will repeat once more, that one must truly be ashamed before God and our well-meaning authorities, who have dealt so lovingly and paternally with us in all matters, but who had been promised a completely different life and practice on our part.

"May the all-knowing God prepare a secure refuge for each innocent and blameless soul, in which they may work out their well-being and providence with fear and trembling, and thereafter that they might find eternal rest together with all the blessed in the eternity ahead. Philippians 2, 12; 1 Peter 11, 17; Matthew 11, 29. I would also add the well-known words of the poet in Song No. 197:"

3. "Man kann so manche Sünd'  
Unwissentlich begehen,  
Vor Gott kommt der Gedank'  
Gleich einem Werk zu stehen,  
Ein einzig rädug'es Schaaf  
Verdirbt den ganzen Stall.  
Wer steht, der sehe zu,  
Daß er nicht plötzlich fall'

10. "Des Richters Zukunft wird  
Gleich einem Blitz geschehen;  
Was unrein und gemein,  
Darf nicht in'n Himmel gehen.  
Es fühlt die letzte Plag'  
Aegyptens erstes Kind.  
Es wird kein Haus fast sein  
Da nicht Verdammte sind.

11. "Herr Gott! so oft ich dies  
Nach aller Läng bedenke,  
So schneidet Angst und Furcht  
Durch Adern und Gelenke;  
So schauert mir die Haut,  
So gellt und klingt das Ohr,  
So bebet Mund und Herz  
Und hebet sich empor.
12. "Ich lebe zwar getrost  
Durch Glauben, Lieb' und Hoffen,  
Und weiß, daß deine Gnad'  
Noch allen Menschen offen,  
Und deine Leib' und Treu'  
Mich tröstet und erhält,  
Doch fleh' ich desto mehr  
Für mich und alle Welt.
13. "Senk' deine wahre Furcht  
In aller Menschen Herzen,  
Laß Niemand mit der Buß'  
Und wahren Glauben scherzen;  
Thu allen Kitzel weg,  
Trägheit, Vermessenheit,  
Verstockung, Heuchelei,  
Bosheit, Unheiligkeit.
14. "Hilf siegen über das,  
Was du schon überwunden;  
Zerstör' des Teufels Reich,  
Laß ihn bald sein gebunden,  
Daß wir mit Fleiß und Sorg'  
Verleugnen, widerstehn,  
Anhalten mit Gebet,  
Entfliehen und entgehn. Amen."

### 15.07 Assessment of Abraham Friesen.

Abraham Friesen was a mature 37 years of age when he joined the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in 1818. He was a well established farmer in the village of Orloff with four sons and four daughters. He had been elected as deacon of the Grosze Flemish Gemeinde in 1817 and had belonged to the progressive faction centered in Orloff. From "The Short Exposition" of Klaas Reimer, the reader will recall that it was shortly after this that the battle against the false humility pietists in the Kleine Gemeinde took place. Klaas Reimer noted the tremendous gains which were made when Abraham Friesen joined the cause. It is evident that the gifts and talents of the popular young deacon were appreciated by the Kleine Gemeinde brotherhood as he was elected as a minister at an election held on January 12, 1823. The Kleine Gemeinde at this time had a particular need for stalwart and courageous leaders for it was in 1824 (1821 according to another source) that the Kleine Gemeinde was accused for the second time before the Fuersorge Committee in Odessa. As a result each member of the Gemeinde had to be prepared to sacrifice his all in the face of deportation to Siberia.

In his early years as a minister Abraham Friesen had to struggle to obtain a sound evangelical balance in his ministry. The influence of the strict Calvinistic "social gospel" adhered to by the Aeltesten Jakob Enns and Bernhard Fast is evident when he voiced the view that a fallen brother who had left for another Gemeinde should be shunned until death. It seems that Abraham Friesen had initially also been somewhat influenced by the false humility proponents in the Kleine Gemeinde. Fortunately he was able to overcome these erroneous influences and to achieve a great depth and understanding in the mysteries of the gospel.

In this he was no doubt aided by the battle tested wisdom and experience of the more senior Klaas Reimer and by the theological perception of Heinrich Balzer. But his tremendous insight into the teachings of the gospel was also based on his own extensive study of the writings of the Anabaptist-Mennonite forefathers. He was fluent in both Dutch and High German and also translated a number of writings into German. These vitally important aspects of his ministry will be dealt with in chapter seventeen. His library included: The complete Works of Menno Simons in Hollaendish, the writings of Dirk Philips in Hollaendisch, and the Works of the Danzig Aeltester George Hansen, a complete *Martyr's Mirror* in Dutch and the "small" *Martyr's Mirror* by Isaac van Duihren, the sermons of Jakob Danners, the works of Aeltester Peter Peters, the writings of Peter J. Twisk, the writings of Danzig Aeltester Hans von Steen, among others; as well as an assortment of the handwritten epistles popular at the time. His writing style and articulation bespeak of a sound education.

His sound full gospel doctrine is manifest in the Epistles set forth above. He asserted that Jesus Christ had instituted a spiritual kingdom consisting of persecuted and martyred believers and consequently he taught very strictly against the deluded pietists and chiliasts of his day. From this vantage point he propagated other vital evangelical doctrines such as nonresistance, spiritual discipline, and that the believer should not judge or condemn others. In the end the validity and success of his ministry was based on his underlying premise that the "New Testament was the foundation and solid ground of truth and the supreme teaching over all authority on which he and everyone must found and build". With total approval he quoted the famous touchstone of Menno Simons, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ". 1 Corinthians 3, 11.<sup>12</sup>

After his 1823 election Abraham Friesen quickly became the leading minister of the Kleine Ge-

meinde. From his writings such as his 1827 "Petition for Michael Makowski," it is evident that his views carried great weight and that he often spoke with the full authority of the Kleine Gemeinde. In view of his devoted efforts and gifted talents it seems only natural that Abraham Friesen was elected as the second Aeltester of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde on April 3, 1838

His entire ministry both before and after his election as Aeltester is characterized by a positive attitude which was intellectually forward looking and yet totally based on simple faith. Aeltester Friesen was not prepared to allow the cultural reactionaries, pietists, or other enemies of the faith to malign the scriptural teachings and practices of the Kleine Gemeinde and other likeminded groups. He followed the model of his spiritual forefathers such as Menno Simons and was more than prepared to wage a strong evangelical offensive against such attacks. In the case of Heinrich Balzer this resulted in the conversion to the cause of the gospel of a leading theologian and intellectual. In fact Aeltester Abraham Friesen took this to be part of the evangelical obligation of the spiritual leader in the Gemeinde of Christ.

The matter of the Aeltester election of 1838 serves as an excellent example of his leadership qualities. (See Section 16.08). Where the cultural reactionary Mennonites were frequently only able to react in bitter frustration to the clever manipulations of their opponents, Abraham Friesen deflected such attacks and redirected them against their proponents. His strategy consisted of a meek submission to harrassment and persecution coupled with an aggressive assertion of the gospel in the face of the same. Because of his sound education and well developed reasoning and writing abilities, Abraham Friesen was more than the equal of the cultural and pietist Mennonite leaders of his day. Consequently he quite cheerfully rebutted the 1838 charges of Bernhard Fast and his fellow pietist Aeltesten and gently drew their attention to the teachings of the gospel and the faith of the fathers. Abraham Friesen concludes his reply to Bernhard Fast by pointing out that it was sufficient for the Kleine Gemeinde if they could live in the fellowship and grace of God, and that their sustenance and constitution was not dependent on the ordination of an Aeltester by the other Mennonite Gemeinden in the Molotschna.

No doubt his position and intellectual approach put many of his opponents ill at ease for Aeltester Abraham Friesen had the advantage of promoting evangelical (nonresistant) Christianity, and thus at all times could resort to the Gospels and to a host of Anabaptist-Mennonite writings for his inspiration. His opponents, on the other hand, had the difficult job of promoting their "Mennonite Faith" by referring to culture, tradition, and to the teachings of pietism. The foregoing writings demonstrate that Aeltester Abraham Friesen was always ready, able and willing "to give an account to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear". With his skill and readiness to present a thorough and reasoned written presentation, he in fact very much resembled the Anabaptist-Mennonite leaders whom he admired and held so highly. Through his education and extensive study Abraham Friesen was able to employ his many God-given talents in the advancement of the Kingdom of Christ.

At the same time Aeltester Abraham Friesen was a genuinely warm and loving leader of his own Gemeinde. His epistles demonstrate that he was a tireless shepherd of his flock, constantly admonishing and encouraging those in his charge. His pastoral wisdom and comfort was immediately available when members of the flock were faltering. In such instances he was gentle and mild, but evangelical discipline was strictly and lovingly applied where necessary. In this practice, as in other matters, he admitted his imperfection and mistakes but insisted that the Gemeinde constantly had to strive for the purity of the church of Christ. In his view the failure to practice the doctrines and ordinances instituted by Christ and his Apostles did not demonstrate spiritual love.

Abraham Friesen followed his Anabaptist-Mennonite forefathers in modeling his ministry on that of the Apostle Paul as evangelical missionary. This ministry consisted of preaching, visitation and writing. The writings set forth in this chapter illustrate the many facets of this service. The "Epistle to Balzer" is directed to a special individual whom he wishes to win for the cause of the Cross. The "Epistle to A. Enns" is directed to a specific individual who has fallen from faith and whom he seeks to win back from his error. The *Einfache Erklarung* of 1845 confesses and asserts that the Gemeinde of Christ must on occasion amputate and cleave asunder a wounded and infested member who has made evident his previous separation from God through his manifest offenses. All of these writings were circulated among the members of the Kleine Gemeinde for their doctrinal instruction and spiritual edification. These writings were also copied and circulated among the general populace where they were read and studied by some and mocked and ridiculed by others. This in itself was a major component of the Kleine Gemeinde mission in the Molotschna. By the circulation of these

writings Abraham Friesen demonstrated that he was quite prepared to submit his faith and doctrine to the purifying test of critical examination.

Under the firm and unrelenting leadership of Klaas Reimer the Kleine Gemeinde had become firmly established by 1820. Through the 1824 division of the Grosze Gemeinde into a retrenched anticultural Grosze Gemeinde and the culturally progressive Orloff Gemeinde, the Kleine Gemeinde in a sense had become the senior Gemeinde in the Molotschna. However, the evangelical teachings of the Kleine Gemeinde made it an unattractive Gemeinde to join in the temporal sense. Therefore the transfer of a brilliant and eloquent deacon from the Orloff group in 1818 certainly is symbolical of the fact that the teachings of the group did appeal to individuals of a high calibre who were seriously seeking for spiritual fulfillment. By 1848 no less than four other ministers had followed his example and cast their lot with the Kleine Gemeinde. In the intervening years the Kleine Gemeinde was also joined by a number of Mennonite families who had just emigrated from Prussia. This in spite of the fact that these later Prussian emigrants had already come under what some historians considered to be the "beneficial influences" of pietism. This confirms that there was still a minority of Mennonites in Prussia who were not impressed with the compromises being made there. It is quite probable that Peter von Riesen, the distinguished representative of the Kleine Gemeinde in Prussia, was able to direct many of these like minded individuals to his brethren in Russia.

With the benefit of the wholesome stimulus provided by such new members the Kleine Gemeinde reached what could be called its zenith or golden age during the 1830's and 1840's. This internally peaceful era of consolidation and expansion was also very much attributable to the talented leadership and skillful organizational abilities of Abraham Friesen. If Klaas Reimer can be recognized as the founder of the Kleine Gemeinde, and Heinrich Balzer as the intellectual, then Abraham Friesen above all else, must be recognized as the evangelical missionary who consolidated and advanced the mission of the spiritual earthly Kingdom of Christ in Russia. These three men of God constituted a truly worthy Russia "troika". Any listing of the leading Russian Mennonite heroes of the faith would certainly have to include this powerful Kleine Gemeinde triumvirate.

### 15.08 A Closing Admonition, 1849.

In conclusion, reference is made to a short admonition by Aeltester Abraham Friesen written only a year or so prior to his death in 1849. He presented this short address to his Gemeinde only shortly before his final sickness. In this "Kurze Ermahnung" or "Short Admonition" Aeltester Abraham Friesen describes his spiritual odyssey and reflects with respect to the programs which he had promoted over the years. Most of all he describes the state and condition of his own soul as he closes his career in anticipation of his imminent death. He admonishes his beloved Gemeinde which he has led so capably, to continue and to persevere in the faith. The "Short Admonition" illustrates above all that the faith and ministry of Abraham Friesen was totally founded on the message of regenerative grace and redeeming love.

From pictures of his grandsons one can well imagine Aeltester Abraham Friesen to have been a handsome man with a trim physique and erect bearing. At the time of presenting this concluding admonition to his Gemeinde he was a man in the middle seventies, no doubt with a head of white hair, a man in his prime of experience and wisdom, with seasoned abilities of judgment and leadership. Aeltester Friesen presented his "Kurze Ermahnung" at the close of a regular sermon. One can picture the group of some seventy families assembled in a large threshing barn which had duly been prepared for the Sunday worship service. Aeltester Friesen has presented the sermon and is coming to a close. Then he proceeds to present his "Kurze Ermahnung" or Brief Admonition. No doubt there were very few dry eyes in the assembly that morning by the time he had finished. Their beloved Aeltester and devoted leader was dying and saying his last farewell. Here follows the "Brief Admonition":

"A short Admonition from Aeltester Abraham Friesen to his beloved brothers and sisters; Yes, presented for his beloved Gemeinde and appended to a sermon shortly before his departure, as follows:

"I will then for this time make a short presentation for my listeners by way of closing, with the purpose of Godly salvation. And not in this alone. Rather everything which you have heard from me in the 23 years of my service has been done towards that end and has laid a good foundation in me for my hope: Looking forward in grace to my eminent departure to receive eternal life, for which I am longing with all my heart. Just like the beloved apostle Paul when he noted that he was about to present his sacrifice and that his departure from this world was near, he then openly confessed how he had previously conducted himself. He says, 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a Crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge out of grace, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.' 2 Timothy 4.

"I, insignificant mortal dust, have also had a longing within myself for this coming, and in accordance with my limited strength I have battled against sin and against my own lusts and carnal desires. In so far as I was able I have also worked to admonish and inspire my fellow man to that end. This I have done for the reason that I so dearly wanted to fight a good fight in order that I might also receive the victory of the soul, so that through grace I might ultimately be found worthy of eternal life.

"See now, my beloved. This has been my entire outlook during the term of my ministry. I hope that on the judgment day, my God will not accuse me of any legalism or self-righteousness during the period of my service. Of this I have already been accused far too much. I have felt in myself a great weakness, rashness, and shortcoming. In addition I have also felt a great lack of the wisdom required to teach a Gemeinde, and even far more so, to regulate a Gemeinde. So that you must ascribe everything which I, useless servant, have effected and accomplished to God and his grace and not to me.

"Nevertheless I would wish to leave this much with you prior to my departure, as a good remembrance and in the hope that there would still be someone who might be awakened and inspired to make their way towards the salvation of God: That for the little while which we still have left to live, we might walk on the narrow way with true diligence and good courage. Oh, and therefore I admonish you with the words of the Godly hero, Joshua, 'Take heed for your souls with the greatest of diligence, that you love the Lord your God'. Joshua 23, 11. Yes, exert yourself at all times that you remain in humility and learn to shun all pride. For one can readily perceive the tremendous might with which the way of pride and ruination attempts to enter man. If we wish to continue even somewhat in humility, we must be forceful to that end. For the Kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and those who do violence, take it by force. Matthew 11, 12.

"Not every one that saith unto me, 'Lord, Lord', shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my father which is in heaven. Matthew 7. Behold! For the Lord Jesus Christ has perfectly taught us the will of the Father through his words as well as by his example, and has said, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one cometh to the father but through me'. John 14.

"Oh do understand! He who would now be assured of entry into the kingdom of heaven should follow the teachings and example of Jesus, for he is the only way, and the truth and we must believe in his words. Jesus is also the life which must live in us, in the way in which Paul says, 'nevertheless, I live; yet not I but Christ liveth in me'. Galatians 2, 20. For that which I now live in the flesh, I live in the faith of the Son of God, who has loved me and who has sacrificed himself for me. Oh, what a sought for life such a one has, who in truth can also speak with Paul. For such is a righteous Christian being. Oh! This is my wish for my beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, that they would all live in Christ so that all of them could say together with Paul, 'for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain'. Oh, how blessed and above blessedness is such a one who with good confidence can see such gain in his death. Indeed, for such a one need have no fear of this mortal death, since death is only a secure entry unto rest.

"Oh, do see my most beloved! All the twenty-three years of my groaning, entreaties, searching, and yearning after the truth, have been directed to this end, namely, towards the goal of salvation: All of my reading in German and Dutch books, all of my translating, publishing, and bringing to the light. Together with all my good admonitions, through the spoken word as well as in writing, which are modelled on the word of God. I repeat, that all this has occurred for the end that no one would fail to heed the promise to enter into their rest, and that no one of us would come short of it. Hebrews 4.

"This I wish to leave behind for you, my beloved, as a friendly adieu and farewell. But I am not hereby declaring that I am dying right away, O indeed not! For the hour of death is hidden from us. But we do know very well that I will soon have finished my course, and that it is well to set the house in order before one dies. 2 Kings 20. The king Hezekiel, received fifteen years before his departure. I would do the same in so far as I can give expression to my spirit, to set in order the beloved Gemeinde which has been entrusted to me, while I still have a little strength left.

"I bid you once more, beloved brothers and sisters, that you would maintain a good watch over yourselves. And as I have said before, that you might heed your soul most diligently, so that you will love the Lord your God, with your whole heart. Also see to it that you remain steadfast in humility, flee away from all grandeur, and shun all evil pretence. Live peaceably and then the Lord of peace and love will be with you, and if he is with you then no one can do you harm.

"I must go the way of all flesh, just like all my fathers before me. Therefore do receive earnestly to your hearts the good which I have taught you. And at all times see to it that you live in such a way as you would have wished to live when you draw your last breath, so that you might also enter there with all the blessed. Where there will be the fullness of joy and beautiful love at his right hand eternally and for evermore. Amen."

"Abraham Friesen"<sup>14</sup>

The foregoing is a heartrending picture of a mighty man of God who inspired a courageous battle to remain true to the teachings of the gospel and steadfast in the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. As such Abraham Friesen is part of a heritage which all the descendants of the Russian Mennonites can claim as their own.

**Eine Kurze Beschreibung** is the name of the small booklet which contains the "Brief Admonition". This booklet was published in 1904, apparently by Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen who was

the Aeltester of the Nebraska Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde at the time and who was also a grandson of Aeltester Abraham Friesen. In the introduction to the writings published in *Eine Kurze Beschreibung* the publisher has added some comments and verses of scripture as a remembrance and tribute to this valiant warrior of the faith. This memorial is an appropriate parting testimony of Aeltester Abraham Friesen.

“With respect to his deep consciousness of sin, and how he found his way aright through the word of God and his gracious support, and how he took comfort and courage therefrom, and how according to the teachings of Jesus, he received peace unto his soul. Matthew 11, 28. And to which has been added a true teaching and admonition as to how necessary it is to be made free of worldly vanity and conformity with the world, while there is still grace.

“And secondly, a heartfelt and profound admonition to the Gemeinde, as a farewell and a friendly adieu, which he added at the close of a sermon: And which is very comforting and edifying to read. “See to it, therefore that you bring forth fruits meet for repentance. Matthew 3, 8. Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Matthew 11, 28. Ask, and it shall be given you, seek, and ye shall find, knock, and it shall be opened unto you. Matthew 7, 7. If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. Matthew 16, 24.

AMEN<sup>15</sup>

#### FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER FIFTEEN. ABRAHAM FRIESEN, EVANGELICAL MISSIONER

1. Benjamin H. Unruh, *op.cit.*, page 324 and 339.
2. Abraham L. Friesen, *Familienbuch*, Tiege, 1862, unpublished booklet. Courtesy of Herny Fast, Steinbach, Manitoba.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Aeltester Peter Toews, *Samlung*, *op.cit.*, pp. 38-39. See also Aeltester Abraham Friesen, *Eine Kurze Beschreibung* . . . ano 1820 (Druck von Paul Springer, Beatrice, Nebraska, 1904), pp. 3-9.
5. Aeltester Peter Toews, *Ibid* pp. 33-37.
6. *Ibid*, pp. 62-69.
- 6a. James Urry, *op.cit.*, page 196.
7. See “Evangelicalism and Radical Discipleship” by Wes Michealson, in *Evangelicalism and Anabaptism* (Herald Press, Scottdale PA 1979) edited by Norman Krause, at pages 63-84.
8. Aeltester Peter Toews, *Sammlung*, *op.cit.*, pp. 176-183.
9. *Ibid*, pp. 248-255, also published separately in 1845, as Abraham Friesen, *Einfache Erklarung* (Druck der Gerhardschen Offizin, Danzig), pp. 4-17.
10. The Luther Translation uses the word “Meide”.
11. Paul M. Lederach, *The Third Way* (Herald Press, Scottdale, PA, 1980) pp. 47-48 and page 136.
12. A. Friesen, *Einfache Erklarung*, *op.cit.*, page 32.
13. Aeltester Peter Toews, *op.cit.*, pp. 307-310.
14. It is interesting to note the parallels between “the closing admonition” of Aeltester Abraham Friesen and “the Valedictory Sermon” of John F. Funk (1835-1930). See H. Gates, et al., *Bless The Lord, O My Soul*, (Herald Press, Scottdale, Pa.; 1964), 239-247.
15. Aeltester Abraham Friesen, *Ein Kurze Beschreibung*, *op.cit.*, p 2. According to Aeltester Peter Toews, the *Kurze Ermahnung* of Aeltester Abraham Friesen had been recorded by his younger brother, the minister Klaas Friesen.

# Chapter Sixteen.

## The Golden Years, 1824-1849

### 16.00 Introduction.

This chapter will focus on the the golden years of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. In this work the term "golden years" is used to refer to a period of internal peace, balanced consolidation and steady growth. The era has been somewhat arbitrarily established as commencing in 1824. In this year the Kleine Gemeinde successfully withstood a second Grosze Gemeinde challenge to its very existence. The period comes to a close in 1849 with the death of Aeltester Abraham Friesen who in many ways is representative of this period.

This does not mean that the Kleine Gemeinde endeavour to follow the way of the cross came to an end in 1849 or that a radical change in its philosophy occurred in that year. In fact, many of the finest achievements of the Kleine Gemeinde took place after 1849 as the reader will see in chapter seventeen, "Books and Publications", and chapter eighteen, "Socio-economic Policy". At the same time it must be recognized that these developments had their roots in the solid theological teaching and practice which was established in the Kleine Gemeinde under the gifted and inspired leadership of founder Klaas Reimer, theologian Heinrich Balzer, and particularly Aeltester Abraham Friesen, who played a leading role throughout the entire period.

This consideration of the golden years of the Kleine Gemeinde will be based on a review of various documents written by Abraham Friesen. Therefore this chapter will not purport to be a concise statement and analysis of all important events and theological occurrences which affected the Kleine Gemeinde during the period. Instead the format will be that of a documentary history. The writings will be set out in chronological order so as to provide the reader with a better view of the unfolding of events over the quarter century under review. Brief comments and annotations have been added where necessary to explain the significance of a document or event. With the exception of the 1824 "Letter to Peter von Riesen" all the documents referred to are from the First Book of the *Sammlung . . . zur Historie der Kleinen Gemeinde der Mennoniten*, compiled by Aeltester Peter Toews in 1873.

### 16.01 Election Lists, 1801-1824.

In order to provide greater understanding of this period the record of the various ministerial elections of the Kleine Gemeinde will be inserted among the documents in the appropriate chronological sequence. The record of the ministerial elections held prior to 1824 are set out here so as to complete the record. Numerous versions of the 19th century Kleine Gemeinde election records are still extant today. It appears that during the 1860's many members of the Kleine Gemeinde made their own copies of the original records which were maintained by some of the earlier ministers, such as Klaas Friesen (1793-1870), later by Johan Dueck (1801-1866), and others. The *Wahl-Liste*<sup>1</sup> of Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen (1831-1917) of the Kleine Gemeinde in Nebraska is the source utilized for this chapter:

"**Election No. One:** The first election record is that of the election of Klaas Reimer as a minister of the Danzig Mennonite Gemeinde in Prussia. This election took place on February 1, 1801 at Neuhuben. The first vote was for two deacons: Gerhard Dueck 25 votes, Julius Wiens 3, Klaas Reimer 24, Klaas Enns 2, Heinrich Wiebe 5, Jacob Enns 1, Isaac Reger 2, Gerhard Doerksen 3, and Peter Wiens 1. On the same date a minister was elected from the two deacons: Gerhard Dueck 10 votes, Klaas Reimer 21.

"**Election No. Two:** In 1805 A.D. a minister by the name of Cornelius Janzen was elected in the Chortitzer colony. Cornelius Janzen was the minister who went out (from the Grosze Gemeinde) together with Klaas Reimer to found the Kleine Gemeinde. But in 1822 Janzen again went back to the Grosze Gemeinde. In the year of our Lord 1814, Klaas Reimer was elected as Aeltester through the casting of lots in the presence of H. Janzen, the Aeltester from Schoenwiese. Klaas Reimer died on December 25th, 1837.

"**Election No. Three:** In 1817 Abraham Friesen was elected as a deacon in the church at Orloff and in 1818 he came over to the Kleine Gemeinde.

"**Election No. Four:** On October 12th, 1823, a deacon and ministerial election was held in Orloff for the Kleine Gemeinde. The votes were as follows: Peter Rempel-Lichtfelde 1, Heinrich Wiebe-Orloff 15, Cornelius Sawatzky 1. On the same date a minister was elected from the two deacons, namely: Abraham Friesen and Heinrich Wiebe. All the votes fell on Abraham Friesen, namely 16.



“**Election No. Five:** Another deacon and ministerial election was held on January 13, 1824. For deacon: Cornelius Sawatzky 2, Klaas Friesen-Altonau 20, Peter Rempel-Lichtfelde 4, Johan Friesen-Orloff 1, Klaas Friesen-Lindenau 1, Peter Penner-Orloff 1. On the same date a minister was elected from the two deacons, namely: Heinrich Wiebe and Klaas Friesen. Klaas Friesen 10, and Heinrich Wiebe 15 votes.

“**Election No. Six:** Shortly thereafter a minister by the name of Heinrich Wiebe of Tiege from the Grosze Gemeinde came over to the Kleine Gemeinde. He died in 1838. In the meantime the other minister, Heinrich Wiebe, was removed from his ministerial office and rejoined the Grosze Gemeinde.”

## 16.02 A Letter to Peter Von Riesen, 1824.

The first document in this anthology is an epistle which Abraham Friesen wrote to Peter von Riesen in Prussia in 1824. This letter serves as an excellent introduction to the period under consideration. The reader will recall that Peter von Riesen was the oldest brother of Abraham Friesen. He was a prosperous merchant and miller in the City of Danzig and had decided not to move to Russia as did all his brethren. He certainly shared many of the theological convictions of his younger siblings. However such beliefs and theologies were subject to all the myriad influences of day to day life so that it was natural that changes would occur.

From the subject letter it can be seen that Peter von Riesen has been wooed by the teachings of pietism which had been rampant in Prussia during the two decades since his brothers had left the old homeland in 1804. In this epistle Abraham Friesen explains his views and beliefs with respect to a number of issues and concerns which his brother, Peter von Riesen has raised in a previous letter. The result is a priceless insight into the very inner soul of the Kleine Gemeinde in 1824. The letter serves as a report of the state of affairs of the Kleine Gemeinde as of 1824. Here follows “The Epistle to Peter von Reisen, resident in Schidlitz, a suburb of Danzig:”

Beloved Brother and Sister-in-law:

“Firstly I wish you the best of health and well-being. I also report to you that my wife and children are alive and well. Likewise our brothers and sisters and close friends, at least in so far as I am aware.

“On the 19th of June, old calendar, I received your letter of April 4th, 1824. From the same I have in part noted your temporal as well as spiritual situation and that you desire a clear and unsparring reply from me with respect to the same. For sometime I have had doubts in this regard as I, together with those entrusted to me, have much to do at all times in order that we might perceive and live out the will of the Lord.

“In addition it occurs to me that your views may be different from mine. Nevertheless your desire is that I write you in my simplicity and capability. 2 Thessalonians 3, 2. I am afraid that this may seem like foolishness to you as perhaps you believe something different and therefore will not recognize the spirit from or through which I speak. 1 Corinthians 2, 14.

“However, my siblings have encouraged me to write and I do so after all but only in the hope that you together with your wife will receive this from me in love: And that you will consider and judge everything with the Spirit and the Word of God. In addition I wish you and everyone who reads this insignificant writing or hears it read, that the eyes of the spirit may be opened unto you through Jesus, John 9, for without this all men are blind and remain in sin. If we confess our blindness then the Lord Jesus wishes to restore our sight, John 9, 39-40, which our loving Father desires for me and all mankind. Amen. Now my beloved brother. In accordance with my few talents I will give an answer to your writing as you have required from me. My writing will only be pursuant to my limited faith and knowledge which I have of the Word of the Lord in the spirit of the admonition of Peter. 1 Peter 3, 15.

“I will allow my first answer to deal with your last question. You ask if my views respecting the writings published by the Berliner Verein are not too strong? And you mention that in your last booklet you had found such fine teachings throughout. To this I would answer that I do not disparage any fine books and teachings provided that they speak of faith in Jesus or that they speak of the oracles of God as Peter teaches. 1 Peter 4, 11. But I find it hard to believe that the books from the Verein contain such teachings. We are very well aware that many of the books which they publish do not have the spirit of Christ and instead are of the world, Romans 8, 9, and John says they are of the world therefore they speak of the world and the world heareth them. 1 John 4, 5.

“Although they go out in the name of Christ, Matthew 24, 5, that is to say that they call themselves Christians, and call upon Christ for their salvation: At the same time they carry on bloody wars and judge and condemn each other according to their flesh. 2 Corinthians 10, 3. They also war with the weapons of the flesh such as imprisonment, beatings, fines and other similar loving punishments, 2 Corinthians 10, 3-7: They have also altered the baptism which Christ himself has commanded as a sign of his grace and as the covenant of the penitent who have faith, Matthew 28; 1 Peter 1, 20: Yes, those of the unperishable seed, namely, those who are born anew through the Word of God. 1 Peter 3, 21.

“But they baptize those who are unrepentant, that is to say, those who continue to live according to the flesh as before, those who live in great splendor and pride, which has never yet been pleasing

unto God, Judith 9, 11-13, and other similar things more, such as: the baptism of infants, the swearing of oaths, and the taking of revenge. All of which can be found among the Verein. This clearly demonstrates to us that they do not have the spirit of Christ and Paul says that he who does not have the spirit of Christ, he is none of his. Romans 8, 9.

"Now beloved brother, do reflect on these few remarks which I have so briefly presented to you. From where do all your fine books come? Are they not all composed by those to whom I have just referred? And now say for yourself, would you not invariably find the same among the Verein and among many who call themselves Christians? Make a comparison with the word of the Lord as to whether this is right or not right. John says that by so doing it will become manifest which are the children of God and which are the children of the devil. 1 John 3, 10. The spirit of God tells us that such things are wrong, i.e. Making war, taking revenge, repaying evil with evil, great luxury and pride, baptism of non-believers. We are not merely to purify ourselves from the same but are also to withdraw from such people so that we do not become partakers of their sins. Revelations 18, 4.

"Therefore we should not receive their 'fine' books, which they have filled with sweet words and magnificent speech, in order that we would not mislead the innocent hearts by so doing. Romans 16, 17-18. I may regard the matter somewhat sternly but even the preacher in Ecclesiastes has warned us to beware of foreign teachings, Ecclesiastes 12, 12, if they have not been written by those who are wise. Which is to say that they have not been inspired by the spirit of God. 2 Peter 1, 21. And Christ spoke saying: 'Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing'. Matthew 7, 15. That is to say, those who present themselves as the ministers of righteousness for by their fruits shall ye know them. 2 Corinthians 11, 15.

"Demonstrate to me the fruits which are known among the selfstyled (nominal) Christians and those who submit themselves to the Verein. Everywhere you will find worldly and fleshly pride and the fruits of the Spirit, which must be the signs of one who has been reborn, will not be anywhere to be found. Galatians 5, 22; Ephesians 5, 9. If there is anyone who has not yet allowed the truth of God to depart too far from his heart I hope that such a one will be able to decide for himself as to whether I think too harshly regarding the Verein and with respect to the fallen Mennonite world. Romans 1, 25. I bid that everyone who reads this would allow the spirit and word of God alone to decide and that they would surely not allow themselves to trust in man. For through the prophets the Lord says that such a one is accursed. Jeremiah 17, 5.

"Beloved brother. You also wish to know my opinion with respect to your disposing of everything there in order to move to Russia, or whether you should remain there. At the same time you mention that a man whom you regard as a believer has advised you against doing so and has said that you should not undertake such a serious work without having experienced an inward call from the Lord. You also state that apparently this is quite correct. At the same time you say that you and your wife are concerned that among all the dispersion there you might neglect the salvation of your souls.

"Ah, what should I say to this? Is the knocking on your heart not call enough? John says that 'if our heart condemn us not, then we have confidence towards God'. 1 John 3, 21. To this I will only add this much, namely that I have complete assurance that no further inward nor outward call will go out over us, other than the one which has already gone out over a fallen and sinful humanity, namely, Moses and the prophets, Luke 16, 29-31: Together with the gospel, rich in grace, which teaches us sufficiently against all the uprooting and dispersion of the world as we read in Luke 18, 18-20; Luke 21, 43; Romans 12, 16; 1 Timothy 6, 6-12 and in many other places more. In addition to this there is the conviction of our own conscience, which I regard as the leading of the Father that we should accept the call from the Lord. John 6, 44.

"Whether I advise you that you should dispose of everything there or that you should remain living there cannot really help for the salvation of your soul, if you are unable to decide the matter for yourself. Compare with Romans 14, 23. But do consider the counsel which the Savior gives. 'Sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and . . . come and follow me'. Luke 18, 22. I say, do consider this. How does this strike you? Would you also have to stand back sorrowfully with the wealthy young man? Or would you gladly be ready to sell everything, to give everything up and to leave everything, as we are taught by Christ and his word, and in their place to buy truth, wisdom, instruction, and understanding? Proverbs 23, 23. Prove yourselves in this and pray for power and succor from the Lord for Christ says to his disciples, 'Verily, Verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name he shall give it unto you. Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name.' John 16, 23-24.

"Beloved brother, I perceive that you have also understood that the Gemeinde here has divided into two parts. To this I must say yes. But not only into two for by now there are already three parts. Of these one party confesses war, worldly kingdoms, worldly authority, child baptism, great ostentatiousness and many other unchristlike things as being Christian. And these also openly submit themselves into spiritual associations with those who freely practice the same. This party is called the Verein.<sup>2</sup>

"The second party endorses all the foregoing with word and deed and also gathers contributions for the Verein so that I really cannot tell if there is very much difference in their faith. But they have occupied the offices which the Verein required of them and according to what is manifest they have separated themselves.<sup>3</sup>

"But the third party confesses that the kingdoms of the world, war, worldly authority, child

baptism, and pride, do not belong in the kingdom of Christ. Isaiah 2, 4; John 18, 36. For the Kingdom of Christ is a suffering Kingdom, which is only governed and maintained through the sword of the spirit and the splendor of its blessedness. Luke 22, 25; 2 Corinthians 10, 4, and as Paul teaches in Ephesians 6, verses 10-17. This is the little flock of which I, in my insignificance, am a servant (minister) and for which I have been called, even though unworthy.

"I can perceive from your writing that you are already aware of this in that you say that you find it very commendable that I belong to the small little flock (Kleine Herdchen). I interpret this as if you mean to endorse us with this. It would be desirable that you would say this out of a knowledge of the Word of God and that it would not merely be such an outwardly support. But from your writing I can only speculate. Not that I mean to counsel that you should come to Russia because of this, as if we are all of one mind here.

"I am afraid that we do not speak in one sense and spirit or as Paul speaks or teaches in one mind and spirit. Philippians 1, 27. But do not be surprised by what I am saying and do not be offended. For I say the truth in Christ and I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness . . . that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart . . . for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh. Romans 9, 1-2. Regrettably we cannot live in one spirit and one Gemeinde.

"Be that as it may, our joy would be very great if you my beloved brother, could first come to visit here with us. Then you could experience this for yourself and see how matters stand with your brothers and sisters. Not merely in the temporal but principally with respect to our spiritual conditions. I would hope that you would thereby be able to determine for yourself whether we are only brothers in the flesh or whether we are also spiritual brothers. You could then also determine how matters—unfortunately—stand with those of us who are already here in Russia. Then you would be able to make a better choice as to what decision you should make.

"I also perceive from your writing that without thinking anything of it you have given money to the Verein. Consequently your name has been printed in these books and thereby your alms have been published for all the world to see, including us here in Russia. O my beloved brother! Our Savior says that these have their reward in that they only do their alms so that they may have the glory of men. Therefore let us give our alms differently. Matthew 6, 2. Namely, let us give our alms in secret to the poor and above all to our own brethren in the faith, in accordance with the teachings of Paul, whereby our names will not be recorded and sounded out with a trumpet as the hypocrites gladly do. Rather that our entire joy would be in that, if only our names would be recorded in the book of heaven. Luke 10, 20.

"Now beloved brother, with these words you so doubtfully say: Perhaps it is not for a good purpose and perhaps this actually opposes our religion and the fundamentals of our faith. Beloved brother, would it not be better to refrain from making any more contributions? The purpose for which these alms are obtained is clear and manifest, that in part the world uses these alms in order to allow the word of God to be published, and spreads the same with the appearance of holiness, Matthew 11, 25. On the other hand much endeavour is directed towards higher schools in which a form of wisdom is being taught through which it is impossible to know God. 1 Corinthians 1, verses 19-21, 25 and 28; and 1 Corinthians 2, 4-8. Through such wisdom the plain truth is being darkened and confused. 2 Peter 2, 2: A similar end results from the related writings which one could say are going out through the world in great droves and announcing spectacular signs and wonders. Revelations 16, 14. Through their falsely glorified ingenuity these, namely this false Christendom, seek to deceive the very elect if it were possible. Matthew 24, 24. To God be our lament.

"By now there are many who are encompassed and misled so that they tolerate many ungodly ways within Christendom, and they also seek to defend the same. And even where there are still a number of ministers who do not yet wish to foster these teachings from the scripture, they fall silent against the same. Oh what false disciples! For Christ says that 'if these should hold their peace then the very rocks would have to cry out.' Luke 19, 40. And if one inquires of these for their foundation they respond with much abomination and many opinions. In addition to their own reason and opinions their reply also contains the truth

"Oh, what a great love of the world through which such things occur. After all Paul says there is only 'one faith and one baptism' which is right according to the word of God. Ephesians 4, 5. However, they say that in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him. As if they want to say that if only man confesses Christ with the mouth and calls him Lord and Master then he is acceptable to God, even if he does not do what Christ has commanded. Yes, they also say that it is best to remain with the faith in which one was born and raised for if one only fears God and worketh righteousness then he is acceptable to God. Behold, through this the words of Peter in the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 10, 35, are used as a cover to conceal the evil.

"Oh, what a great denial of the Holy Gospel of Jesus who will also deny such men before his Heavenly Father. Matthew 10, 33. I am afraid that such lack and denial of faith to a great extent comes through the wisdom of the learned ones who are able to clothe the abominations and manner of the Anti-Christ in magnificent words. Revelations Chapter 17, 4. And then they enter these words in their books as if in a golden beaker which they extend and pour out over all the world. Thereby they more and more implant war, revenge, baptism without faith, and great luxury, into the Kingdom of Christ where these instead should be rooted up. Matthew 15, 13.

"Beloved brother, take heed! All this must be considered as being Christian and must also be imparted to the Mennonites even though it is manifest that it is contrary to Christ and His teachings?

At the same time these are considered as being the good Christians and all those who witness against the same with their teachings, life, and walk, must be considered as being agitators, deceivers, disturbers of the peace, proponents of works-righteousness, stupid and evil. All of which my fellow brethren and I must hear frequently, and principally from among the Mennonites:

"I must also frequently hear that those who are openly living in a manner which is contrary to the Word of God are the good Christians and loving brethren and almost everyone is most accommodating and helpful to these. They gather and give contributions to these and send gifts one to another. Revelations 11, 10. All, in order that they can spread their deceiving books, for which they have stolen and mixed in the Word of God, throughout all the world. Zechariah 5, 3. To my knowledge an angel of the Lord has already spoken about such writings and the prophet Zechariah compared the same to 'a great flying letter, the length thereof is twenty cubits and the breadth thereof ten cubits'. And Zechariah says that 'this is the curse which goeth forth over the face of the whole earth according to which all the thieves and falseswearers will be deemed to be Godly'.

"We must understand that what is meant here by thieves and falseswearers are those, who without having the true faith in Christ and without having experienced the true conversion through His Holy Spirit to Christ, nevertheless call themselves Christians and consider themselves to be righteousness-working members of the Gemeinde of Christ. But they are not reborn through His spirit nor are they baptized upon their confession of faith, rather without faith during their childhood or as adults. John 3, 5. For Jesus says 'that he that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold,' that is to say, those who climb in some other way without the holy spirit and the baptism which Christ himself has commanded, is a thief and a murderer. John 10, 1: And Paul says 'that if any man have not of the spirit of Christ, he is none of his.' Romans 8, 9.

"Behold my beloved brother! These flying letters which include the tidings of the Kingdom of God—which name they unashamedly give to their deceiving message—together with the speeches of Stilling and Bengel and also hundreds of booklets, declare all those as being pious who Christ calls thieves and murderers.

"My beloved brother, do for once consider for yourself the purpose for which your alms are being received and as to whether I am regarding the writings emanating from the Berlin Verein too strictly. I hope that you will have faith as a grain of mustard seed for then you will cast off the doubts which stand before you as a mountain. Matthew 17, 20. I will not say that such alms to the Verein or Bible Society are completely contrary to our religion and fundamentals of our faith, but I will say that among the Mennonites much wood, hay and straw is built upon the same which is completely contrary to the true faith in Christ. I Corinthians 3, 12. For God says 'Come out from among them, and be ye separate my people and touch not the unclean thing and then I will receive you and will be your Father, and you shall be my sons and daughters. 2 Corinthians 6, 17-18.

"Behold my beloved brother. I consider this deceiving teaching, life, and practice which is being accepted in the entire world and among all confessions as being the falling away of which Paul speaks which will come before the coming of the Lord. 2 Thessalonians 2. For here Paul is not talking of the deception of the temporal as you state in your letter. O no! Instead this is to be understood as a reference to a spiritual falling away which will not only be revealed to the poor.

"Nevertheless, through the oppression of the rich the poor have accepted their call and therefore have had to fall into an apparent poverty: Because of which many a one can come upon evil thoughts. But the man of sin and the child of perdition of which Paul everywhere speaks is more situated among the wealthy and great in this world than among the poor. Revelations 13, 13-14. For Christ says that the abomination shall come to sit in the Holy places. Matthew 24, 15. The one who is opposed will exalt himself over everything which is called God or the service of God, 2 Thessalonians 2, 4, so that it comes to stand in the Temple of God, which means in the Gemeinde of God, and with regards to which the poor frequently have little to say.

"Rather the rich seat themselves therein with great majesty like the woman who was adorned with scarlet and the color of roses, Revelations 17, 4; And they speak great swelling words which have no substance and they promise liberty while they themselves are the servants of corruption. 2 Peter 2, 18-19. They baptize those who are unrepentant and without faith and receive them into the church. In addition, they ban and also receive back into the fold without the righteousness-working fruits of repentance, as if the forgiveness of sins was by virtue of their ban. Whoever has the spirit of Christ can decide for himself as to whether what I have written is the truth or not and as to whether this has not been set in the holy places as a God as Paul says. 2 Thessalonians 2, 4.

"Now, my beloved brother. Here you have my opinion and my grounds with respect to that which many so-called Christians in good faith accept and propagate as the gospel. Should your faith also be with the great multitude and be contrary to my faith and that of the small flock, as I still presume from your epistle, then I know that my writing will also seem all too stern for you. Indeed those who walk the wide road freely say to us in this respect that we should not judge that we be not judged. Matthew 7, 1.

"If this is also how these matters appear to you then I want to beseech you: That you would at least venture enough for your soul that you would look up all the scripture references which are noted in the margins and elsewhere and take the same into your deliberation. I hope that as a consequence everyone who still wishes to receive the grace of God and the love of Christ will perceive whether my speech is from God or whether I speak of myself. John 7, 17. For I say with the Apostle that, 'I will not dare to speak any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me.' Romans

15, 18. Christ also says, 'that it is not ye that speak, but the spirit of your father which speaketh in you.' Matthew 10, 20.

"But we must realize that there are two kinds of children on earth, namely, the children of God and the children of the devil, 1 John 3, 10. To which our beloved Lord Jesus himself gave testimony and said to the scoffers 'Ye are of your father the devil,' John 3, 33, therefore every child or generation will do according to the spirit of its father. In this we are not merely to trust in man, Jeremiah 17, 5, nor to believe in every spirit. 1 John 4, 1. But we are to try the spirits.

"Therefore I bid that you also prove this my speech as to whether or not it corresponds with the words of Christ. If this is how the same is found to be, which I hope and am well assured through the grace of God to be the case, then it is not I which judgeth rather the words spoken by Christ, John 8, 47-48, who has commanded his followers to speak in the light and to preach upon the housetops. Matthew 10, 27. Behold, for it is the word which judgeth. Consequently it is a very small thing for me that I am so judged and condemned by the judgment of men. 1 Corinthians 4, 3.

"Now, my beloved brother. I bid that you do receive this insignificant writing from me in love. For it has been written by me, unworthy one, out of love and concern for the salvation of your soul. At the same time this is also written in fear, although not in fear of the world, but out of the fear of God before whom I must at all times work out my salvation with fear and trembling. Philippians 2, 12. In addition, God has regarded me as a witness of His word. He has placed me, most unworthy one, at a very crucial battlement on the walls of Zion where I must battle not only against the manifest world but also against my former fellow brethren, who according to the spirit have become our enemies. Matthew 10, 36. I also know that this my writing points towards most of our—or the—Mennonite Gemeinden for they are completely fallen and no longer give much heed to the wholesome teachings.

"Together with a heartfelt greeting from us all, I subscribe hereto. From your beloved brother.

"P.S. If you have opportunity then write soon. It is very expensive by post."

Orloff, October 25th, 1824

"Abraham Friesen"

"N.B. I must also relate to you of a lamentable affair. As I have heard a young female has yesterday been sent out of the Mennoniten Gemeinden to Siberia because of adultery. Christ has come into the world to save the sinner but we condemn them. Christ is come to give life and we contribute unto the death. Review the Book of Wisdom, Chapter 2, verse 23-25."<sup>4</sup>

### 16.03 A Petition For Michael Makowski, 1827.

One of the major concerns of the leaders of the reform movement which led to the founding of the Kleine Gemeinde in 1812, was the official use of force to discipline those who were disobedient in spiritual as well as in civil matters. It was very clear to them that the use of physical force for any purpose was directly contrary to the teachings of the gospel. To the Kleine Gemeinde such a policy symbolized a general abandonment of evangelical faith among the Molotschna Mennonites.

In his *Sammlung . . . zur Historie der Kleinen Gemeinde der Mennoniten*, Aeltester Peter Toews has preserved record of one such incident from 1827. The matter in question involved a Catholic man by the name of Michael Makowski and his family, which included three children. Makowski had left the Catholic Church and had been baptized by Aeltester Klaas Reimer and had become a member of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. Aeltester Peter Toews has noted that according to a letter by Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) of 1825, it appeared that Makowski and his wife were being detained under arrest in Ekatherinoslaw but they were not physically imprisoned. Toews goes on to clarify that it is uncertain whether this imprisonment is because of their baptism or whether this imprisonment is for some other reason. But he concludes that "it was sufficient to say that the Makowski family was suffering tribulation for the sake of their Savior."

The Molotschna Mennonite Gebietsamt had authority to see to the release of the Makowski family if they so desired. In 1827 the ministerial of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde submitted a petition to the Gebietsamt interceding for the plight of Makowski and his family and undertaking to see to their needs. It appears that they are seeking to have the family released into their care and custody. From a later letter of Abraham Friesen it is evident that this Kleine Gemeinde effort was more successful than the previous "Petition for Anna Thiessen." Makowski was eventually released and came to reside in the Molotschna Mennonite colony. However, this release did not occur before one of the Makowski children had died in prison. In this case the ministerial of the Kleine Gemeinde refers to the words of the Savior, "whosoever shall give to drink to one of these little ones a cup of cold water . . . etc."

The petition also refers to the restrictions which the Mennonite Gemeinden continued to impose against the members of the Kleine Gemeinde in that they were unable to purchase additional land in the colony. Aeltester Peter Toews has noted in the *Sammlung* that it was Johann Cornies who finally required that the other Mennonite Gemeinden in the Molotschna revoke this restriction. Here follows the text of the "Petition for Michael Makowski".

“To the Gebietsamt in Halbstaedt:

“Pursuant to a writing of the Ekatherinoslawschen Kontor, which was presented to us on behalf of the Gebietsamt; which stipulated that the foreigner Michael Makowski who has become converted to the Mennonite confession of faith, was required to make a choice respecting his life's situation. In response to the same we hereby advise the Gebietsamt that the said Makowski elects no other circumstance but to live in the Mennonite colony in the Molotschna together with his brethren in the faith.

“We the undersigned hereby wish to earnestly petition the Gebietsamt: That for the purpose of receiving the said Michael Makowski, together with his wife and three children (the fourth child has died on the 14th of February), we will render support and undertake all their obligations. At the present time it is almost impossible for him to travel all the way here together with his family. We believe that the sponsoring of this family is a matter of great concern to the Gebietsamt and therefore we hope that you will allow this to be sufficient for this purpose. Not alone for the reason that you have pity for the poor and abandoned families, for you yourselves also know very well what the Savior has commanded; ‘That whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water’. Matthew 10, 42. How much more will this not hold true if you shall look to their well being as well as ours.

“Secondly, it is also our plea to the Gebietsamt as well as to the ministerial: Could you not come to a decision to tolerate our Gemeinde in our faith, even if it was only as the most lowly ones in the colony? So that you would treat us fairly where we live and also if anyone of us should purchase additional property? For we do not doubt that there will still be many among you who will recall how in Prussia all of us were restricted in this manner so that we could not purchase any piece of property without surrendering our freedom of faith.

“Therefore we plead and hope that in as much as you have also experienced this yourselves, that you would not wish to impose this on anyone else, for the commandment says: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’. We also believe that we have not done any wrong to you nor will we do so in the future. This is the case even though we hold ourselves back from partaking in public offices and do not take part in any physical punishment. Notwithstanding these impositions, everyone among us shall be your loyal subjects as the apostle Paul teaches in Romans 13, 1. For we confess with the beloved apostle that there is no authority but of God. Where a government exists it is ordained from God and therefore we definitely believe that the Lord has given you the authority and the power of the Almighty over us.

“But the Lord will also ask and inquire into your governing for you are the authorities of his Kingdom, Wisdom of Solomon 6, 4-5, in order to punish the evil doers and to praise the pious. 1 Peter 2 up to 14, and Romans 13, 3. Therefore we bid of you, do treat us and also those who come to join us in our faith, as the most insignificant under your protection. But only for so long as we strive to live according to the teachings of the Lord and his apostles.

“We promise you that we, together with all those who unite themselves with us in our faith, wish to conduct ourselves towards you and all other authority in submissiveness and obedience as we are taught by Paul and Peter, Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2 and 3, in so far as we are not required to overstep the commandments of Christ. Yes, we will gladly pay our taxes and fulfill our other obligations in the manner which Paul speaks when he says ‘For this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing’. Romans 13

“Otherwise we submit our plea that you consider our petition in the manner of love, as to whether we have been detrimental or harmful to anyone, and that you treat us with the compassion and love which God has also imparted to you.”

“Michael Makowski, Aeltester Klaas Reimer, Minister Abraham Friesen and deacon Klaas Friesen.”<sup>5</sup>

#### 16.04 A Letter to Jakob Klassen, Krongarten, 1831.

The incidents involving Franz Thiessen and Michael Makowski were not isolated episodes. This is illustrated by a letter written by Abraham Friesen in 1831. This letter was written to Jakob Klassen and family in Krongarten. Krongarten was one of the two villages of the Frisian Mennonite Gemeinde in the Chortitz or Old colony. It is interesting to note that a good relationship seems to exist between the Old Colony Frisians and the Kleine Gemeinde even though almost twenty years have already flown by since the Frisian Minister, Peter Hildebrand, had contacted the Kleine Gemeinde in 1812. This friendship underlines the many continuing similarities between the two Gemeinden.

Aeltester Peter Toews has noted that he included this letter in his *Sammlung* in order that the reader might be able to understand why the words of the Revelation of St. John, 18, 4-5, had become so meaningful to many in the Molotschna: “Come out of her my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not her plagues. For her sins have reached unto Heaven, and God

hath remembered her iniquities.”<sup>6</sup> In this letter Aeltester Friesen relates to his friend Klassen that on the previous Sunday he had seen two wagons driving by and that sitting in each wagon was a prisoner with his hands tied behind his back. The reader might note the poignant question with which Aeltester Friesen closes this letter, namely, “Where have you ever read this of Jesus, in whose footsteps the Mennonites have covenanted on bended knee to follow?”

This letter provides a first-hand update with respect to spiritual conditions in the Molotschna in 1831. Regrettably there seems to have been little improvement since the time of the founding of the Kleine Gemeinde two decades earlier. Here follows the “letter to Kronsgarten.”

“Beloved Friends:

“As friend Giesbrecht has provided me with an opportunity I cannot omit to write a few lines to you. May these words find you in good health. With respect to ourselves I might say that we are currently quite well, although my wife and children have been somewhat sickly since the harvest. Brother-in-law Klaas Reimer, in Petershagen has been very sick, but has become well again so that we are hoping, if it is the will of the Lord, that he will serve us with the communion of the Savior on this coming Sunday.

“Much beloved friends, J. Klassens. In your letter you state that I write you far too little. But what is the reason for this deficiency? Nothing other but that we perceive that pure unbelief, unrighteousness, and the like are taking the upper hand all around us. And as I wish to write something to you today I must raise my voice in lament with the poet in No. 403 and say:

Ach Gott tu dich erbarmen,  
Durch Christum, deinen Sohn,  
Ueber Reich und ueber Armen,  
Hilf dass wir Busse tun.  
Und sich ein jeder erkennen tut,  
Ich Fuercht Gott hat gebunden ein Rut,  
Er will uns damit strafen,  
Den Hirten und den Schaffen.  
Es wird ihm keiner enlaufen, etc. . .

“For the overly excessive pride is still increasing from day to day in the churches. Guzzling, singing, sport (games) at banquets, and fighting in the public houses in almost everywhere. Comedian plays have also become acceptable in our colonies. The taking of prisoners remains permissible so that one can truly say that there has been nothing more wicked since the beginning of the world, and so on.

Wer kann alles ermassen,  
Was treibt die Welt mit Macht,  
Mit ihrem Saufen und Freszen,  
Hochmut und grosze Pracht.

“In the face of all this the Aeltesten and ministers remain silent, until now and again a good hearted brother can no longer tolerate this lamentable situation and then takes the matter to heart with the ministerial. Whereupon they apparently also promise an improvement and better regulations to such a one but they allow matters to remain as they are, namely, all the guzzling, fighting, taking of prisoners, and the great excessive ostentation.

“Nevertheless our fundamentally benevolent God does not gladly wish to depart from us. He allows great signs and wonders to be seen, in order that mankind might still take the matter to heart. A lad was born in Muntau, although prematurely, whose configuration and physical members are to have been very frightful to behold. This is being kept very quiet and denied. However, the grandmother, midwife, herself is to have said that this constituted a sign and demonstration of the great pride (display) around us. The large growth of flesh on the head as being what the men and women are making out of their hair today; that the large thick armlets were like plaited frills, and on the back a symbol of a buckle. This little child is to have had other deformities as well, which can only be taken to demonstrate the great displeasure of God in the fact that the Mennonites, the chosen people, are conforming themselves so very completely to the world in stylishness and excessive extravagance (pride).

“A young man in Fischau has hung himself.<sup>8</sup> According to the testimony of his fellow brethren he had previously lived a very licentious and sinful life. This had not been done in secret so that the matter had also been brought before the ministerial but the ministerial allowed the matter to continue in this superficial manner. But now the very own conscience of this man became awakened so that he confessed his sins. Consequently they placed him under the ban whereupon he fell into doubting and hung himself during the night. Before he hung himself he had written on the table with caulk, the following words: ‘I will no longer deliver myself to the great heathen harbour (fellowship), and my wife and her relatives will not dispose themselves to the Kleine Gemeinde (small assembly) of God’.

“Alas! Would that the people might truly give thought with respect to such terrible occurrences. They should not think that of all the people resident in the Molotschna these alone have sinned. Indeed not! For in Luke 13 our Savior says that, ‘except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish’. But alas! Where do we find repentance among the people? Everyone lives gaily in their own pleasure as if matters with us were well, in peace and as if there was no danger. Should anyone among the

people be concerned as to how all this will come out in the end, such a one is calmed with magnificent words: That they should only remain in their fellowship, as Paul describes the situation in Romans 16, 17-18.

"In my writing I have referred to fighting and the transporting of prisoners which is not a figment of my imagination. With my own eyes I saw two wagons driving by on the preceding Sunday and seated on each wagon was a prisoner with his hands tied behind his back. Tell me my beloved! Where have you ever read this of Jesus, in whose footsteps the Mennonites have covenanted to follow on bended knee? Or where have you read that any apostle or true believer has ever done such a thing. And yet those who still want to be called nonresistant Christians are so inclined. Beloved brother, 'Be not deceived', writes Paul, 'God is not mocked'.

"I have made reference to fighting. My own son has seen how someone fought with a colonist so that he bled very heavily because of this. This did not occur in a concealed manner, rather in the house of a brother who himself was a distributor of the brandy. Jesus said that 'wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together'. Matthew 24. One never hears that the Aeltesten and ministers carry any remorse with respect to any of these, and that they put the same away from themselves in accordance with the teachings of Paul. 1 Corinthians 5.

"Therefore it should be our heartfelt wish that everyone who still seeks to save their soul might give heed as to where these matters are going. And that each and everyone for themselves would follow the word of God as can be read in Romans 16, 17; 2 Corinthians 6, 17; and Revelations 18.

I must close with the poet and say,

Was erlebt man schoeode Zeiten,  
Wer kann ohne Trauern sein, denn Verderben dringt herein.  
Was man von den Christen Leuten,  
ihren Namen ruehmlich spricht,  
Zeigen ihre Werke nicht."

"Orloff 1831

"Abraham Friesen"

### 16.05 Correspondence Regarding the Menno Simon's Books 1835-1836.

In 1834 Peter von Riesen completed the Dutch to German translation of the Menno Simons **Foundation** book. The work was then published by Peter von Riesen and the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. In 1835 the entire stock of these books was impounded by the Mennonite church in Prussia, ostensibly under the pretext that the circulation of these books might stir up the hostility of other religious confessions. The significance of this publication and the confiscation of the same will be considered at greater length in Chapter Seventeen. The documents pertaining to this event indicate that Peter von Riesen is in full spiritual agreement with his brethren in the Kleine Gemeinde in this matter. (Compare with Section 11.10 and 16.02). Here follows a series of five documents<sup>9</sup> which contain the account of this historic occurrence:

—ONE—

#### Extract from a Letter of Peter von Riesen to his brother in Russia.

"I have had a hard temptation and struggle because of the Menno Simons books. My wife and I have truly been concerned in this regard.

"We are still very concerned as to whether we have done right by surrendering up these books so obligingly. Was this really the will of the Lord or should I have allowed matters to progress to the point that I was threatened in case I did not do so. But there were others to consider besides myself. The consequences for the printer of this work would have been very severe on this account. We considered this at great length and in September we decided to submit ourselves to this, except for the third part, which belongs to the other two volumes which have already come to Russia, I have retained these copies (the third volume) with us here and express the wish that the same be picked up from here as soon as possible.

"There have been four large conferences and I was summoned for the beginning of the second one. But the matter did not remain at this. Instead, I was required through a writing to submit a written declaration, both of which documents are attached hereto. I subsequently also gave my written consent to the delivery of the books. But this was not enough, for then I was summoned to a large conference in Orloff. I don't really know why. I think that perhaps some individuals wanted to meet me personally. Now, after all of this, it was decided that we should submit the work to the censor which was somewhat difficult for our nature. We considered the matter in a loving manner, that this was all the work of God, and that we were his humble instruments for his purpose. The fact that this is also what we have experienced has served to strengthen us. For when the printer went to see the censor together with the original copy of the book, the gentleman immediately asked if the printing would not be too expensive for us. After satisfying himself in this regard the printer returned to the censor who then asked, who would correct (edit) the proofs. To this the printer replied that he had undertaken to do so. 'Now' said the censor 'then you must make sure that you do not change anything, in order that this venerable work does not lose any of its value'.

"After the first volume had been approved by the censor, I had occasion to drive by the home of Ohm Regier with the censored work. When I did not find him at home, I left the book there in the belief that the attitude of the Mennonite ministers would soften somewhat. This was not to be



the case, for they continued in their view that these books should not be read in Prussia, for they said, 'If these books become widely available for the reading of the Mennonites, they will also find their way among other religious confessions, who will thereby acquire a hatred of the Mennonites'. To this I answered him that it would be far more helpful if only the Mennonites did not seek to make themselves the equal of the others to such a degree, in pride as well as in other aspects of their lives and composure, for then everyone could read these books and judge themselves according to the same.

"My humble presentation did not avail for this time. Nevertheless there are many who would gladly have these books. But at the present time no one is really prepared to step forward and confess this to the gentlemen. In fact, almost everyone at the large conference stated that the books were good and that it was very much to be desired that they would be read by the pious minded. But the matter remained at this, since there were also many who were frivolous, and who wanted to misuse the issue and therefore preferred to seize the books. Here follows the letter from the ministers and then my answer:'

—TWO—

**A Resolution directed to Peter von Riesen in Schidlitz near Danzig, Prussia, subscribed to by Twenty-nine Mennonite Aeltesten, Ministers and Leaders.**

"The undersigned are assembled today in order to give consideration to the books which have been printed by Peter von Riesen. They find themselves compelled to give notice of the following: Firstly, the said Peter von Riesen is hereby instructed to obligate himself with his own signature for his lifetime, that he will obtain all copies of said book which have already gone into circulation and that he deliver these copies to a location which is to be determined. In the meantime an investigation is taking place as to whether a number of references in said book may be prejudicial to all the Mennonite Gemeinden because they affect the love towards other religious confessions. In fact the entire writings of Menno Simons might thereby lose in value.

"Secondly: That the printing of the continuation of the same, which has already been commenced, be completely halted. In the case of refusal, the undersigned will be forced to proceed to the measure of submitting the entire matter to the higher government authorities, although they would only do so unwillingly. And in this event Peter von Riesen would have to take full responsibility upon himself for all the unpleasant consequences which might evolve therefrom. We shall expect a definitive declaration in this regard prior to the expiration of this month, in order that further measures can be taken.

"Decided at Marienburg on August 10th, 1835. The original of this Resolution was signed by 29 Aeltesten and ministers."

—THREE—

**Letter of Reply from Peter von Riesen to the Aeltesten and Ministers.**

"From a writing which has come to me and which has been subscribed to by many Aeltesten, ministers, and a number of representatives, I can perceive that the same have taken offense at the Menno Simons **Foundation Book** which was submitted for printing by me and which has already been completed. Although the greatest part of these books are intended for Russia, they have taken offense because of these books and in consequence they wish that all these printed writings be confiscated and delivered up to a predetermined location. Firstly, with respect to the impounding of these books, I can say that I have attended to the same, except for a number of copies which I believe to be in good hands and for which I enclose a list of the same. Secondly, with respect to the printing. The same has been halted and no more will be printed except with the prior knowledge of a number of the Aeltesten of the Gemeinden here, in case I receive further orders from Russia. Regarding the first matter, with the respect to the surrender of the M.S. books, I hereby obligate myself to deliver the remainder of the same to the Honourable Aeltester Peter Regier in Tiegenhagen, where they are to be stored. I will attend to this during the month of September except only for the copies which have gone to Russia and except for a number of copies which I wish to retain for myself and my children."

Schidlitz, August 24th, 1835

"Peter von Riesen".

—FOUR—

**Petition by Peter von Riesen to the undersigned Aeltesten, Ministers and Representatives.**

"I must add a heartfelt petition to the writing submitted to the undersigned Aeltesten, ministers and representatives by myself: That each of them might allow to be bound a copy of the M.S. writings which have been surrendered into protective custody. And that each of them would read through this worthy **Foundation** book given out by our predecessor Menno Simons once or twice with deep concentration. I am convinced that if you are otherwise honestly seeking to advance the well-being of the souls of your Gemeinden, that you will find that the writings which have been taken into custody are in fact very useful, and that you will gladly allow the same to come unto all God-seeking souls. For my wife and myself know the comfort which these writings can afford and the blessings which can be received from the same by someone who is seeking the right way. Indeed, the printer of this work, even though he is not of our religion, stated that these books have given him great benefit, for example, regarding the communion service and also in many other matters more."

February 28, 1836

"P. von Riesen"

**An Extract from a Letter of Reply of Abraham Friesen to Peter von Riesen.**

‘It is a most sorrowful and lamentable situation when twenty-nine Aeltesten and ministers are united and come to an agreement that they will not allow the Menno Simons writings to come to light. One could well ask these gentlemen. Why? Do they want to hide the candle which has been lit under a bushel? Alas. If only they would take to heart the sayings of Christ in Matthew 5, 13-15. Then they would take heed and cry out in pain that they had done such foolishness. What really are the thoughts of these good men in this matter? Menno was not afraid of tyranny and persecution, nor oppression, opposition, nor hatred and poverty. Instead, he demonstrated his foundation and faith before all people through this book and thereby confessed the Lord Jesus Christ before men in accordance with Matthew 10, 31-39.

‘These fine Aeltesten and ministers have no reasonable grounds for their fears, for the hearts of rulers with respect to matters of conscience are so completely inclined in favour of freedom, and they govern over all pious people with great indulgence. Indeed, not only do they tolerate the practice of the faith and fundamentals, they occasionally also direct us back to the same. I perceive from your writing that even the censor had wished that this book would not lose any of its value. By comparison the Aeltesten and ministers, who should be united in favour of this work, assert a great danger and fear the hatred of other religious confessions.

‘Alas, I fear whether or not another circumstance has not inspired a hatred within their own conscience since the teachings of Menno Simons so severely punish the contemporary Mennonite world and the ministerial in particular. Perhaps they feel severely punished and shamed by him and therefore they would far rather prefer that these writings would not become known in their Gemeinden. The Aeltesten Jakob Warkentin here (in Russia) also expressed his dissatisfaction regarding the Menno Simons books in the presence of four other Aeltesten at the home of Klaas Reimer. He went on to say that he had never read these books and that he would also make sure that he did not do so in the future. Nothing was said to him in this regard, and yet when he referred to the fear which had been asserted in Prussia, the Aeltester Wilhelm Lange from Gnadenfeld answered very wisely and said: That while he was still resident in the vicinity of Berlin in Prussia, a privy councillor from the Court of the King had instructed that he be summoned there. Here the privy councillor had advised him that a volume of the writings of Menno Simons had come to his hands and that he had read the same in great wonderment and that he had never believed that Menno Simons had set forth such a sound teaching. The privy councillor had gone on to say that, Lange should make the work known among his Gemeinde because he believed many Mennonites were no longer acquainted with this writing. This punished the conscience of Ohm Warkentin somewhat so that he fell silent at this. But few or perhaps even none of these books have sold ever since the writing from the Honourable Aeltester Abraham Regier became known and since Aeltester Warkentin made manifest his approval of the same (forbidding the sale of the M.S. books).

‘From your writing I also perceive the concern of you and your wife as to whether you have done the right thing in so freely giving up the books. I believe that you may console yourself in this, for man cannot know what the Lord may still wish to accomplish through this. It is even possible that a renewal may be brought about among the people. It becomes evident through all of this how far the ministers have already departed from the true faith and that the salt of the earth has lost its flavour. The teachings of truth can be compared with a leaven, which a woman takes and mixes with three measures of flour until it has all been leavened. Matthew 13, 33. In like manner the teachings of Menno Simons can also become effective even though these books have been put under lock and key.

‘It is my heartfelt wish that the beloved Aeltesten would thereby be set on fire together with all those who can be understood as being part of the three measures of flour, or together with those who belong to the heavenly kingdom. I am fearful for the beloved Aeltesten and ministers in Prussia together with their Gemeinden which may also include the innocent, that their nonresistant Christianity has come to a complete end. They have become so fainthearted that they are afraid to allow the teachings of Menno Simons to come to the light. He asserted the doctrines of the nonresistant Christians so simply and expounded the power of God’s word so clearly. But how will they subsist when they themselves are to defend these teachings. From this sedition against the writings of Menno Simons it is clearly to be discerned that they have been overcome in this. A prominent privy councillor had wished that the Mennonites would become familiar with the fundamentals of their faith through Menno Simons. Instead, their ministers seize these writings and take them into confinement as if a horror was to be found in them, if only they are able to continue with the new teachings. So that one has good reason to lament with the prophet and say: ‘O my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths’. Isaiah 3, 12.

‘It was with great wonderment that I read two letters from the Honourable David Epp in Heuboden to Heinrich Balzer at his home in Tiede. Epp clearly and plainly expresses himself in these letters that he rejects the faith of the first nonresistant Christians. He also remembers me in these letters and especially the writing which I wrote to you some ten or twelve years ago. He is hardly able to paint my weak teaching and faith frightfully enough, and in closing he adds that he believes that there could not be another misled person like me in the Kleinen Gemeinde. He then also stated that he would be glad to forward several hundred tracts to Russia if only this would release me from my delusions.

“Oh, but if this fine gentleman could only realize for himself, he would have to be ashamed that he has over extended himself so far. If he would study the matter in the books of the ancient nonresistant Christians, for example in the large **Martyr Book**, Part One, page 104, and Part Two, page 338, 609, and 704 and other similar references, also the 27th Article in Part One, then he would have to be convinced that he was not rejecting my teaching but instead he is rejecting the foundations of the martyrs.

“The beloved gentlemen has not offended me. It is a small thing for me to be judged among men in this manner. I know very well myself that I am a sinful and imperfect person and also prone to error and mistakes. But we have such a fellowship of witnesses about us here and therefore I will hold fast to our faith through the grace of God and not waver. I will allow to be sufficient for me the grace of God which is powerful in the weak. Amen.

“In addition I extend a greeting to everyone from myself and my wife. We jointly commit all of you to the grace of God.”  
Orloff, May 18th, 1836

“Abraham Friesen”.

## 16.06 An Epistle to Klaas Friesen of Lindenau, 1836.

Klaas Friesen of Lindenau was one of the leaders of the pietist humility movement which almost devastated the Kleine Gemeinde shortly after its organization. It appears that Klaas Friesen had never quite been able to completely renounce his false humility and works-righteousness. The purpose of this epistle is to draw to his attention the error of his ways. It is evident that the Gemeinde which was seriously striving to practice the teachings of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith would always find it necessary to wage an earnest battle to maintain a true balance between the evils of works-righteousness on the one hand and “cheap grace” on the other. The 1836 “Epistle to Klaas Friesen of Lindenau” represents an earnest evangelical offensive against the oppressive spirit of works-righteousness:

“Pursuant to our (Abraham Friesen and Klaas Reimer) visit at your home yesterday where we discussed a good many matters with respect to what binds you and imprisons you so firmly that you are unable to live in one spirit and mind with the Gemeinde. Quite to the contrary it seems as if you are unable to control yourself as you are bound far too strongly to your own righteousness. Nevertheless we would also seek to inspire you with this writing, and thereby to help you if possible. Acts 2, 40.

“‘For I say unto you’, says Christ, ‘that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven’. But I doubt that your righteousness will be better. Notwithstanding that it appears to be very holy, it is truly not better. For in almost every aspect your righteousness exceeds the word of God, if one probes the matter intelligently.

“But alas, for if it is not better, you will not enter into the kingdom of God. Oh, but for what then have you prepared yourself with your righteousness? Nothing else, ‘But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.’ Hebrews 10, 27. Oh, but do free yourself from this, and allow yourself to be helped! You yourself know that you have only so little time left. I bid you to give thought to how you have been contrary to the Gemeinde almost from the very beginning and to how you have instigated much in the Gemeinde which was not in agreement with the holy scripture. For the contrary ones have this expectation. Hebrews 10.

“Alas, how is it even possible that you are unable to perceive that you are totally and completely wrong? Nothing else than your own self-righteousness still continues to blind your spiritual eyes. For even though you do not believe what we are saying, you proceed to ground yourself even further on unscriptural ordinances. This is also how it was in the beginning when you raised yourself up against the ministerial, and this is also how matters have continued until this very hour. So that experience together with the holy word of God, sufficiently teaches and convinces all understanding and God fearing persons with respect to the nature of the spirit which you have allowed to inspire you, and which still motivates you.

“I ask you? What kind of a spirit was it which so inspired you and a number of others with you, that Klaas Reimer was to be cast out of his office? Say for yourself! Was it God or was it the devil? I recognized the spirit as being the devil who had also sorely tempted me at the time. For God made him (the spirit) manifest to me as he wanted to institute matters which neither the Lord Jesus nor his disciples had taught. And as almost all of the zealous opponents of Klaas Reimer wanted to cast him down, they came into great shame. For God allowed them to carry on as the raging waves of the sea so that they had to foam out their own shame in accordance with Judas verse 13.

“Behold! And you were one of the foremost among these zealots. And as you yourself confessed to us yesterday, you became one of those in this error. Yet you continue to take the chance of grounding yourself on your own righteousness and wisdom as was the case then. This time you seek to master the ministerial and the Gemeinde in certain matters just as if the Gemeinde was in some way entrusted to you. Oh! How can you continue to be so elevated in your own mind and attribute so much to yourself, even though nothing has been entrusted to you. Yes, so that you desire to see things in the Gemeinde exactly in accordance with your judgment.

“Oh! Such a view is not even given out by any Aeltester or minister as long as they humbly seek to serve God according to his word and to truly represent his Gemeinde. Much less so by anyone

who has already once been so frightfully deceived by Satan. Oh, I bid you, for once do renounce and desist from such a strict mind, as if your righteousness was better than that of the scribes and pharisees for otherwise you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Desist from reviling and blaming us, and do believe that should we be standing before God as we were before you, it would have been but a little thing for God to have allowed us to have come to naught a long time ago. Acts 5, 38. And do consider that after all, God hath chosen the ignoble and the disparaged ones, and that he maintains those who fear his word. Isaiah 66, 2.

"But you apparently need only to press forward courageously as if you had the command or word of God to somehow refashion the Gemeinde according to your wisdom and then everything would apparently be good in so far as you were concerned. Alas! Where do you even have one word of God on which to base this? Does the apostle Jakob not write with emphasized words, 'Not everyone should venture to be a minister (Lehrer)?' Does not Paul say 'Be obedient to your ministers and submit yourselves unto them.'?"

"But you yourself would rather teach them to be obedient and you will accept neither admonition, punishment, nor separation from us. Instead, it seems to me that you will continue to hold to your own righteousness as being correct until the death. You do not give heed to what Jesus says of such righteousness. You do not consider the Gemeinde. Nor are you ashamed of having caused sorrow to your gracious, aged spouse day and night, notwithstanding that she has already had to sigh and languish over this wretched situation for so long.

"Yes, if our gracious God did not know how to keep and preserve her through His almighty wisdom you would apparently not think anything of it, if in her last hour you could still cause her to depart from the Gemeinde and from the word of God. Indeed, if she would only serve and follow your judgment and opinion and your righteousness. It seems to me that then your spirit might be somewhat more calm.

"But the Lord wishes to heed her tears and her lamentations. The Lord wishes to look upon her age and weakness in grace. Consequently it is not she through you, but you who without a word may be won to the teachings of the apostle through her. And thus she will continue under her cross until the end. For he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. Matthew 24." Orloff the 18th of February, 1836. "Abraham Friesen"<sup>10</sup>

### 16.07 The death of Klaas Reimer, 1837.

The events of 1837 are dominated by the death of Klaas Reimer on December 28th, 1837. The untimely death of a courageous and heroic warrior of the faith at the young age of 67 was a great loss for the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. (See Chapter Twelve.)

The account of a deacon election held on October 10th, 1837, is included here: Isaac Loewen-Lindenau 26 votes, Ab. Friesen-Neukirch 4 votes, Johan Friesen-Neukirch 17 votes, Ab. Friesen-Ruckenau 2 votes, Joh. Dueck-Fischau 1 vote, Cornelius Janzen-Neukirch 1 vote, Peter Thiessen-Schoenau 1 vote, Martin Kroeker-Lindenau 1 vote, Jakob Friesen-Blumstein 1 vote. Fifty-four members partook in this election.

### 16.08 Aeltester Election and Ordination, 1838.

The outstanding event of 1838 was the election of a new Aeltester and the attempt by the Kleine Gemeinde to have this new Aeltester ordained by one of the other Mennonite Gemeinden in the Molotschna. The Aeltester election was held on April 3, 1838. The results were as follows: Heinrich Balzer 14 votes, Peter Penner 2 votes, and Abraham Friesen 45 votes. The election was completed by 61 members. It might be noted that the minister Peter Penner from Prangenau had joined the Kleine Gemeinde in 1835.

It was now necessary for the Kleine Gemeinde to elect another minister which election was held on June 26, 1838. Election No. 11: Firstly for Deacon. Johan Friesen-Neukirch 32 votes, Klaas F. Reimer-Tiege 12 votes, Johan Dueck-Fischau 2 votes, Peter Thiessen-Schoenau 2 votes, Jakob Bartel-Neukirch 3 votes, Ab. Friesen-Neukirch 5 votes, Heinrich Reimer-Muntau 1 vote, Peter Wiebe-Rosenort 1 vote, Ab. Friesen-Ruckenau 1 vote.

On the same date one minister was elected from the three deacons, namely: Klaas Friesen-Altonau 21 votes, Isaac Loewen-Lindenau 16 votes, and Johan Friesen-Neukirch 21 votes. As two candidates had the same number of votes lots were cast which fell upon Klaas Friesen. This election was completed by 59 members. Thus the ministerial now consisted of Aeltester Abraham Friesen, and the ministers; Heinrich Balzer, Peter Penner, and Klaas Friesen (Altonau).

The reader might wish to note the steady growth of the Kleine Gemeinde. The fact that some 61 votes were cast in this Aeltester election would indicate a threefold growth in the small flock since 1814 when the group had started with only 18 or 20 families.

The Kleine Gemeinde now had the same problem it had in 1814 when it came to the ordination of Aeltester Klaas Reimer. Who would ordain the new Aeltester? The previous precedent established by the Kleine Gemeinde was that this ordination had to be performed by another ordination qualified

Aeltester if there was one available. Accordingly the Kleine Gemeinde ministerial made a request for the ordination of their new Aeltester to Bernhard Fast, the Aeltester of the Orloff Gemeinde and a frequent spokesman for the pietist-cultural Mennonite groups in the Molotschna. Aeltester Peter Toews in his **Sammlung** has referred to the historical records and writings of minister Klaas Friesen, the youngest brother of Aeltester Abraham Friesen, who has described the events which took place in this regard:

“A request and entreaty with respect to the election and ordination of an Aeltester was made to the Honourable Aeltester Bernhard Fast in Orloff prior to the election. The latter wished to consult with the other Aeltesten and ministers in that regard. After a good period of time we ministers were summoned to the place of Aeltester Wedel in Alexanderwohl where three other Aeltesten were also present, namely: Wilhelm Lange, Benjamin Ratzlaff, and Bernhard Fast. Here we were given to understand that if they were to establish an Aeltester for us, we would also have to accommodate them: Namely, that we should no longer consider infant baptism, the swearing of oaths, and the bearing of arms to be quite so unchristian, as one member from our Gemeinde allowed himself to express this position. In addition we were no longer to receive members from other Gemeinden without proper certificates. As we were unable to accept these stipulations the ordination was completely denied to us”<sup>11</sup>

This is how Ohm Klaas Friesen of Altonau has summarized the reaction of the Mennonite leadership in the Molotschna at the time. Rather than encouraging the Kleine Gemeinde in the furtherance of the Kingdom they imposed conditions on brotherly cooperation which required that they also depart from the basic principles of evangelical faith. The Grosze Gemeinde Aeltester Jakob Warkentin was not present at the meeting of Aeltesten at Alexanderwohl, indicating perhaps that this cultural Mennonite group was not prepared to consider a Kleine Gemeinde ordination on any terms. It is interesting that the meeting of the Kirchen-Konvent was hosted by Aeltester Wedel in Alexanderwohl. Notwithstanding that it had already partially adopted the pietist faith, the latter group continued to adhere to certain evangelical teachings such as nonresistance. Perhaps the fact that the group was basically settled within the confines of one village, insulated it to some extent from the influences of the later more radical forms of pietism to which the other groups were subject. The decision of the Alexanderwohl conference was to decline the Kleine Gemeinde request. The reply of the honourable Aeltester Bernhard Fast to the request for ordination of the Kleine Gemeinde was as follows:

“To the Reverend Abraham Friesen and Associates.

“In response to your request to formally ordain an Aeltester for you and thereby to establish a formally recognized Gemeinde, we impart to you the following information:

“We have recently perceived from you that in your outlook you are not committed to helping us in the regulation of our Gemeinden and in the establishment of the same: And that in fact you are committed to work against the same, which can only bring disorder in its wake. In such a case we ourselves would have to take the blame, if we had allowed ourselves to be vehicles to strengthen you in your outlook and thereby to weaken the being of our Gemeinden.

“No, we cannot wish for this nor can we do so. Instead we wish and counsel you with total sincerity to abandon your partisan spirit and to join one of the official Gemeinden and together with the same to build the Gemeinde with the help of your advice. This remains our hopeful outlook for the near future. Then we would be able to pray in one spirit to the Father in heaven for the blessing which he has promised to bestow upon us.

“Our hope is that you might accept our wish and this advice from us. With friendly greetings, I remain in the name of my co-workers.”

Halbstaedt, February 23, 1838

“Bernhard Fast”<sup>12</sup>

It is quite remarkable that even historian Peter M. Friesen takes issue with Aeltester Bernhard Fast for the position he has taken. Because Aeltester Bernhard Fast was open to the teachings of pietism, Peter M. Friesen generally favours him and rates him very highly. However this issue predates the succession of the “Ruckenaу pietists” by only two decades and so Peter M. Friesen could hardly hold the position of the Kirchen-Konvent in this case to be wrong and then completely reverse himself respecting a similar situation which occurred only twenty years later. According to the record of Ohm Klaas above, the Pietist-Mennonite Aeltesten, Lange of Gnadenfeld, and Ratzlaff from the Rudnerweide Gemeinde also joined with Aeltester Bernhard Fast of the so-called progressive Orloff Gemeinde in this decision. Perhaps these groups were not always quite as progressive, tolerant and spirit-filled as some historians would have us believe.

In any event Peter M. Friesen considers the action taken by Aeltester Bernhard Fast to have been very shortsighted. In the following quotation Peter M. Friesen explains his interpretation of this event:

“The shortsightedness of Elder Fast never ceases to amaze one: here he shows himself to be the same person he was in the Gnadenfeld matter; but in his ‘Letter to the Elders and Ministers of Prussia’, his dealings with the Moravian bishops (#66), with the evangelical missionaries and the matters relating to the M.B. Church of 1860, he was a different person. To assume such an air of superiority over against the Kleine Gemeinde proved useless, and his rejection of a potential ally, which the Kleine Gemeinde would undoubtedly have become had her wish been fulfilled, brought great injury. Ohrloff’s penalty was conclusive isolation until 1860. Despite that fact, the Kleine Gemeinde has friendlier relations with those of Ohrloff, as one can see from the ‘brotherhood question,’ than with anyone else. It should be noted further that through the energetic defence of her independence, the Kleine Gemeinde blazed the trail for the M.B. Church, whose most closely related Mennonite sister church she has become in the form of the Krimmer M.B. Church in the United States, which is a deepened and improved extension of the old Kleine Gemeinde.”<sup>13</sup>

Peter M. Friesen was quite correct in noting the Orloff Gemeinde and the Kleine Gemeinde were natural allies in many matters. They had many common interests in the areas of agricultural, education, and other secular matters. Later, when Johann Harder, a leader with strong Anabaptist-Mennonite leanings, became the Aeltester of the Orloff Gemeinde, the alliance to which Peter M. Friesen refers became a reality and a powerful force for peace and brotherhood in the Molotschna.

How did the Kleine Gemeinde deal with this rejection? In times of crisis leadership qualities are tested and proven. In his reply to Bernhard Fast, Aeltester Abraham Friesen quickly establishes that he is quite capable of the office of leadership for which he has been chosen. The reply by Aeltester Friesen is a carefully reasoned rebuttal of the accusations made by Bernhard Fast. It is also a loving statement of evangelical principles on the point in question, and a meek acceptance of the decision made by the Kirchen-Convent. Here follows the reply of Aeltester Abraham Friesen.

“To the honourable Aeltester Bernhard Fast and all you fellow servants. We hereby wish you much grace, salvation, and blessing from the infinite fullness of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!

“We received your writing of the 23rd of February with the deepest anticipation. Nevertheless we perceive therefrom a denial of our wishes and our heart’s desire which greatly humbles and saddens us in our current circumstances, indeed, because all of you beloved, have considered our matter so suspiciously, and that you are able to deny our request without at least even trying to convince us that in some way we are not correct according to the Holy Scripture.

“However, we comfort ourselves with the words spoken by the King and Prophet David when he says, ‘For the Lord will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance. But judgment shall return unto righteousness; and all the upright in heart shall follow it’. Hereupon we can await the direct and indirect leading of God with unceasing hope.

“But that you should in some way have understood from us that we are not committed to assist in the regulation of your Gemeinden and in the establishment of the same, and that to the contrary we are committed to working against the same? This we deny and freely state that you err in this belief insofar as such regulation is in accordance with the teachings of Jesus and his apostles on which, after all, our entire confession of faith is grounded pursuant to Matthew 5, 39; Luke 22, 26; John 18, 36; Romans 12, 19; 1 Corinthians 6: The following to the contrary Matthew 18, 8-9; 15, 17. 1 Corinthians 5, 1-13; 2 Timothy 2, 20-21, 2 Timothy 3, 2-5; and many more similar verses. We are obligated from our whole heart to fulfill, assist, and establish the forgoing, and with the help of God to cling firmly to the same, and not to waver neither to the right nor to the left, until our final end.

“Although we declare that under the current circumstances the certificates (of church membership and transfer) are unnecessary for our part, this is not to say that we would consider them for naught in all circumstances. No indeed, rather we consider the same to be good and beneficial in cases where fellow members from a distance, but from a fellowship which is likeminded, transfer from one Gemeinde to the other. In fact we consider it to be our necessary duty in accordance with the example of Paul, who gave a good testimony along with Onesimus who had accepted the faith, when he sent him to his fellow labourer Philemon. Philemon 18-21.

“But of what benefit will the certificates be for us? Since we live one among the other our virtues as well as misdeeds are well known among the people and a changing over from one Gemeinde to the other usually only occurs because there are differing beliefs and not through a transfer of membership. Therefore we can foresee neither danger nor disorder between us and you, even if it is not required that a certificate be imparted. Obstacles and fetters will be laid in the way of the seekers of the truth if they are not allowed to change to another Gemeinde without a certificate.

“We currently consider it to be sufficient if the individual is persuaded by the Holy Word of God as to which is the most true way to the salvation of the soul, and if they hear the word spoken behind them, saying, this is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left. Isaiah 30, 21. However that we should open this door for the stubborn and disobedient, and to allow the same to withdraw with a certificate proportional to the circumstances so that they would then find opportunity to diminish their guilt or in fact to completely belie their deeds? We are not led to this by the Word of God, rather the same everywhere provides that such members

are to be put from us and that we are to have no company with them, in order that they may be ashamed. 2 Thessalonians 3, 14.

"And finally you wish and advise us in complete earnestness that we should depart from our party spirit, and that we should join ourselves to one of the official Gemeinden. Oh, my beloved. What shall we say to this. How can you so directly declare us to be of a partisan spirit?"

"Oh do consider, that even though it is only in our imperfection, we have also studied and searched in the Holy Scripture and that we have gone out due to the necessity of our conscience and not by virtue of a party spirit. We do not ground ourselves in anything nor do we stand firm in any matter which is not taught by the Word of God. At the same time we also readily admit that at times false spirits have come our way. But we have not followed the same and rather, far more, have put them from us which the other 'official' Gemeinden have neither done nor recognized, and rather have accepted them in their Gemeinde as good brothers. However, until the current day we must carry the stinking name thereof, and be declared as being partisan by you. O Lord.

"But how is it possible, beloved, that you so earnestly advise us to join ourselves to one of the official Gemeinden? Do you not know that much uncleanness and disgrace lies hidden in the official Gemeinden and that a little leaven will leaven the whole lump? 1 Corinthians 5, 6. Do you not notice a far greater spirit of partianship in the official Gemeinden than in ours? And where in such a setting would there be the united building together of which you advise us? On the contrary, do you not experience a violent sense of indignation and antipathy towards all the human ordinances of these formal Gemeinden, for which, according to your own statement you have neither help nor solution?"

"Be assured my beloved, we would no longer submit ourselves to all of these nor will we have fellowship with the unproductive works of darkness, Ephesians 5, 11, since God at one time has persuaded us to something else. And even though we should never become an official Gemeinde here on earth, it shall be sufficient for us to live in the grace of God and his fellowship. In order that through grace we might attain eternal salvation in the future.

"And since you have so completely denied our desire we find ourselves compelled to submit ourselves to our brethren, and as God wills and we live, await an opportune time and allow the election to proceed among us. However, we leave the ordination to you and to your good judgment.

"Otherwise, with friendly greetings, we remain your lowly fellow servants."

"Orloff the 12th of March, 1838."14

"Abraham Friesen, Heinrich Balzer, Peter Pennér  
Klaas Friesen, Isaac Loewen"

## 16.09 Ministerial Election, 1840.

Another ministerial election was held on February 2nd, 1840. According to the **Wahl-Liste** of Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen, Election No. Twelve, the results were as follows: Firstly for deacon: Ab. Friesen of Neukirch-9 votes, Klaas F. Reimer of Tiege-42 votes, Peter Thiessen of Schoenau-5 votes, Joh. Dueck of Muntau-8 votes, Peter Wiebe of Rosenort-3 votes, and Ab. Friesen of Ruckenu-2 votes. A minister was then elected from among the three deacons. Johan Friesen of Neukirch-40 votes, Klaas F. Reimer of Tiege-27 votes, and Isaac Loewen of Lindenau-2 votes. This election was completed by 69 brethren.

## 16.10 A Petition of Thanks, 1842.

The teaching of the Anabaptist-Mennonites was that the government and its administration was to be cheerfully and willingly obeyed in all matters which were not contrary to scripture. Not only were the evangelical Christians committed to honouring the law in its smallest detail, they were also to be model citizens of exemplary character. This was the way of discipleship and also the duty of the members of the Gemeinde. No possible grounds was to arise on account of which the government authorities would have reason to regret that it had allowed the nonresistant Christians to dwell within its borders, and whereby they would become unworthy of the privilege of practising their faith unmolested.

This teaching is expressed in a Petition of Thanks issued by the leadership (Lehrdeinst) of the Kleine Gemeinde in 1842. This was a 'Dankschrift' submitted by the Kleine Gemeinde to Eugen von Hahn who was the acting President of the Supervisory Committee at the time.

Your Excellence

Most Gracious Lord:

"The fullness of the benefaction which the Mennonites have been favoured to enjoy in this blessed fatherland for a good number of years through the kindness and grace of our exalted Monarch, justly binds us to a duty of thankfulness and reciprocal love which we owe. Our Gemeinde is vividly permeated by these feelings, and accordingly we cannot refrain from submitting the same to the highest degree, humbly and thankfully, to your Excellence on your journey through these colonies.

"Our heartfelt wish and concern is only one, namely, that we might be worthy of this eminent grace and that through a pious, quiet, peaceful, obedient, and submitted deportment we might at all times evidence, before the righteous God as well as to our wise and dearly treasured superiors and authorities, that which we truly recognize. Namely, that

out of gratitude for the unearned grace of our highest monarch, which has been so richly disposed upon us, we are obligated and bound in the utmost degree to willingly and gladly evidence our **Submissiveness, Diligence, and Living Faith** in everything which the gracious and all knowing government, with our best interest and well-being in mind, wishes to have us do. Provided that it is not a matter which is against our conscience.

“Our beloved God forbid, that our blessed District Authority, which acts judiciously and with discernment, would at present or at any other time, be able to find just cause to be grieved on our account, or even to find occasion for a complaint. Or that instead of helping to ease the burden of the conduct of their office, we would make the burden that much heavier and oppressive. As a consequence of which an adverse judgment would properly fall against us.

“Most Gracious Lord President, please receive graciously this feeble expression of our thankful hearts by which we are truly affirming that we will remain and never cease to be, the loyal and obedient subjects of our most Gracious Government. For which we, the loyal subordinates of your Excellence, humbly subscribe in the name of the Gemeinde. The ministerial (Lehrdienst) of the so-called Kleine Gemeinde.”

“Aeltester Abraham Friesen”

Ministers: Heinrich Balzer, Peter Penner, Klaas Friesen, and  
Johann Friesen Deacons: Isaac Loewen and Klaas Reimer, Jr.

Colony Rueckenau on the Molotschna the 14th of May, 1842.

## 16.11 An Epistle to Heinrich Neufeld, 1842.

Regina von Riesen (1795-1852) was the youngest sister to Aeltester Abraham Friesen. She was married for the first time to Isaac Friesen (1788-1814). She then married for the second time to Heinrich Neufeld, who was a minister of the Grosze Gemeinde. It appears that the Neufeld family had been unhappy about the Kleine Gemeinde and had accused her brothers that the Kleine Gemeinde was judging and condemning all others, and that they considered themselves to be the only true church. In his “Epistle to Heinrich Neufeld” Abraham Friesen refutes these charges as being totally unfounded. This letter illustrates that the faith of Abraham Friesen was solidly founded on evangelical authority and that his spirit of leadership was one of inward warmth, meekness and love.

The “Epistle to Heinrich Neufeld” serves as an excellent preview to the 1846 epistle dealing with the Aeltester Heinrich Wiens affair. Here Abraham Friesen admonishes the ministers of the Grosze Gemeinde that they should take note of the unrighteous ways of their people. They should submit to the requirements of the authorities before God will bring them to a fall. Abraham Friesen also gently chides the Neufelds that they would criticise the Kleine Gemeinde for cooperating with the government when this in fact was something which was required of all God fearing Gemeinden. The 1840 “Epistle to Heinrich Neufeld” provides an excellent survey of the thinking of Grosze Gemeinde leaders during the 1840’s.

Beloved brother-in-law Heinrich Neufeld:

Blumstein, July 30th, 1842.

“With a heartfelt wish I commit you and your beloved wife to the meek and always gentle Jesus as a living testimony, Matthew 11, 29 and to his holy gospel as the one and only ordinance and direction marker, and to the holy spirit as the master teacher and ruler of the counsels and conceptions of our hearts, John 14, 26, and that you might seek to attain and press towards the same. Having first done so, I must let you know that my spirit has not yet been completely put to rest with respect to the matters which I discussed with you and your beloved wife on July 14th. In so far as the Lord grants wisdom unto me, I would gladly declare myself further in order to placate the dissatisfied spirit of my so dearly beloved sister and thereby to also provide greater expression to my views in this.

“Firstly, beloved brother-in-law, I thank you and the spirit of grace who loves you so dearly, that we have somewhat been able to consider this most sorrowful matter and to discuss the same in love. For the Apostle says, ‘Let all your things be done with love’. 1 Corinthians 16, 14 and again when he says ‘Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt. . . .’ Colossians 4, 6. But I am unable to praise the conduct of your wife who became so wrathful, for Paul also says, ‘Be not angry and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath’. Ephesians 4, 26.

“Alas my beloved sister. If only the sun would not have had to set upon your anger so many times. Not that I feel so terribly offended thereby nor that I should not want to bear the same from you in love. Oh no! But look and see. Through this you yourself are evermore disturbing your own conscience in so far as you are acting contrary to the word of God. James says, ‘Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger’. James 1, 19. ‘For the wrath of man, worketh not the righteousness of God’. (Verse 20). And you, my beloved sister are the wife of a preacher (Lehrer) of whom Paul requires that they be, ‘grave, not slanderers, rather good teachers in all things’, 1 Timothy 3, 11. And ‘that they teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to be discreet, chaste, keepers of the home, obedient to their husbands, so that the word of God be not blasphemed’. Titus 2, 3-5.

“I bid of you beloved sister, that you do search for yourself in the holy scripture for here you, as well as I, will find directions, ordinances, and restrictions as to how we are to run the race if



we are to attain the prize. 1 Corinthians 9, 24. The Lord God speaks very earnestly through the mouth of David and says, 'Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. Thou sittest and speaketh against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother's son. These things hast thou done, and I kept silent; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself; but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes'. Psalm 50, 19-21. Alas, alas, we do well to pay heed for ourselves, as much for myself as for you, my beloved friend. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned', says the Lord Jesus in Matthew 12, 37.

"Beloved friends, I find it to be quite a hindrance that you have attributed to me, that I am to have said to someone that yours and other Gemeinden were not Christians, and that the Kleine Gemeinde alone were Christians. I did not give you much answer in this regard as I very well knew in myself that these were only twisted lies, similar to where the false witness asked Jesus if he had not said that he could break down the temple of God and rebuild it in three days. He himself was to say so if he was 'Christ'. Instead he answered. 'Thou hast said'. Matthew 26, 61-66.

"Oh my beloved friends. What motivates you to such questions? Do you so badly wish to believe these lies? Oh, but do tear yourself away from those whom the apostle Paul describes in such terrible terms and says of the same: That because they received not the love of the truth, God shall send them strong delusions, that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but rather had pleasure in unrighteousness. 2 Thessalonians 2, 10-11.

"Beloved! I say unto you! The entire design of your former Aeltester (Jakob Warkentin) and the reason why the entire Grosse Gemeinde came into such unrest and dissatisfaction with respect to the wise actions of the authorities is nothing but powerful delusions and lies. If you do not completely desist in this, you will not only cause many in your Gemeinde to be wretched, but I believe that much of the temporal well-being and respect of the Mennonites in Russia is thereby going lost. Take heed in this!

"But I must return to my object, that I am to have expressed that we alone were Christians and that the other Gemeinden were definitely not Christians. I might give you something to consider in this regard. You will no doubt have read in the **Martyrs Mirror** of so many pious Christians in respect to whom I would have to be ashamed to even consider myself an equal, because of my unworthiness. Behold! And they have never had such a belief that without exception they considered all others to be non-Christian and that they flattered themselves that they were the true Christians, thus speaking out against the people.

"Alas my beloved! How can you think this of your miserable, weak, and frail friend, who wishes only to follow the truth in everything so whole-heartedly. I say! How can you allow yourself to believe that I would have such pride. Do you now mean to say by this that I have completely and totally abandoned heed for God and his Holy Word? Or do you not have more faith in God than that he would allow his weak servant, whom he has known from afar and chosen for his service, thereafter to allow him to fall so instantaneously and so deeply into the pride of Lucifer? Romans 8, 30; That I should so exalt myself and so abase others? Matthew 3, 12. No, not even for a moment! That belongs to God. 'He sheweth strength with his arm and disperses those who are proud in the imagination of their hearts'. Luke 1, 51. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things and the rich he hath sent empty away', verse 52 and 53.

"But my beloved, I do not mean to say that without exception we are all good Christians. Oh no, never. For Menno Simons, even though he did not exalt himself and abase his fellow men, freely says in his second book<sup>17</sup> page 212, 'I know for a fact, that such an arrogant person is no Christian, no matter who he is'. With this, Menno is referring to a good number who are not Christians, in comparison to which, beloved friends, we may all mirror and prove ourselves. I bid you, may we truly prove ourselves and our own houses and the Gemeinde, in which the spirit of God has placed each and everyone in order to shepherd the Church of Christ, with the Holy Word of God. Acts 20, 28. And let us take Menno Simons to help us in this examination for then we shall truly find that all such useless pomp and luxury, such vain ostentation and display, and arrogant practices, which are the rule with the majority, and in which, I am afraid your home has also ascended too far: That these things are from the world and not from the Father, and in the words of the apostle John, they will perish together with the world. These practices are in no way fitting for a Christian nor are the other ungodly ways on account of which Menno in the fear of God says, that man can be no Christian.

"Alas! Is it not high time that we not only stand firmly in this but even more so to be converted and to tear down that which has been fashioned for the sake of pride, and commence to live a holy, blameless, and Christian life, in order that in the eternity to come we might experience our blessed salvation. Sirach says, that if the people are proud and wrathful this is not created of God, but cometh about when man forsakes God and hardens his heart, for pride is the inspiration of all sin, and whoever is in its clutches commits an abomination. Oh, for it is clearly and unequivocally manifest that nothing but horror and sin can come from this. Nothing but hatred, quarreling, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such like, of which the Apostle Paul says that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Galatians 5, 19-21.

"Ah, but do pay heed my most beloved brother-in-law whether or not the most of the people among you, who are overcome in this, are not blindly opposing all appointed human order. For in accordance with the teaching of Paul they should be subject and obedient to the principalities and

powers, to obey magistrates and to be ready to every good work, to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men, Titus 3, 1-2. But contrariwise you have spited the highest authority with more than 800 votes. The local officials appointed over us have been maligned by many in the worst way. Through great unrighteousness they have been severely accused. Instead of being meek and gentle towards all men many have expressed their worthiness or bitterness against those who do not hold with them in their rebelliousness. Indeed, ours have also felt threatened in the spirit by the assertion of many that they would do away with the Gebietsamt and the Verein as soon as they would be in power, and that this would also apply to us.

"Alas beloved brother-in-law. Do give thought to the arrogant dispositions which have arisen under your leadership. God has invariably disgraced the proud and ultimately brought them to a fall. Sirach 10, 16. For behold saith the Lord, 'This was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of peace (contentment) was in her and in her daughters, but she did not assist the poor and the needy. Ezekiel 16, 49. 'Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven and he overthrew all the inhabitants of the city. Genesis 19, 24. And what was the experience of Haman who lifted himself up against Mordecai and against the Jews, and in fact allowed the gallows to be constructed for Mordecai but he himself was hung thereon. Esther 7, 10. Even your own Aeltester was cast aside so quickly and unbeknownst to him, where he himself may have supposed that he would overthrow others.

"Alas my beloved brother-in-law. Do allow all of this to be a warning unto you and also warn your Gemeinde in order that they would depart from such insanity. In order that they would not also make your MAN and many others with him very unfortunate. For behold, Peter says, 'Let no one among you suffer as a murderer or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters'. 1 Peter 4, 15. Receive the word of the Lord as a warning when he says, 'for then I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be haughty because of my holy mountain'. Zephaniah 3, 11. But if you insist on elevating yourselves even more as appears to be the case, you will truly receive a judgment, as Paul says, and will thenceforth have to suffer as evildoers and as those who have aspired unto a foreign authority. Alas, if mankind would only take heed for its punishment, if not for the temporal then at least for the eternal. The Apostle Peter says, 'The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished, but chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous they are, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities. 2 Peter 2, 9-10.

"Alas, do give thought my beloved brother-in-law, are the most of those who are contrary minded not also such as are living in the impure lusts of the flesh? Are they not also the ones who are maligning the principalities? Are they not the ones who have already plagued our authorities for years on end on account of their disputation, deceit, and drunkenness, which matters should have been settled fairly and equitably in the Gemeinde by the ministers? But no! For many years the ministers have approved of a situation where some of the ministers themselves have gone and applied to the Gebietsamt in order to obtain what was legally theirs. It is a disgrace that these beloved men, who may total some 50 to 60 in number here, allow themselves to be served with exemption from statute labour (Reichendienst) for their Feuerstelle (village farm), and for this pittance they then preach 'peace, peace' where there is no peace. Jeremiah 6, 14.

"Instead they, together with their members are full of dissatisfaction and unthankfulness towards their local authorities, notwithstanding that these officials expend every possible diligence and are busily engaged for at least two days out of every week to set the people right and to persuade them unto peace and if possible to bring everything into good order. Which is truthfully far more incumbent upon the ministerial than upon the Gebietsamt. They would accept this just as gladly from you as they do from us but you do not want to do so, and yet the people malign the Gebietsamt that it is too strict. Oh, if only the blame would not twice fall upon the ministers: First, because they have allowed such evil roots to grow up. And second when they oppose those whom God has ordained to punish the evil and to protect the pious.

"Take note my beloved brother-in-law, when Israel desired for a King, and said to Samuel, 'Behold thou art old and thy sons walk not in your ways: now make us a king to judge us like all nations. But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the Lord and the Lord said unto Samuel, hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.' 1 Samuel 8, 5. Behold, for this is also what our people together with the ministers and Aeltesten have done and this since our very first settlement here. With the exception only of a small number whom the Lord has allowed to remain as a seed who even today continue to have him as a judge and king over them in all matters. Which is a small Zoar and secure refuge for all truth seeking souls even today.

"The remainder use the King of Kings as their judge and his gospel as their guide only to the extent that they find it suitable for them. The portions which they find to be inconvenient, they have given over to the men in the Gebietsamt. I perceive it to be an almost unbearable burden for these men, gently and mildly to govern such a great assembly of unashamed men. For only the most wicked and wanton fall upon their necks. As a result most of the disobedience remains unpunished.

"Alas, my beloved brother-in-law, how is it that you and your fellow ministers are so dissatisfied

over these men and their government. And even if they should sometimes err in some way they are not to be blamed, but rather the ministers and Aeltesten whom the Holy Spirit hath appointed as bishops in order to shepherd the Gemeinde of God. They are to take charge in every matter and to accept responsibility for the Gemeinde. Such accusations are just as improper as when the people of Israel ordained King Saul into authority over them and then blamed him for not governing in the way Samuel had. For they had rejected Samuel and the rule of the Lord their God and had desired that a king be constituted over them who would judge them like all the heathen nations.

"These men are not ruling nearly as unwisely as you accuse them. With great endeavour they bring many matters aright unto which the ministerial does not even move a finger and the obstinate ones are mainly those who have been ruined by the ministerial or who are being misled, so that they cannot render fealty or obedience without first being punished by the Gebietsamt. Do consider, do reflect! I have also enquired of Jakob Friesen (the Aeltester's son, then Schulz in Blumstein) with respect to the twofold accusation, as he calls it, to Johan Cornies regarding the construction of Johan Epp. Friesen stated that they had not at all had him in mind, as Epp had built high enough of his own volition. Beloved brother-in-law, I cannot but admonish you, for in part I find this a wonderment and in part it grieves me, that you yourself are led thus far astray: How can I perceive this in any way other than that you accept as complete truth the most insignificant splinter amongst us and that you wish to aggravate and propagate the same. But you remain unaware of the beam in your own eye? Even if it was true that Epp had not wanted to build according to the regulations, and that Friesen, as the Schulz who is to see thereto, had twice driven to see Cornies on this account: Do say yourself! Has he thereby automatically breached the word of God? I doubt very much that you will be able to bring forward a clear scripture to support such a view.

"By comparison it might not be unreasonable to refer to your Aeltester, who is able to inspire the entire Gemeinde with a misled zeal. It is quite in order for him to travel to the Fuersorge Committee regarding temporal matters, and there, if not to make accusations against our local authorities, at least to make them appear highly suspect and black in the eyes of the higher authorities. Behold, and this can occur with the knowledge, counsel, consent and accompaniment of the ministerial and in spite of the same you remain unaware of the beam in your own eye, even though this does not in any way comply with our Confession of Faith, and even less with the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teachings of his Apostles.

"Oh! One must ask with lamentation: Israel, why is it that you are in a foreign land? Why have you soiled yourself among the dead? Why are you among those who appear to be bound for hell? This is the reason: That you have forsaken the wells of wisdom. If you had remained in the ways of God you would evermore have resided in peace. Do now learn the right wisdom in order that you might experience the giver of longevity, providence, joy and peace. Baruch 3.

"I also bid you beloved brother-in-law and also you beloved sister, that you would not allow our **Petition of Thanks**, and the fact that we are happy and that we "common people" are doing so and so well, to aggravate you so: And that on top of everything else, we are enjoying the love and good favour of our higher government as well as the local authorities. For we would have to be completely without feelings if, next to God, we did not with joyful hearts give thanks to our eminent government and watchful authorities. This is found to be offensive among your members only for the reason, that not only are they not thankful, but they are downright complaining. We cannot be motivated by such feelings. Should we also be unthankful for your sake? We, who know that an unthankful heart vanishes as vapour in winter, and dissolves as an unnecessary water. Wisdom 16, 29.

"On at least two brotherhood meetings we have earnestly warned our brethren against pride and against speaking spitefully about this most sorrowful matter. We admonished the brethren with the words of the Apostle in Romans 13, 11. But we have not told them that they should not rejoice since this would also be contrary to the words of Paul when he says, 'rejoice in the Lord in every way, and again I say rejoice'. And again when he says, 'Finally brethren, farewell, be glad, be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you. 2 Corinthians 13, 11. Certainly our government authorities have earned the epithet used to describe them in the **Petition of Thanks** as 'wise and experienced men' many times over in their dealings with us, which I have already explained to you in person. To this Sirach also adds that those who fear God also honour their authorities and for this reason God keeps watch over them. Paul not only refers to supplication, prayer and intercession for the government but also thanksgiving. 1 Timothy 2, 1. And in 1 Thessalonians 5, 18 he says 'In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you'.

"And now beloved friends, allow this to be sufficient for this time, although much remains suspended in my thoughts regarding you. I am not too sure why this is such a special concern for me but I bid of you, beloved brother-in-law, that you would receive my frankness from me in love. Who knows what the Lord may wish to accomplish for he has also carried great patience for me for many years. He also continues to carry all miserable sinners with great patience and forbearance. Beloved brother-in-law, I must say with the Apostle that, 'I am persuaded better things of you, even though we thus speak'. And also you beloved sister, do accept this in love from your oldest (Aeltester) brother here in Russia who will not be here much longer. Search diligently with those from Berea as to whether these things are so. Acts 17, 11."

Greetings and love from my wife and myself,

"Abraham Friesen"<sup>16</sup>

## 16.12 A Letter to a Sister, 1843.

A "Letter to a Sister" 1843, serves as a reminder of the humanly impossible task of purification which had been entrusted to the Gemeinde of God. This trust was to be pursued earnestly and with prayerful diligence. The Kleine Gemeinde was frequently charged that they exercised this obligation too quickly and too strictly. History will be the judge. The participants in this episode have long since passed into eternity. No doubt they are thankful for the loving admonition of Abraham Friesen.

**"Beloved Sister in the Lord:"**

"After wishing you all well-being in body and soul I also request that you would not take this supplication unto you for evil. For we would say together with Paul, 'That we seek not for that which is yours, rather for you'. 2 Corinthians 12, 14. I have already personally advised you in brotherly love, that you enlighten yourself from the disorderly ways and vices. 1 Peter 4, 4. I cannot omit to repeat this warning in a writing, Ephesians 5, 17-18, thereby to warn you that you make haste to make an earnest beginning in this. For we have understood that music, tobacco, and other disorderly matters were recently to be found in your home and that your children are also spreading this to other homes.

"Therefore we bid you again, exactly as we have previously done in person: That with the approval of your Curatoren (advisors to a widow) and the Vormuendern (guardians for the children) you seek to make your house free of such evil. Either you solemnly promise in the presence of everyone concerned that the children will obey and improve or you should release the children from you. Luke 10, 26. You will create a great sorrow for us if either of the foregoing cannot be effected within a very short time, for then we shall have to present the matter to the brotherhood in order that the Gemeinde seek to purify itself of such specks. 2 Timothy 2, 21.

"You can be assured that this amusement and mischief carried on by your children, in which it seems as if you have almost been overcome, is nothing minor. Indeed, not that you have verbally consented to this but in so far that your house seemingly cannot be made free of the same. The like cannot be tolerated within the Gemeinde. For how is this different from the evil people in the days of Israel who adopted pagan practices and established gambling houses and became impenitent and ready to practice all shame and vices. In another place we read that ancient venerable laws were rooted out through this and replaced by other dishonourable laws. They built a playhouse (theatre) in which the young single men should display (ubend) themselves. Thus the heathen ways came to reign supreme, for the priests no longer heeded the sacrifice in the temple and instead ran to the playhouse to see how well the ball was being hit and how the other amusements were going. Consequently they gave up the ways of their fathers, and held the heathen ways for precious. Just as in our present day when many no longer respect the ways of our fathers and perceive their strivings as foolishness and an abomination. Instead the harmonizing of instruments, and the playing of the draught boards and dice are accepted as a precious diversion of time. And of course the harmful and terrible smoking of tobacco and the employment of the same in the nose and mouth, and many additional foreign customs more.

"Oh beloved! Far be it from us that these ways should also be tolerated among us to any degree. And if you wish to be and remain our fellow sister, you would also be united with us in this. And then you would not merely give superficial assent to our well-meant advice. Rather, you would help carry through with the same as a righteousness-minded mother over your children and that you would do so for the favour, praise and honour of God and for the salvation of your children."

Blumstein, February 9, 1843

"Abraham Friesen"<sup>17</sup>

## 16.13 A Petition to President von Hahn, 1843.

In some respects the attitudes of the Grosze, the Orloff and smaller Gemeinden, with respect to the Kleine Gemeinde, could be characterized as small-minded harassment. Contemporary historians report that the Kleine Gemeinde endured this program of serious as well as petty discrimination in meekness and love.<sup>18</sup> However this campaign eventually backfired when the government authorities finally stepped in and legally required that the other Mennonite groups in the Molotschna accord all due legal rights to the Kleine Gemeinde.

The Grosze Gemeinde had made two attempts to have the Kleine Gemeinde eradicated by filing serious complaints with the government authorities in Odessa. First, at the time of the founding of the Kleine Gemeinde in 1814 through the charges of Aeltester Jacob Enns. A second attack was launched by Oberschulz Klassen just after the division and split of the Grosze Gemeinde in 1824. In both cases the Russian authorities rejected these endeavours. It is evident that the Russian government recognized the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde from the outset. Otherwise, they would have banished the Kleine Gemeinde to Siberia as requested.

The prevailing attitude also included the harassment of the members of the Kleine Gemeinde

in their everyday affairs. In his *Sammlung . . . Zur Historie der Kleine Gemeinde der Mennoniten*, Aeltester Peter Toews has noted that at first the Kleine Gemeinde were not allowed to purchase additional property in the Mennonite villages. This restriction was eventually lifted through the intervention and endeavours of Johan Cornies.<sup>19</sup> Klaas Reimer has also recorded that after his ordination in 1816, Jacob Enns and Johan Wiebe, the two Flemish Aeltesten and their ministers, had a meeting in Orloff where they decided that they would not recognize the baptism of the Kleine Gemeinde. This meant that any member of the Kleine Gemeinde who wanted to transfer to another Gemeinde had to be rebaptized.

A new means of hurting the Kleine Gemeinde was developed in 1843 when it was discovered that the fire insurance regulations could be interpreted in such a way that it would be illegal to assemble in private homes for worship and Bible study as was the practice of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. The result of this was that the Kleine Gemeinde was officially notified by Colonial Inspector Peleck that they were forbidden to conduct worship services in private dwellings. This Order No. 878 which was firstly forwarded to the Gebietsamt provided as follows:

"To the Honourable Abraham Friesen, of Blumstein, the Aeltesten Lehrer of the so-called Kleine Gemeinde."

"We forward to you a copy of the direction of the Lord Colonial Inspector Peleck received on the 16th of this February, Sup. No. 378, the full compliance with which will be required of you."

"Gebietsamt at Halbstaedt. February 27th, 1843." "Gebiets Vorsteher Toews."<sup>20</sup>

In his *Sammlung* Aeltester Toews points out that the decision of the Inspector Peleck dealt with the matter of the brother Makowski who had left the Catholic church in order to join the Kleine Gemeinde as well as the matter of the conducting of worship services in private homes. The following is an extract from Order No. 378 of the colonial inspector.

"With respect to the prohibition against the holding of worship services in private residences by the Kleine Gemeinde: This is forbidden by virtue of the 88 clauses of the fire regulations as set forth in the 14 volume codification. And the aforesaid Gemeinde should be placed on notice that no assemblies can take place in private houses except during the hours prescribed for worship services, which however is only to be for the purpose of devotions and the singing of psalms.

"In consequence of this I have directed myself to the Police Inspector of the Melitopolschen Kriese (District), Babenko Bezirk, and have requested that he institute a thorough inquiry of the Schulz of the village of Ruckenau in the presence of a colonial deputy. Such inquiry to be for the reason that in the year 1841 and 1842 the said village Schulz permitted the arrest of the citizen Makowski pursuant to an unlawful written instruction as to what religion the said Makowski must belong to.

"I am hereby giving notice to the Mennonite Molotschna Gebietsamt in this respect and direct as follows: That the Molotschna Kleinen Mennonite Gemeinde is hereby forbidden to carry on its worship services in private dwellings. At the same time it is to be noted that any assembly in private homes other than during the hours prescribed for the worship of God is forbidden. And even during these hours such assembly is permitted only for devotional purposes and for the singing of songs."

February 16th, 1843. Original subscribed to by the Colonial Inspector Peleck. Certified by the Secretary of the Gebietsamt "Hamm,"

It is interesting to note that Michael Makowski had been freed from prison and was now resident in the village of Ruckenau where he continued to be a member of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. It seems that he had been the target of some extra attention because of his vulnerable status as a Russian national. In this case the colonial authorities acted benevolently.

Where petty restrictions on landownership and civic rights could always be ignored or overcome with the assistance and cooperation of fairminded colonial authorities such as Eugene von Hahn and progressive Mennonite leaders such as Johan Cornies, this restriction prohibiting the holding of worship services was a devastating blow to the Kleine Gemeinde. The practice of meeting for worship services in private homes had long been taken for granted by the Kleine Gemeinde. This was a serious crisis and the result was that a petition was submitted to the President of the Supervisory Committee in Odessa, Eugene von Hahn. The petition, explains why this regulation was so punitive for the group. Here follows the petition:

"To his Excellence the Lord President of the Supervisory Committee of the Colonists of Southern Russia, Privy Counsellor and Lord von Hahn. From the ministerial of the Kleinen Mennoniten Gemeinde on the Molotschna our most submissive petition:

"Pursuant to order sub. 378 of the 16th of February forwarded through our Gebietsamt here, the Lord Colonial Inspector Peleck has made us aware of the decision of the Supervisory Committee for the Foreign Settlers in South Russia as a consequence of which our

Gemeinde will be forbidden to hold its worship services in private dwellings.

"Our Gemeinde has existed for almost twenty-eight years and has always openly held its assemblies for the worship of God in private dwellings in a quiet, calm, and peaceful manner. During this time we have presented no danger to the general well-being of the land nor have we held any secret assemblies damaging to the other Mennonite Gemeinden. This is well known to our local authorities and all the Mennonite Gemeinden here. Nor can this be completely unfamiliar to the Lord Colonial Inspector.

"Through this decision our Gemeinde is cast into a grievous mourning and into a great dilemma. How and in what manner are we now to conduct our assemblies in the future for the purpose of the worship of God. Since our members are to be found scattered throughout the entire Bezirk, being resident in the different colonies (villages), it would be completely without purpose for us to have our own house of prayer designated for worship services. This would also incur unnecessary costs for the small membership of our Gemeinde. Furthermore it saddens us even more that the other Gemeinden which have their own houses of prayer, such as the Orloff Gemeinde, nevertheless hold worship services in private homes because their members are scattered and so distant from their house of worship, and so that the old and the weak who are far away can also attend the worship service.

"Therefore we sadly venture to take our refuge to the paternal concern and benevolence of your Excellence, and as your loyal subjects we humbly bid as follows: That we would not be compelled by the humane laws of the land, and rather that this gracious freedom would also be imparted to us in the future; and that we also would be allowed to conduct our worship of God in private homes as has been the case in times past in accordance with the reasons which are above truthfully stated.

"In the expectation of a gracious hearing for our most submissive petition and the imparting of an early decision, we have sorrowfully subscribed our names with the deepest reverence."

The loyal subjects of your Excellence, the  
Ministerial of the Kleinen Gemeinde:  
Aeltester Abraham Friesen, Ministers Heinrich Balzer, Peter  
Penner, Klaas Friesen, Johan Friesen and deacons Isaac  
Loewen and Klaas F. Reimer, Jr.

"Colony Neukirch,

"March 27th, 1843."

Through this petition we see the great concern of Aeltester Abraham Friesen and his ministerial respecting this rather lamentable turn of events. The response of President von Hahn is evident from the following correspondence. First of all a letter from the Gebietsamt to the ministerial of the Kleine Gemeinde:

"To Abraham Friesen in Blumstein the Aeltesten Lehrer of the so-called Kleine Gemeinde.

"With the order of the Supervisory Committee dated the 7th day of this month, No. 2225, we also received the following: A letter from the President of the Supervisory Committee of the Colonists in Southern Russia, Privy Counsellor von Hahn, addressed to the same ministerial, together with the instruction that the same was to be submitted to your ministerial. Accordingly we enclose herewith the original of same. Gebietsamt at Halbstaedt the 17th of April 1843."<sup>15</sup>

"Gebietsamt Beisitzer Braun."

The text of the enclosed letter from President von Hahn is as follows:

"To the ministerial of the Kleinen Mennoniten Gemeinde in the Molotschna. I hereby advise with respect to the request submitted to me by the ministerial of this Gemeinde on March 27th. That the Kleinen Gemeinde has been prohibited from conducting its worship services in private homes because of a law enacted in 1834 whereby similar proceedings are prohibited in the strongest manner. But I have already been to see His Honour the Lord Minister with the petition that an exception be made for the Kleinen Gemeinde because of special considerations. I am now awaiting a favourable decision which I will share with the ministerial in due course."

Odessa, the 7th of April, 1843. President of the Supervisory Committee for the Colonists of South Russia. "Staatsrath von Hahn".

The official approval of special provision for the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde was imparted to the group by another letter of the President of Supervisory Committee Privy Counsellor von Hahn dated June 28th, 1843. As follows:

"To the ministerial of the Kleinen Mennoniten Gemeinde on the Molotschna:

"Further to my writing addressed to this ministerial of April 7th of this year, No. 2225, I hereby advise that in consequence of the petition of the Kleinen Mennoniten Gemeinde to approve their private worship services His Honour the Lord Minister of Reichs Domains (Crown Lands) has commanded as follows: That the Kleinen Gemeinde is not to be disturbed in the conducting of its worship services and that they are permitted to conduct their assemblies in private homes until such a time when they construct a house of prayer.

“At the same time his Honour has also instructed me to consider the means through which the construction of a house of prayer for the said Gemeinde can be effected. I therefore request that the ministerial reflect upon this circumstance and present its opinion to me.

“In accordance with the command of his Honour I have already advised the Lord Colonial Inspector. Odessa, the 28th day of June 1843. The President of the Supervisory Committee for the Colonists of Southern Russia, “Privy Counsellor von Hahn”.

Through this order from the Minister of Crown Lands himself the threat to the worship services of the Kleine Gemeinde was concluded. With this the Molotschna Mennonites were again put on notice that the higher government authorities would not endure the intolerant oppression of one group of Mennonites by another.

### 16.14 The Recognition of the Kleinen Gemeinde, 1843.

The chain of events brought into motion by the attack against the private worship services of the Kleinen Gemeinde was not ended until the Supervisory Committee issued a decree requiring that the Mennonite civil and ecclesiastical authorities accord all due legal rights to the Kleinen Gemeinde. In the previous section it has already been noted that the Russian government authorities themselves had recognized and dealt with the Kleine Gemeinde as a legitimate Gemeinde ever since its founding in 1812. What in fact happened in 1843 was that the Government authorities forced the Gebietsamt and other Mennonite Gemeinden in the Molotschna to treat the Kleine Gemeinde equally with the other Gemeinden in every respect. The decree itself explains the circumstances under which it was granted.

#### **Regulation of the Supervisory-Committee of January 28, 1843. No. 4501. To the Schulzenaemter.**

“Pursuant to the presentation of His Excellence Acting General-Supervisor of the Colonists of South Russia, His Eminence the Lord Minister of Domains of the Empire, has been moved to enact that: the Molotschnauer Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde is not to be disrupted in the conduct of its worship services and that until they have erected a house of prayer, they are allowed to hold their assemblies in private homes as has been the case in the past. Simultaneously, the Lord Minister has instructed the Acting Supervisor-General to give consideration to the means by which the construction of a house of prayer could be brought underway for said Gemeinde. As a consequence of this eminent decision the Kleine Gemeinde shall henceforth be a part of the Kirchenkonvent, completely the equal of the other Gemeinden. Accordingly the Schulzenaemter are hereby put on notice, that the Kleine Gemeinde is to receive all privileges, equal to the other Gemeinden, and also that their ministers are to be excluded from the common duties, as specified by the existing regulations: And in all other matters which arise they are to be considered and regarded as fully competent ministers. The Schulzenaemter are to notify all the village residents of the foregoing.

“This regulation is published by the Society for the Advancement of Agriculture and Trade. The Gebietsamt in Halbstaedt on July 20, 1843. Gebietsvorsteher Toews, and Beisitzer Braun and Neufeld.”<sup>21</sup>

This regulation was issued under the authority of Johan Cornies and illustrates the natural alliance between the Anabaptist-Mennonites and some of the mild pietist-cultural Mennonites such as Johan Cornies. But when these groups had insensitive spiritual leaders such as Aeltester Bernhard Fast, cooperation was impossible as the mental horizons of such leaders were still premised on the use of unevangelical means to effect the eradication of opponents and offenders. e.g. Franz Thiessen and the Kleine Gemeinde. An example of this is seen in the refusal of Aeltester Fast and his pietist Mennonite colleagues to ordain the new Kleine Gemeinde Aeltester in 1838. Johann Cornies himself had definite pietist leanings and breached the most fundamental evangelical teaching of nonresistance at will by using forceful means against his opponents. But at least he could still comprehend and sympathize with many of the tenets of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. It seems that Cornies also respected the Christian witness of the Kleine Gemeinde and the testimony which they lived out in their daily lives. The Supervisory Committee decree of 1843 was an excellent example that peaceful cooperation between the mild pietist-cultural Mennonites and the Anabaptist-Mennonites was certainly possible.

But such brotherly cooperation could only take place during a period when the mild pietist-cultural Mennonites were under the leadership of someone who could overcome the customary narrow mindedness and judgementalism of pietist Mennonitism in order to meet and work together with the Anabaptist-Mennonites on some common ground. History has shown time and time again that the traditional and typical pietist elitism which declared the salvation of the Anabaptist-Mennonites to be for naught has done little to promote feelings of love and respect between the two groups. In fact

this often created an understandable suspicion on the part of the Anabaptist-Mennonites as they could not quite comprehend how such an intolerant and self-parroting attitude would foster and promote the building of God's peaceable spiritual Kingdom on earth.

On the other hand the fact that the Supervisory Committee in Odessa did intervene in the Molotschna Colony on behalf of the Kleine Gemeinde is evidence that an devoted and committed group with sound leadership can successfully live out and practice evangelical faith even under the most adverse circumstances.

The wise and just action on the part of the government authorities did bring about another Kleine Gemeinde petition to the government authorities. The grounds for this petition was that the Kleine Gemeinde had decided that they should not accept the exemption from statute labour for which the Supervisory Committee regulation No. 4501 provided. This common or statute labour consisted of the work on roads, bridges, etc., which every citizen had to perform for the Gebietsamt as this was how municipal services were provided at the time. The grounds of the Kleine Gemeinde were that there was no scriptural precedent for a teacher of the gospel to receive such special privileges and also that the Kleine Gemeinde had no economic need for such exemptions. The Letter of Thanks of the Ministerial of the Kleine Gemeinde dated August 22, 1843, explains the situation:

**From the Ministerial of the Mennonite Kleinen Gemeinde in the Molotschna to the Gebietsamt at Halbstaedt.**

"Pursuant to the publication by the commendable Gebietsamt of the Colonies by virtue of Sub. No. 2587, of the gracious decision of His Eminence the Lord Minister of Domains regarding our worship services, and providing that they can be held in private homes until the erection of a house of prayer: Which was imparted to us by His Excellence the Lord Acting Supervisor-General of the Colonists of South Russia State Councillor and Knight von Hahn. We feel compelled to deliver our due thanks to our treasured superiors and also our higher authorities: Also to the Gebietsamt as well as the Society which is our well meaning promoter, not alone in this regard but also in many other matters. These we acknowledge on behalf of our Gemeinde.

"The warning and publication regarding the extending of the privileges of other Gemeinden and ministers to the Kleine Gemeinde similarly testifies anew to the impartiality of your nature and the noblemindedness of your truth-loving hearts. As we believe that the participants may possibly be more than we are aware of, we hereby wish to extend our imperfect thanks to each and everyone with this writing. Although given lovingly, our thanks is as nothing and is also worthless. But we know that you await the greatest remuneration only after this life, in accordance with Matthew 10, 40, and 42.

"But my dearest beloved, there is one of these privileges with which you so goodheartedly intend to benefit us, which we would gladly decline. Namely, that you have also excluded us from the existing regulations regarding common labour (Reichendeinst) like the ministers of other Gemeinden. But for us, we do well to look into such matters in accordance with; 1 Peter 5, 2; Matthew 5; Corinthians 9, 18; and 2 Corinthians 11, 7. Not that we do not have the authority but rather that we thereby create a hindrance for the Gospel of Christ. 1 Corinthians 9. If we were in poverty and indigence, or suffering tribulation and persecution, there is a degree of freedom allowed in such instances. But we have our land and income like another, we live in good repose and freedom of conscience, in such blessed times, and we have our sufficiency so richly. For these reasons we do hereby completely decline this well intentioned offer for the present time.

"At the same time we bid you not to take offence at us in this regard nor to think that we hereby mean to be disrespectful of the arrangements made during the difficult settlement years. Oh, no! For how very well I still remember the circumstances of some, and of how they not only came to Russia without any property but had also emigrated to Russia with great debts, and in addition had large families to nourish, and little profitable work. Consequently this arrangement was very reasonable and correct for those in such circumstances who were simultaneously to take up a position in the Ministerial (Lehrdeinst).

"But which is not the case with us at the present time, and possibly there are a good number of farmers (Wirthen) to be found in the colonies, for whom the (Reichendeinst) statute labour would be more difficult than for ours. Accordingly we hereby express our wish to rather remain with the previous arrangement. Otherwise we recognize ourselves to be obligated for all our thanks, and subscribe hereto in the name Kleine Gemeinde, by which we are known."

"The Ministerial (Lehrdeinst): Aeltester Abraham Friesen.  
Ministers (Lehrer): Heinrich Balzer, Peter Penner, Klaas Friesen, Johan Friesen. Deacons: Isaac Loewen and Klaas Reimer (Jr.). Colony Blumstein, the 22nd of August, 1843."

On October 24, 1843, the ministerial forwarded another letter to the Verein in Orloff in further support of their petition and in the hope that Johan Cornies would once more exercise his influence



on their behalf.

“To the Chairman of the Molotschna Mennonite Society for the Advancement of Agriculture and Trade, Johan Cornies. From the Ministerial of the Kleinen Gemeinde.

“Under date the 22nd of the previous month we have submitted a Petition to the Gebietsamt in Halbstaedt with the request that our ministers would not be excluded from the statute or common labour as this might be somewhat contrary to our conscience. As we have not yet received the response of the Gebietsamt to our Petition, and since we are more and more convinced in accordance with the gospel that such a privilege would disturb our conscience we direct ourselves to you, most honoured chairman, with the request that together with the Gebietsamt you might be helpful to us in this matter in order that we would not be excluded from the statute labour. We have been unable to find any trace that ministers of our confession since the very time of the apostles have previously allowed themselves to be favoured in this manner when there was not a need for the same. Nor can we find that they have accepted any advantage from their ministry. Ezekiel 22, 30.

“We would regard it as a departure for our Gemeinde if we would accept the same. We would have to regard it as a disgraceful gain for ourselves, 1 Peter 5, 2. When we consider our well-being and simultaneously recognize that our Saviour did not possess any land or property, nor even as much that he had a place on which to lay his own head, Matthew 8, 20. He taught freely and said ‘freely ye have received, give also freely’. Matthew 10, 8. Even the holy apostles occupied themselves day and night with much labour and work, and their own hands served them for their necessities and for those who were with them. 1 Corinthians 4, 11. Accordingly we do nothing greater when we also decline the providence which has been offered to us. We bid that you also grant us your favourable consideration in this matter, and herewith await a favourable decision. From the ministerial of the Kleinen Gemeinde.

Aeltester Abraham Friesen, Ministers Heinrich Balzer, Peter Penner, Klaas Friesen, and Johan Friesen. Deacons Isaac Loewen and Klaas F. Reimer. October 24th, 1843.

The decision of the Gebietsamt and Agricultural Society was issued on November 24, 1843. The verdict was a polite but firm denial. Here follows decree number 823 of the Society which provides as follows:

“To the Ministerial of the Kleinen Gemeinde

“In response to the petition of your Ministerial (Kleinen Gemeinde) of October 24 of this year, that the ministers of the Kleinen Gemeinde not be excluded from the general requirement of statute labour. I presented this matter at the October 5th sitting of the Gebietsamt in order to determine their opinion in that regard. Whereupon they have declared that no further declaration will be issued in this matter which will remain to be governed by the general regulations and policy already in force.”

This I report to you with friendly greetings.

Chairman, “Johann Cornies”.

The position of the Kleine Gemeinde in this matter is noteworthy in view of the fact that Mennonite thrift so often becomes common greed in the absence of the evangelical teaching of community of sharing. This episode provides an important contrast to the relentless pursuit of land and wealth which became so common among the Molotschna Mennonites. As such this also illustrates the endeavour of Aeltester Abraham Friesen to lead his flock in the way of the Cross in all their daily life and endeavour. These petitions also provide a rare insight into the financial circumstances of the Kleine Gemeinde at the time, through the admission that their ministers had little need for special exemptions.

It should also be mentioned that Johan Cornies issued another decree number 822 on November 24th, 1843 in which he advised that His Excellence the Lord General President of the Supervisory Committee of the Colonists of South Russia had finally issued his instructions regarding the matter of a house of worship for the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. His ruling was that such construction be undertaken, but he did not require that the same proceed at once. He also stipulated that the Gemeinde should take time in order to first take counsel in the matter.

### 16.15 Declaration respecting Baptism, 1843.

Reference has already been made to the problems which could arise when someone who was not a Mennonite by birth became converted and wished to become a member of one of the Mennonite Gemeinden in the Molotschna. The Russian legal system provided special privileges and obligations for its various classes of people which included the nobility, various groups of common people and peasants with little more than slave status, etc. The Mennonite world with its special Privilegium was created within this multicultural fabric. In the case of Michael Makowski who had joined the Kleine Gemeinde it seems that he was allowed to live within the Molotschna Mennonite Colony. However, confusion existed as to how best to deal with the problem of absorbing such converts to the faith into a separate legal system and society.

The issue came to a head in 1843 when Aeltester Peter Schmidt in Waldheim baptized a young Lutheran youth by the name of Peter Penner and also received him into his Gemeinde. The matter apparently was so contentious that eventually Johan Cornies became involved in an attempt to settle the policy matters involved. In his typically thorough fashion Johan Cornies requested an opinion of all seven of the Mennonite Aeltesten in the Molotschna at the time. In his **Sammlung . . . Zur Historie der Kleinen Gemeinde** Aeltester Peter Toews has noted that on July 10, 1843, Johan Cornies had referred the question to all the Aeltesten but for some reason the request was not received by the Aeltesten minister of the Kleine Gemeinde. Consequently Johann Cornies later forwarded the request to Abraham Friesen together with copies of all the correspondence which had already taken place with the other Aeltesten. Here follows a copy of the letter of Johan Cornies to Aeltester Abraham Friesen:

"From the Chairman of the Molotschna Mennonite Society for the advancement of Agriculture and Trade on September 15th, 1843. No. 630. Colony of Orloff:

"To the Honourable Church Aeltester Abraham Friesen in Blumstein.

"On the 10th of this past month of July, I issued No. 477 and No. 478 the enclosed writing to the Church Aeltesten in the Molotschna Mennonite Bezirk. I have been informed that these writings did not come into your hand and as a consequence I feel obligated to forward the same to you with the intention and request that you provide me with your opinion with respect to the contents of the same. I also request that your reply be officially submitted by the first of October of this year. As this situation is of the greatest importance I also send you copies of all the correspondence which has been conducted to date with the six other Aeltesten in this matter. These are sent to you as copies for the purpose of preserving the same. My original request is document No. 1 and the response of the Aeltesten to the same is No. 2. Then my further writing is No. 3 and the reply of the five Aeltesten thereto is No. 4. And the response of the Kirchen-convent of the Orloeffler and Petershagenaer Gemeinde are No. 5. At the same time I also advise you that upon receipt of the response which you will give to my inquiry No. 1, I will be obligated by this protocol to forward a copy to all of the other Aeltesten for their records.

Johan Cornies"

Here follows the text of the original inquiry to all the Aeltesten in which Johan Cornies poses the problem and outlines what he perceives to be the issue. This is document No. 1 referred to above:

"To all the Aeltesten of the Molotschna Mennonite Bezirk:

"On the 7th of this month the Church Aeltester Peter Schmidt from Waldheim attended at my place and advised me that pursuant to an expressed desire he had baptised and received into his Gemeinde, a colonist who was recorded in the Mariopolschen Bezirk according to the revision. Immediately thereafter I received a letter from the Mennonite Johan Schmidt from the colony of Ruckenau who made inquiries of me in this regard and whom I gave the following answer: That according to the present law it was open for evangelical Lutherans as well as unconverted to come over to the Mennonites but without thereby simultaneously extending the privileges of the Mennonites to the same. Legally the colonists remain recorded as such and at the same time they also remain bound to perform all the obligations of the colonists.

"The foregoing resolution of mine is based on a regulation respecting spiritual matters of the most honourable minister issued in the year 1822. The same also contains the addition that in each and every changeover from one party to the other a detailed report must be submitted to the authorities as soon as the same is complete. A great disorder will definitely develop from the receiving of colonists into the Mennonite brotherhood. For when these people through marriage will in turn have male descendants, the same will remain in the status of a colonial. Nor will they be able to own any land in the Mennonite districts. Rather these people will much more be subject to being transferred about through passes. Therefore under no circumstances will an Aeltester be allowed to approve the receiving of such a member on his own. Rather all the Gemeinden together must provide their approval for the same. The matter will also have to be examined beforehand by the Society and the Gebietsamt as to whether such a one will also be assured of some other means of support in case of future difficulties.

"In accordance with my duty I hereby submit this matter to all the Church Aeltesten to intensively consider and examine the consequences of the same and to make a decision as to whether they are all in agreement with the Aeltester Peter Schmidt that the referenced youth from Mariopol should be received into the Molotschna Gemeinden. In which case all the Aeltesten shall notify the Gebietsamt to make the further arrangements which are legally necessary. And in any event that you oblige by advising me of the results no later than the 20th of this month.

"Colony Orloff, the 10th day of July, 1843. The original was signed by the Chairman of the M.M. Society for the Advancement of Agriculture and Trade. Johan Cornies.

"Certified copy from the original by Wiebe"<sup>22</sup>

The reply of Aeltester Abraham Friesen is unequivocal and without hesitation. In his response, Aeltester Friesen first outlines the Anabaptist-Mennonite view of baptism upon faith. Then he goes on to insist that if the young lad in this case has been baptized upon such a faith then he must be accepted into the Mennonite Gemeinden regardless of the consequences. Here follows his epistle:

“To the Chairman of the Molotschna Mennonite Society for the Advancement of Agriculture and Trade, Johan Cornies in Orloff.

“From the Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde.

“In the response to your writing of the 10th of July of this year to all the Aeltesten, requesting that we consider, examine and come to a decision with respect to the questionable consequences of the acceptance of a Lutheran youth by the name of Peter Penner whom the Aeltester Peter Schmidt has received into his Gemeinde by baptism. And as to whether we are all in agreement with Schmidt that the aforesaid youth could be accepted into the Molotschna Mennonite Gemeinden?

“In this regard we do not know how to declare otherwise than that if the youth has proceeded to baptism upon true repentance and renewing of the mind, Romans 12, 2, and if Aeltester Peter Schmidt has received him into the true Gemeinde of Christ in accordance with the gospel Acts 2, 38, that in that case the said youth must remain in the same. We also wish to briefly outline the fundamentals of baptism and comment with respect to which persons are to be baptized according to the teachings of our faith.

“Baptism is an evangelical act and usage constituted by God. Mark 1, 24: Baptism was first instituted by the blessed Saint John through the counsel and will of God and the highly revered Jesus Christ, the son of God, Luke 7, 30, who submitted himself as a true example and received baptism, Matthew, 3, 11 and 16. Jesus Christ is also the true baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire of whom John the apostle has born witness, John 3, 11 and 16. With complete power in Heaven and on earth this Jesus has gone out from God and come to earth and has sent out his apostles with the commandment to preach his gospel to all the nations, Matthew 28, 19; Mark 16, 15 and Romans 10, 17, and to baptize all those who consider the gospel to be worthy and who truly believe in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, and also to teach them that both before as well as after the baptism they are to live out everything which He has commanded unto them. Matthew 28, 17.

“As obedient servants the apostles were able to follow the same in every respect and made a first beginning at Jerusalem, Acts 2, 4. Then they filled all the lands here and there with the message of the gospel, 1 Corinthians 4, 16, Luke 24, 47, and all those who heard, believed, and eagerly accepted this heavenly teaching were made into disciples and followers in the name of the Holy Trinity of God and baptized with water, and thereby united with Christ to practice all His commandments. Matthew 28, 20.

“The teachings and commandments of Christ were not merely instituted for a certain time period but were constituted in order that they be kept until the appearance of Christ Jesus from Heaven. 1 Timothy 6, 14. Likewise He wishes to remain with those in the spirit who follow His commandments until the end of the world shall come, Matthew 28, 20. All believers and disciples are obligated not to change nor to disparage in anyway the teachings and regulations which emanate from the commandments of God, no matter how good their intentions may be. Deuteronomy 12, 8; and Chapter 4, 2. Rather, they are to remain steadfast in the same according to the ways and ordinances of Christ and the practices of His highly enlightened apostles. And in accordance with these teachings to preach the gospel to all people and to demonstrate repentance and conversion and submission to the will of God to all those who believe in the same. Acts 10, 42. And these shall be baptized once with water in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost by an unpunishable servant ordained for that purpose. Matthew 28, 20.

“But in the final end this outwardly baptism is not our entry into the Kingdom of God. Galatians 3, 24. Nor does this determinable element have any might or holiness inherent in itself. 1 Peter 1, 21. It is also impossible that any grace or salvation can emanate therefrom, just as neither the leprosy nor the blindness could be healed by the waters of the Jordan or the pool at Siloam, 2 Kings 2, 14 and John 5, 9, but rather only through the power of God to which they were being submissive and obedient by so doing. Luke 8, 46.

“Likewise the water in the baptism has no power of itself to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from the impurities of our flesh, 1 Peter 3, 21, but is only the evidence and a sign of the grace and blood of Christ in the washing away of our sins, Acts 22, 16, which the sinner has received into his heart through faith and the rebirth and that through grace before the baptism, Ephesians 2, 8, by the putting away of the sinful man in the flesh which is publicised by baptism. John 1, 12; Colossians 2, 11. Without this inward baptism through the Holy Spirit and the fire the outward and determinable water baptism is like unto the sealing of an empty letter, void and in vain. Romans 2, 28.

The baptism of Christ is constituted so that it is only ordained and commanded by Christ upon faith, repentance and regeneration. His eminent apostles, who have followed Him have neither taught nor served in any other manner. Accordingly all other baptism

is therefore quite properly rejected including not only the baptism of young innocent children but also that of unpenitent, proud and fleshly-minded adults who do not believe in the word. Romans 8, 8. From the *Martyr's Mirror*. N. Bene.

"Thus, if this frequently mentioned colonist youth has received the baptism in the manner referenced, then he is already in the Gemeinde of God and is an epistle of Christ which is recognized and read by all people. But if he has proceeded to baptism without faith, without penitence and without a new and regenerated life then he is void of all spiritual virtue just like an empty letter, and the one who has baptized him has not dealt wisely, having acted in the manner of one who seals an empty letter and forwards the same to his Lord whom he is to honour and obey. One can well imagine the honour which is put in store by such a one." *Nota Bene*.

"Thus far from an imperfect menial servant of the gospel of the Lord. Colony Schoenau on the 8th of October, 1843. "Aeltester Abraham Friesen"<sup>23</sup>

## 16.16 Declaration with respect to the Ban, 1843.

In his 1845 *Einfache Erklarung* (See Chapter 15), Aeltester Abraham Friesen explains what a heartfelt blow it was to them when the other Mennonite groups in the Molotschna at the time did not recognize as valid their excommunication of disobedient and godless members. Having first explained the scriptural basis for the discipline of love, Aeltester Friesen points out that this disregard for the evangelical ban by other groups such as the *Grosze Gemeinde* of Aeltester Jakob Warkentin seriously prejudiced the beneficial effects which such a separation was to have. It seems that in such instances the other *Gemeinden* would receive the recalcitrant ones and comfort them and encourage them in their ways by blaming the *Kleine Gemeinde* for being too strict, unjust, etc. Nevertheless the *Kleine Gemeinde* determined that it was their holy duty to continue the evangelical practices instituted by the scripture and that the *Grosze Gemeinde* would have to give its own account for these actions.

With the influx of the pietist-Mennonite *Gnadenfeld* and *Rudnerwiede* groups, *Molotschna* society became more pluralistic. In time, it came to pass that the non-recognition of the ban and baptism of others was also practiced against other Mennonite groups. In fact it was the pietist-Mennonite *Gemeinden* among themselves which were unable to recognize the ban instituted by the other. Thus it had happened that Aeltester Peter Schmidt of *Waldheim* had accepted into his *Gemeinde* four members of the *Gnadenfeld Gemeinde* who were under the ban. It appears that such actions were of great concern to the Supervisory Committee which felt that such practices unduly disturbed the peace of the community. Although historically both the *Waldheim* and *Gnadenfeld* groups had evolved from the Old Flemish this had apparently lost its significance by this time as the groups now seemingly differed in various aspects of the species and form of pietism which they had adopted.

The matter caused so much friction in the *Molotschna* that the Russian colonial authorities requested Johan Cornies to deal with the same. Consequently Johan Cornies again sought to obtain a consensus with the Aeltesten of all the Mennonite *Gemeinden* in the *Molotschna* at the time. In order to achieve this Johan Cornies referred the question to the Aeltesten with a writing as follows:

### "To all the Church Aeltesten of the Molotschna Mennonite District No. 477.

"The duties of my office and the seriousness of the circumstances demand from me that I can no longer desist from urgently requiring an official report from all the Aeltesten by no later than July 20th. In so doing I have no intention of infringing upon the office of these Aeltesten nor of interfering with them in the slightest. Much more I rather seek to honour the same.

"The question is whether it is permitted by the teachings of the Mennonite faith and church discipline: That when members of one *Gemeinde* disturb their brotherhood through evil and the pursuit of revenge and for that reason are put in the ban: That an Aeltester from another *Gemeinde* would have the authority to receive such individuals who are under the ban into their *Gemeinde* without any further inquiry and then to free such persons from the ban. And must such a dealing be recognized as valid by the Aeltesten and brethren of other *Gemeinden*: So that in accordance with the teachings of the Mennonite faith and their practices, members who have been received in this manner are to be regarded as penitent and remorseful and as to whether brotherly association may be had with the same?

"The occasion for this inquiry was given to me by the dealings of the Church Aeltester Peter Schmidt of the *Gemeinde* at *Waldheim*. According to the evidence of the written complaints and also according to what Aeltester Peter Schmidt has himself personally told me in my own dwelling: He has received four persons into his *Gemeinde* as regular members who had been put under the ban by the Church *Gemeinde* in *Gnadenfeld*.

"On the part of the government such dealings are judged and punished as being most harmful for the well-being and prosperity of a human society which can bring disastrous

consequences in their wake. But are such unlawful dealings really allowed by the fundamentals of the Mennonite Confession of Faith and practices of the Church? And can such an Aeltester continue to exercise the powers of his office and remain unpunished?

“After I have received the written notifications of all the Aeltesten in this respect, I am duty bound to inform the Supreme Supervisory Committee of the Foreign Colonists in Russia of the precedents and to ask for further instructions upon which to establish a basis as to the general measures which can be enacted should a similar disruption of the well-being and regulation of the household again arise in the future. Which disruptions are highly detrimental to the advancement of industry and the general well-being.

“The 10th day of July, 1843. The original was subscribed to by the Chairman of the Molotschna Mennonite Society for the Advancement of Agriculture and Trade. Johan Cornies. Certified a true copy by Wiebe”.<sup>24</sup>

The reply of Aeltester Abraham Friesen provides an excellent example of Anabaptist-Mennonite scholarship at this time. It demonstrates that for the Kleine Gemeinde the period under consideration can truly be regarded as a golden one. Here follows the “Declaration with respect to discipline”, by Abraham Friesen:

“To the Chairman of the Molotschna Mennonite Society for the Advancement of Agriculture and Trade. Johan Cornies in Orloff.

“From the Aeltester of the Kleinen Gemeinde.

“In response to your writing of July 10th under Number 477 to all the Aeltesten, we feel the heartfelt compulsion to allow this our simple declaration to be issued to the honoured Chairman. From your writing we can perceive your love and zeal for the fundamentals of the teachings of the Mennonite faith and that in as much as is within your power you are inwardly committed to preserving the same. Consequently you require reasons and explanations from all the Aeltesten with respect to such an excommunication.

“Accordingly we shall herewith seek to briefly set forth our teaching with respect to the ban. Although we do not want to mix ourselves in the dealings of other Aeltesten and even less to judge the same as we are not united with them in either fellowship or association: Nor do we wish to count ourselves among those who would seek to glorify themselves: Nor do we want to honour ourselves because of having a foreign object for our work. Or for the fact that a foreign standard is being prepared. But only in accordance with the measure of the rule which God has distributed unto us, a measure which should also reach even unto us. 2 Corinthians 10, 12.

“Just as a house or city cannot subsist if it does not have doors, portals and walls, through which the evil men can be driven out and locked out—but into which the good and the virtuous can be received, subsisted, and protected—Christ has given His Gemeinde the keys to Heaven for its protection which is His word, Matthew 18, 18 and 16, 19. John 20, 23, in order that His Gemeinde through and in accordance with the Word would judge and punish all those which belong under its fellowship and who are found to have been offensive, 2 Corinthians 10, 8 and 12, 10.

“Namely if they have conducted themselves against the commandments and ordinances of God which He has given to His Gemeinde, Romans 16, 17, that you might judge and punish in the truth for their betterment and thereby separate the disobedient from your fellowship in order that through such false teachings and impure practices the Gemeinde would not also become completely soured, spotted, and a partaker of their sins, 1 Corinthians, Chapter 5, whereby the pious might also have to be afraid of doing such evil, 1 Timothy 5, 20.

“This punishment is to be exercised in the same manner as the punishment which God had commanded through Moses to be exercised against the offenders in accordance with the seriousness of the sins. Leviticus 5, 17. Whereby those who through carelessness, weakness, and the like, have gone astray in keeping the commandments of the Lord in some trivial matter, were able to be reconciled through all manner of sacrifices and entreaties of the priests. Numbers 15, 30. In contrast, those who over-stepped the law in offenses which were very serious could not be reconciled through such a sacrifice and rather had to die without compassion through the mouth of two or three witnesses. Deuteronomy 7, 10.

“Likewise Christ has taught in the New Testament that Christian discipline be exercised according to the seriousness of the offence and not unto the ruination of men. Luke 9, 56. Similarly the punishment of the Israelites was fulfilled through the penalty of death whereby the one who was punished was robbed of repentance and regeneration. Luke 19, 10. But when Christ arrived to save the human soul he instituted and ordained such a punishment for the renewal of the sinner so that if anyone should sin against his brother in such a way that it could be demonstrated to be a sin but not so gross that death was thereby born in him that one should then mediate between them out of a Christian spirit which loves his soul, and to admonish him with the word of God and direct his sins before his eyes, and to punish him for the same.

“If he has an ear for such a Christlike admonishment then you have won a brother. Sirach 19, 19; Leviticus 19, 17; 1 Peter 4, 8. And if out of love you must fall silent and cover up his sin because he has no ears for your admonishments, then the same must be also done by two or three so that all matters will subsist in the witness of two or three mouths. James 5, 10; Deuteronomy 17, 11. If he also declines to hear these, then the matter must be referred to the Gemeinde, in which all the members are judges. The brotherhood must be informed. 2 Corinthians 10, 6 and 2, 7.

“If through the manifest works of the flesh anyone shall have come to a fall from which sin the Gemeinde has perceived that the sinner has separated himself from God, Galatians 5, 19; Isaiah 59, 2, and has drawn the wrath of God upon his own neck. 1 Corinthians 5, 3: In such a case the brotherhood of the Gemeinde should be advised because of his sins without the preliminary admonishment and warning and here he should be directed towards penitence and renewal, 2 Corinthians 2, 7, through which he can again find grace as readily as he separated himself from God through the works of the flesh. 2 Corinthians 10, 8 and 1 Corinthians 5, 4.

“The Gemeinde shall not knowingly suffer anyone to remain in its fellowship who has separated himself from God through sin. Isaiah 59, 2. Nor is anyone to be separated from the Gemeinde who has not previously separated himself from God through his own sins. James 5, 16. Nor should the Gemeinde again receive someone and attribute life and peace to them unless they in faith and repentance have first been accepted by God in grace. John 15, 16; 1 Corinthians 2, 9; Philippians 1, 12; Ezekiel 13, 19.

“True repentance has the following attributes. Firstly, that one carries an all powerful heartfelt remorse from God regarding his past sins. Matthew 3, 8. Secondly, that the sinner confesses his sins before God and man from the heart. Thirdly, that the sinner will cease from his sin and the doing of more of the same and in accordance with his means seek to atone for past evil with virtue. Psalm 51, 5: Which repentance and regeneration again openeth the entry into the Kingdom of God, 2 Peter 1, 11, which was locked for him because of his sins. 2 Corinthians 2, 12. So that the Gemeinde of God is only acknowledging that which has already taken place from God in Heaven through his word, Numbers 12, 15, which the Gemeinde through its action is merely making public and bringing into the open.

“There is no respect of person with God, Romans 2, 11; Deuteronomy 10, 17, and therefore the Gemeinde shall also use this key of the word of God correctly, 2 Chronicles 9, 7. No one is to be spared from this punishment be it a minister, a brother, man or wife. Yes, large or small, all are to be judged in truth by the law and standard of the Word of God. John 19, 19. Deuteronomy 1, 14. Just as one with the approval of the Gemeinde reports all disobedient sinners to the brotherhood with remorse and a heartfelt sadness, and directs the sinner towards penitence and renewal, John 12, 48; 1 Corinthians 5, 3, in the same manner all the penitent and obedient sinners with the approval and endorsement of the Gemeinde shall again be received into the Gemeinde through the Aeltester, 2 Corinthians 2, 8; 1 Corinthians 5, 2; 1 Corinthians 2, 9. And just as one endeavours to rejoice over the lost sheep, penny, or prodigal son, the believers and all the angels of God shall rejoice over the penitence and return of one brother or sister who was lost. Luke 15, 5; Luke 15, 10; John 5, 24.

“I hope that the foregoing will be sufficient in order for you to conclude therefrom how a Christlike excommunication and reacceptance is to be dealt with according to the Word of God and the teachings of the Mennonite faith. And accordingly I, imperfect servant of the gospel of our Lord Jesus, hereunto subscribe my name. Colony Schoenau, on the 8th of October, 1843. Aeltester Abraham Friesen.”<sup>25</sup>

### 16.17 An explanation to the Agricultural Society, 1844.

One of the most frequent criticisms made against the Russian-Mennonite groups who endeavoured to live out the evangelical faith of their forefathers, was that their piety was a cold and legalistic formalism. This is the issue addressed by Aeltester Abraham Friesen and three members of his ministerial in this letter entitled “An explanation to the Agricultural Society,” dated January 23, 1844. It seems that the critics of the Kleine Gemeinde are just as active as they were some 30 years previous. Someone has spread the gossip about the Kleine Gemeinde to the effect that their members were required to stay within certain restrictions in the construction of their buildings.

Of course the Kleine Gemeinde stressed that the hearts of their members should not dwell on the building of expensive homes which were elaborately furnished and embellished. This was also the position of all the Anabaptist-Mennonite writers and theologians since the days of Menno Simons. With the increasing secularization and rising prosperity during the 1830's and 1840's, this became an important issue as it became the style among the approximately forty per cent of the Molotschna population who were still landowners at this time, to construct elaborate cornices and gables on their homes and to paint them in all manner of colours.

The Kleine Gemeinde felt that such endeavours—no doubt often by people who had to borrow the funds for such extravagances—signified that their hearts were not solely concentrated on the service of their Lord and Master. Instead, the Kleine Gemeinde laid greater emphasis on mutual aid, helping the poor and needy, treating their employees justly and with compassion, etc. As was to be expected, by so doing they attracted the criticism that this was only the result of a legalistic and invalid works-righteousness, and that they were anti-cultural neanderthals. In a letter to the Society, Aeltester Friesen explains the Anabaptist-Mennonite position on this point.

“To the esteemed Chairman of the Molotschna Mennonite Society for the Advancement of Agriculture and Industry, Johan Cornies, in Orloff. From the ministerial of the Kleinen Gemeinde.

“With respect to your writing of the 13th of this month, No. 51, we declare to you the unadulterated truth that from our part there are no governing regulations in our Gemeinde whereby an onus is im-

posed on our members as a religious requirement: Whereby under the pain of punishment our members are prohibited from constructing houses out of kilned bricks where the cornices project out from the building. And it is even less so that such prohibitions have been openly promulgated in the sermons during our worship services and endorsed with references out of the Holy Scripture.

"As evidence of this we note the case of Heinrich Koop in the settlement of Landskrone who was counselled and encouraged by the ministerial to build his dwelling house according to the regulations and wishes of our most benevolent authorities and who also built in accordance with these requirements free of all hindrance on the part of the Gemeinde. And P.H. of Blumstein had built his house of kilned bricks and with cornices where the beams are concealed. He later came over to our Gemeinde but not once has he been spoken to about this situation. Nor was this in any way considered to be a forbidden and strongly emphasized evil which would hinder his acceptance into our Gemeinde as would have been the case had there been such a law in our Gemeinde.

"Our Gemeinde earnestly holds that all regulations of the authorities be strictly and fully complied with willingly and without murmur by the members of our Gemeinde, unless we have an unequivocal and convincing ground in the Holy Scriptures and the testimony of our venerable forefathers that such regulations are in conflict with our conscience. Therefore we consider it to be an essential obligation that before any new provision is adopted and instituted as a general regulation that all of us in fellowship are duty bound to first examine the matter with the Gemeinde in accordance with the Holy Scripture and to compare the same with the witnesses of our venerable forefathers. This is necessary so that we would not unwisely affix ourselves to a position merely on our own opinion: And so that we would not enforce such self-righteousness through the authority of the Gemeinde.

"On the other hand, there are also matters where through the grace of God we are firmly convinced in accordance with the Holy Scripture and our most fundamental solemn vows that the same is the Holy Will of our righteous God. In these cases, in contrast to the foregoing, we do not believe that the same in any way is merely our own word and merely our teaching and accordingly every Gemeinde member united with us is bound and obligated to gladly and willingly carry the mild gentle yoke of Jesus which each member has adopted of their own free will, and each member must remain at the battle stations which are prescribed for us by his word. In accordance with this obligation it is incumbent upon us to admonish, threaten and punish in our tolerance and teaching, all the members of our Gemeinde who abandon their posts.

"In our sermons at public gatherings as well as other opportunities, we earnestly and without exception also rebuke all vices and passions which would make us vile and wretched in the most holy eyes of God. Among which we perceive pride to be the foremost underlying motivation of all sin. Therefore we occasionally rebuke all prominent luxury articles of the Mennonites of our Gemeinden in our sermons.

"Some two years ago it also occurred in this regard that a pair of our members in Lindenau were admonished at an open brotherhood meeting because of similar indulgences in respect to which they had for some time already felt offended by the Gemeinde. Therefore they were censured and punished in accordance with the Holy Scripture with respect to various points. With this instruction among other things, there was also talk of unnecessary embellishments with which they finished their newly constructed dwelling houses. Among which coincidentally we made mention of the cornices as we held to the view that the construction was better and more durable if the building was the other way with the beams projecting. And that these could be regarded as unnecessary adornments for which they were raising a preference which originated from their own desires. For there was no general hard and fast rule prescribed by our authorities that the houses were to be constructed in this manner. Furthermore that we are not to try to equal the world but rather that we continue ourselves among the lowly.

"In this manner these matters are merely coincidentally rebuked in our ministry. And in no way is it the case as declared above that these matters have been instituted in the Gemeinde as firm rules based on the Holy Scripture the breach of which would result in the application of the ban. For if this was the case we would not be able to allow matters to stand where these matters are commanded by the higher authorities.

"Most honoured Mr. Chairman. This is our candid declaration with respect to your gracious inquiry to this ministerial. It grieves us deeply that, in addition to the endeavours which you make on behalf of the improvement of our enterprises, you have also been burdened in this regard. Nevertheless we comfort ourselves with the full assurance of your continuing faithful affection towards our Gemeinde as has also been the case in the past. We await your gracious recognition of our best interest in this respect for which we have truly felt bound in heartfelt thanks until the present time."

Colony Muntau, on the 23rd day of January, 1844.

"Aeltester Abraham Friesen, Ministers Heinrich Balzer and Klaas Friesen and Deacon Isaac Loewen." <sup>26</sup>

## 16.18 Discipleship and Discipline, 1845.

Discipline is a necessary element of discipleship. The soldier of the cross must dispose himself to the dictates and commands of the spiritual kingdom. The function and purposes of evangelical discipline have already been discussed. (See Section 16.16). God had chosen to build his earthly spiritual kingdom with weak and imperfect mortals and he also chose the same means with which to discipline

and purify his church. This function was performed by the members of the Gemeinde assembled as a corporate body. The Aeltester and the ministerial acted as an executive committee in identifying disciplinary cases and in recommending as to their disposition.

This section will consider three short Epistles dealing with actual disciplinary matters from the year 1845.<sup>27</sup> The **Letter to a Fallen Sister** illustrates the procedures taken to initiate the disciplinary process. After all pastoral counselling had failed a formal notice was issued with a summons to attend the meeting of the brotherhood where the matter was to be dealt with. The **Letter to a Separated Brother** illustrates the rare case of someone who refused to accept the disciplinary action which had been enacted. The letter consists of a loving admonition by the Aeltester seeking to persuade the fallen one to reconsider his position. It illustrates the type of situation where the Gemeinde felt it necessary to implement the ban. The **Letter to the Wife of a Separated Brother** discusses the need for the exercise of marital avoidance in a case where one spouse was excommunicated. Although this was the practice of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde it must be noted that there were other branches of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith who felt equally strongly that marital avoidance should not be practiced.<sup>27a</sup>

—ONE—

#### **A Letter to a Fallen Sister, 1845.**

“To Katherina Regehr in Halbstaedt.

“Johan Dueck has presented your report to us in Muntau. We have seen from the same that in your mind you have completely separated yourself from the Gemeinde. In certain respects this is also your free choice, for the Lord says, ‘Behold I set before you the way of life and the way of death’, Jeremiah 21, 8. And Sirach says, ‘God himself hath made man from the beginning and gave him his choice’. He does not say, you must. Rather he says, ‘If you will, to keep the commandments, and to perform the acceptable faithfulness. He hath set fire and water before thee; stretch forth thy hand unto whether thou wilt.’ Ecclesiastes 15, 14-17.

“In addition there are the following circumstances in which you are still bound to the Gemeinde. First, that as a member of our Gemeinde you have haughtily departed from our Gemeinde in pride and for this you must come to our consideration. Second, you have not provided any reason why you wish to forsake the Gemeinde. And third, nor do you inform us whether you are committing yourself unto another Gemeinde. Consequently you continue in our responsibility.

“Therefore we hereby serve you notice that within fourteen days hereof, you provide us with a written testimonial from the Aeltester to whom you are committing yourself; Or that you present yourself before the brethren in Muntau in fourteen days from today, June 10th, where your matter will be presented to the brethren. Failing either of the foregoing, the matter regarding your circumstances will be dealt with and completed in any event.”

Blumstein, May 27th, 1845

“Aeltester Abraham Friesen”.

—TWO—

#### **A Letter to a Separated Brother.**

“My good friend. I.B. in R.:

“I am returning your letter of December 27, 1845, with the heartfelt wish that you might want to revoke and take back the spirit contained therein for we cannot find that the same agrees with the Holy Scripture. I would have returned the same to you with a decision some time ago but I had always hoped that eventually you would come to another conclusion in this matter. The fact that you are an older man also made it hard for me to put you under inquiry and to admonish you. Leviticus 19, 32 and 1 Timothy 5, 1. The matter with both of you brothers became so difficult and protracted, so that you were unable to achieve a true comprehension of the same. Consequently I have exerted myself to draw your attention to your letter, which in my opinion does not accord with the truth and instead contests the truth. In your letter you relate of the circumstances of your disposition and your depression in your senior years.

“Alas, my beloved. Had this been a heart that was weary and heavy laden, Matthew 11, 28, and had it been a Godly sorrow, the same would have worked repentance unto salvation, 2 Corinthians 7, 10, so that you could have been reaccepted into the Gemeinde a long time ago. But your discouragement has had exactly the opposite effect. The repentance unto salvation would have renewed the confidence of your wife and children in the Gemeinde, and would have persuaded them with joy and tears of love but your discouragement has transplanted them into fear and terror that you might depart from your senses or perhaps even shorten your life. Oh, what a perverse generation and an unclean spirit. Luke 9, 41-42. I am also afraid of the truth of the second verse of song number 95 and that the bondage which you are in evokes such manifold groanings within you.

“Whereupon you immediately assert that you have not yet wronged a single person since the time of your youth. Ah, this is quite a lot to say for all the years of manhood. But then you added to this, ‘since the time of my youth’. What do you think of yourself? How does this agree with John when he says, ‘If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us’. 1 John 1, 8. Or how does this accord with David when he says, ‘And enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified’. Psalm 143, 2. Even the holy apostle was unable



to praise himself since the days of his youth, 1 Timothy 1, 13. How much less so even ourselves, unto whom so much evil is clinging. Romans 7, 21.

"You write further, that even if you think of the night or day, week or month, and prove and reflect, you are unable to comprehend how you could also be under the ban because of the accounting mistake of your brother. As if you actually had no other knowledge of these matters? In my opinion you would have done better if you had not allowed such scornful words to be heard. Certainly you know very well that this was not the reason and that we found you and your brother to have been inaccurate in seven points when the ministerial examined you at M.B. You will also know that we very much counseled you that you earnestly reflect, recalculate, and then decide. In accordance with your desires we also allowed you time to do so. So that you could first determine everything, and convince yourself of how incorrectly you had dealt in all these seven points. Whereupon you were to present yourself before the brethren, and to acknowledge yourself in everything, from which presentation the Gemeinde was to be able to decide whether these mistakes could be forgiven, or whether they must be punished by the ban in accordance with the Word of God. But you continued to justify yourself until into the last hour, and did not confess in anything. Consequently the mistakes of your brother were not the reason for your excommunication. Rather that neither of you would allow himself to be restored, Galatians 1, 6, and that you were not obedient unto our word. 2 Thessalonians 3, 14.

"It seems that you still want to assert that the matter of the accounting was a mistake and if this in fact was the case it is most definitely forgivable. Certainly this cannot calm your conscience for it knows very well how you were made aware of this by the ministerial, and that it was completely impossible to earn so much money in so short a time. The matter with the earnings is almost like the case of a harvest for certainly every Vollwirt (full farmer) knows very well that one cannot earn more than 1300 Schosz wheat in one year. And it is equally impossible to earn 1300 Zechen (a measure of money) only with horses. What is even more amazing is that this is heard from two men who have occupied the position of Schulz for so many years where you have partaken in so many (Zechen) accountings.

"Alas, my beloved friend, if you would only allow a miserable one like myself to advise and plead with you. Do not continue your search for a scapegoat or excuse. Rather, seek penitence with God. Yes, 'Seek ye the Lord: . . . seek righteousness, seek meekness, so that ye may be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger, Zephaniah 2, 3. For you are certainly not obligated to direct yourself to another Gemeinde nor to submit petitions and complaints to every Aeltester as you are minded but far rather direct yourself penitently unto God. Depart from your proud and arrogant disposition, and lament unto God with a sorrowful heart regarding your great ruination. This will be a thousand times more beneficial for your soul, than for you to justify yourself with the other Gemeinden and Aeltesten, thereby heaping one sin upon the other. For we are still on the way, we are still in the acceptable time of grace, during which the Lord will receive penitence for our sins. 2 Corinthians 6, 2. Wisdom 12, 19. This grace continues to be available and, this also is our yearning, wish and desire for you.

"But the manner in which you and your brother are presently living is not right before God. You yourself write that it is contrary to the Word of God and the general order of things. Through this you create much shame in your family and much vexation for the Gemeinde, and much displeasure unto your house. In respect of which our beloved Savior says, 'Woe unto the man by which offense comes'. Matthew 18, 7. Behold, and so much has already arisen through you two brothers. Also that your sister-in-law has had to be separated and according to your letter you are afraid that this will also happen to your family. This cannot be any other way if they continually allow themselves to be fooled by your falsehoods and to uphold the truth for you in unrighteousness. In respect of which the wrath of God will be made manifest from the heavens, Romans 16, 18, that neither hands nor feet might be spared. Matthew 18, 8. Oh beloved brothers. Do consider what you have wrought with a righteous God. Romans 2, 5.

The Gemeinde allows the final and most urgent instrument of love to be employed for you. Which instrument has been commanded by the Holy Spirit in the Word of God and entrusted unto the Gemeinde in order that you shall be ashamed. 2 Thessalonians 3, 6-14. Alas you allow yourself to think that the separation (Meidung) is no burden for you, and that you can very well forgive them for they do not know your circumstances. I would ask you to consider whether this does not manifest a great pride and arrogance against God and his Word, as well as against the entire brotherhood not only in that you regard the separation so lightly and as being so lowly, but also that you attach the nickname 'Labyrinth' to the excommunication. You also deem yourself to be wise in your own conceits, Romans 12, 16, and all the brethren for ignorant as if they do not know your manifest offenses, or as if they blindly voted to approve a matter as serious as an excommunication completely without the spirit, without the Word of God, and without the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

"You write further, that you are not willing to inform the brethren regarding your home and your circumstances, and that it is unfortunate when the members develop mistrust against the leaders. And that you will not give freedom to your family. I do not know what I am to conclude from this for this is not what is true nor honourable. Nor is this what is righteous, proper and loving. Nor does this seem right and it is no virtue, nor is any praise to be expected therefore, Philippians 4, 8, and we must allow it to take its place as an unspiritual babbling. 1 Timothy 6, 20.

"You also write that at the time you thought that the truth would manifest itself and that therefore you had remained silent. But instead it was the time for revenge. Alas my friend. The Word of God

is truth. John 17, 7. You yourself should have realized that the same would not come to justify you in your unrighteous matter: Such as the Zechen (accounting), the dragging under of sheep, the smoking of tobacco through the nose and mouth, and more of the same. For it is not in keeping with the majesty of God to condemn anyone who has not earned the punishment, Wisdom 12, 15. Similarly it is not in keeping with the Holy Word that anyone should be justified as long as he innocently wishes to remain in his evil ways. I also believe that this is the reason why you were dumbfounded before the brethren, and there is great cause for concern whether you in fact have not fallen into the ancient example of unbelief. Hebrews 4, 11. For otherwise I would not be able to call the day of excommunication the day of revenge since it is a great instrument of love according to the holy scripture. The punishment of the flesh so that the sinner may be redeemed and that the soul may be saved. 1 Corinthians 5, 5 and 1 Timothy 1.

"Finally you also say that you have more or less examined the scripture, and that you have found therein that there were also many people at that time who had to surrender their lives in this manner, and that this is still the same earth. It is true that this is still the same world. But it is also true that the same ordinances of God still exist to punish the evildoers. Romans 13, 4. Many a one might insist that they must yield up their life on that account. But Peter says, for what glory is it, if you must sacrifice your life in your present unrepentant stand, either through the punishment of the authorities or through your natural death. For my part I pray unto God for you, together with the Apostle, Romans 10, and wish that the God of all grace would also grant you grace and repentance in order that bowed and broken you could seek forgiveness from God and also that you might receive the same. This is my heartfelt wish and desire for you. AMEN."

Thus far from me, an imperfect menial servant of my God.

"Abraham Friesen"

—THREE—

#### **A Letter to a Sister, the wife of the above I.B., a Separated Brother.**

"To the wife of I.B. whom I love in the Truth, and not alone I, but also all they who have known the truth. 2 John 1.

"I wish you much grace, comfort, hope and strength, and also a heartfelt trust in the all wise providence of God, in all your circumstances and sorrows which you must feel and experience on account of your beloved husband. It is my heartfelt wish that you would not be sorrowful in a worldly manner, but that you would experience a Godly sorrow, and that you would not receive damage by us in anything. For Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of but the sorrow of this world worketh death. 2 Corinthians 7, 9-10.

"My most beloved! You can be well persuaded that the separation of your husband took place in accordance with the testimony of the Holy Scripture and was fully correct and the same should serve not only unto his salvation but also unto yours. Just as the Apostle says in Romans chapter 8. 'And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose'. Likewise also the separation of your beloved husband. For otherwise you have taken the gentle yoke of Jesus upon yourself without murmur and doubts, Matthew 11, 29; Philippians 2, 14, and you have submitted and disposed yourself in obedience to the Word of God as is becoming of a believing wife, and this should also be your disposition with respect to your fallen spouse. Namely, that you would fully regard him in this way together with the Gemeinde, and that you would shun him in eating and drinking in all love and modesty, and also avoid spousal cohabitation in all gentleness and humility. 2 Thessalonians 3, 6 and 14. In order that without a word the man may be won by the conversation of the wives, while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. 1 Peter 3, 1-2.

"Behold my most beloved: In this manner you testify unto the world and the Gemeinde that you love Christ and his Word above all else, and that you are the worthy of him. Matthew 10, 37, and Luke 14, 26 and in addition, that you are seeking the best for your husband. For it is evident that the righteousness-working avoidance of the immediate family is the strongest discipline for the true conversion of the fallen one. In accordance with the holy scripture Menno Simons also viewed matters in this way, as you may read for yourself in the fourth chapter, third volume, page 305.

"Ah, my beloved. You have truly made matters very difficult for us, that you are so reserved towards us and withdraw yourself from us and our members. How we would rejoice with the Apostle, if only we could perceive from you that you had not taken any offense from us. 2 Corinthians 7, 9. I rejoiced greatly when I heard that you had expressed yourself somewhat at the home of Ohm Penner in Pragenau. In fact that you had come to him and had lamented to him and stated that you had obtained more confidence in the Gemeinde and that you hoped to win even more. Oh, this made me so glad for you. It was as if a stone had fallen from my heart. I hoped that your beloved husband and his brother would be the first to feel, how all the God-loving brothers and sisters in the Gemeinde were sighing (groaning) for them together with Christ. And this from the Songs of Solomon, chapter 6, 12. 'Return, return. O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon thee'. I mean that they must soon awake in order that Christ can give them light. Ephesians 5, 14. So that they would not continue to make themselves more unworthy before God and his Gemeinde.

"I have now explained how my heart was made glad for you, my most beloved, but this only continued until I noticed that you were not present at the table of the Lord whereupon my heartfelt concern for you again returned. I then asked and made inquiries regarding you, whether you had been sick, or that perhaps other circumstances had hindered you, but I have been unable to learn

of anything definite. Alas, for it causes me such very great sorrow when anyone from among our members refrains from the Lord's communion table, and when I cannot soon find out what has held them back. I am also concerned that if only I would not have been at fault for this, and that no one would have taken offense from us in anything. Particularly in the matter regarding your husband and with M.B. (the brother) which has been a great concern for you. This weighs heavily on my heart, and very few days and nights pass by that I do not have to think about this with heavy heart. I frequently search in the Holy Scripture regarding this. I prove the matter with the Confessions of Faith of venerable ministers and Aeltesten but nowhere can I find anything other than that we have dealt correctly in this matter and that we are to continue to stand firm in the faith. Yes, that we are to be manly and strong and that all our things are to be done in love. 1 Corinthians 16, 13.

"Which has also persuaded me to this writing through which you as well as both of the men may perceive that we are standing fast in one spirit and one soul with the Gemeinde and that together we are battling for the faith of the gospel, and that we are terrified in nothing by our adversaries. Philippians 1, 27. Indeed, not even the signatures of the entire village society (Dorfgemeinde), which testified for the both men contrary to the truth, can terrify us in any way. According to the Word of God we are certain in this matter. Ah, beloved woman. If only you could be of one mind in this together with the Gemeinde instead of helping our adversaries to put pillows under the arms and kerchiefs upon the heads in this most doubtful matter. Ezekiel 13, 18. Instead, rather help to tear everything apart in which they somehow seek to find support and solace so that without delay, they would finally hurry unto Jesus with their burdens and cares in search of rest for their souls and also find the same. Matthew 11.

"Alas, my beloved. For I am often concerned that you frequently encourage your husband, even if only through weakness and limited understanding. I have exerted myself to write about this matter for this reason according to the Holy Scripture and my measure of ability, so that these men might be completely persuaded if it were possible. Or that at least you, as our beloved fellow sister, would not continue to call evil good, and the good evil for the sake of pleasing your husband. Isaiah 5, 20.

"I also bid you from the heart, that you would not think that anything herein has occurred out of hatred or bitterness for you or the two brothers. Oh no! Neither at the time of separation nor in the zeal of the house of the Lord. John 2, 17; Psalm 96, 10. For we are obliged to cleanse the Gemeinde from such impurities. 2 Timothy 2, 21. Just as we are now obligated to seek for those who are lost. Luke 15, 4. Nothing from our part is to have occurred with any hatred or prejudice. Rather everything is to be done in love.

"We also bid you that you receive this from us in love and that you carry your burden with patience. Even though we wholeheartedly advise and bid you to practice avoidance as it is becoming, no lovelessness can take place through this nor be tolerated. Oh, the God of love and peace will be with you if you do so, and will crown your diligence, virtue, modesty, patience and love, with grace and blessing so that your beloved spouse may soon again be helped aright through the spirit of God, and be restored unto the fold of Christ. This unto the honour of God and to our and your great joy and salvation. Now, that this might soon occur, unto this my soul says Amen. Yes. AMEN.

"With a heartfelt greeting from my wife and myself, we and all those whose names are subscribed hereto, remain your friends, Abraham Friesen, Heinrich Balzer, Peter Penner, Klaas Friesen, Johann Friesen, Isaac Loewen and Klaas F. Reimer. Blumstein. August 5, 1845."

## 16.19 The Marriage of the Second Sister.

Mention has already been made of the Mennonite teaching against the marriage of the second sister. See Section 10.04. In this they were following the provision of Catholic canon law. In his "Letter to a Friend regarding the Marriage of the Second Sister", Aeltester Abraham Friesen considers the evangelical grounds of this position. It should be noted that the letter is addressed to Thiessen who was not a member of the Kleine Gemeinde at the time nor was his intended spouse.

"A writing to a friend regarding the marriage of the second sister".

"Most honoured friend Thiessen. Firstly, a friendly greeting together with a wish for all the best. Your mother-in-law in part gave me the reason for this writing. She loves you from the heart, but is presently deeply concerned in her spirit regarding your intention to marry the second sister. The compulsion of love also spurred me to this writing as thereby you would be made aware of what we think of such a marriage, namely to marry the sister of a deceased wife. 2 Corinthians 5, 13.

"The law says, 'Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy brother's wife: For it is thy brother's shame.' Leviticus 18, 16. By the converse this would also be forbidden to the sister. For who could find anything in the Holy Scripture to support an interpretation that what is forbidden for a brother is permissible for the woman. Especially in view of the closeness in which wedded spouses are bound together. The Lord God himself and also Christ so clearly and plainly demonstrated that man and wife were one flesh. If in fact they are one flesh then the sister of the deceased wife is also your closest blood relative, so that it would be incest to marry her. Genesis 2, 24 and Matthew 19, 5.

"My beloved friend. These are the most important grounds which I can bring forward on such short notice, that such a marriage is not allowed. If this is insufficient for anyone and if there is anyone who would say that this does not demonstrate that it is clearly and specifically forbidden by the Holy Scripture, to ~~this~~ I would reply whether there is not too much at risk for you to stake your soul on this uncertainty? For my part I would counsel and bid each and everyone with the words of the Apos-

the Peter, 'that we would pass the time of our sojourning here in fear.' 1 Peter 1, 17, in order that we do not invoke over us that which is so terribly threatened unto all the licentious offenders in Deuteronomy 27, 15-26, and in other places more.

"Man is free to marry as he please provided that it occurs in the Lord. 1 Corinthians 7, 39. But what foolishness is committed by man when he does not marry in the Lord, rather beyond the Lord and his Word? And when man does so lightheartedly and out of desperation? Which was the case with all those who have married the second sister and continues to be so. We have been given the freedom of choice among so many. Why does it have to be someone who has not been put into our choice, and who in fact has been forbidden? If one makes or commits an unintentional mistake in anything else, and becomes aware of so doing, he makes amends and once more receives forgiveness from God thereby. In Ezra, chapter 9 and 10, you may read for yourself about all the misery, sorrow and heartache brought about by such a forbidden marriage. No God fearing person taking all this to heart would want to place his soul in such danger even if there is no express prohibition. For there is certainly no express freedom for such a marriage to be found in the Holy Scripture.

"According to the ancient writings and books of two and three centuries ago, I have in fact found that light-minded and worldly people have considered such marriages to be acceptable. Romans 8, 7. But spiritually minded Aeltesten and Gemeinden have powerfully opposed such marriages with the Word of God and have punished the same with separation from the Gemeinde in which we are also agreed and wish to stand fast.

"Beloved friend. Since you are unable or unwilling to see the matter in this light, and have convinced the daughter of your mother-in-law to enter into this marriage with you, you should not be surprised if your mother-in-law or also other members of our Gemeinde will completely refrain from the engagement (Verlobungs) and wedding ceremonies. We refrain in this matter because of the commandment and not from any hatred and far more out of sorrow than displeasure. For we consider such a marriage to be impure and not of the Lord, and therefore do not want to help in the ordination of the same. For we are afraid that those who persist can have neither purity of conduct nor marriage. Wisdom 14, 24.

"Beloved friend. You can well imagine the kind of trial through which you are putting your mother-in-law and her daughter, who loves you dearly and who would otherwise wish to enter into this marriage with you, if it was not such a singular and unheard of matter among the true believers over the course of so many centuries. If only this among so many other gross errors had not infiltrated so much during these past thirty years. It would cause heartfelt pain to the mother as well as the foster parents of the daughter if they would have to give up their daughter in this way.

"Finally, I also bid you to receive this little writing from me in love which is how it is meant by me. And please regard me as an unprofitable servant of the Word of the Lord." Blumstein, October 5th, 1845. "Abraham Friesen"<sup>28</sup>

## 16.20 Einfache Erklarung, 1845.

In 1845 Aeltester Abraham Friesen published *Ein Einfache Erklarung uber einige Glaubenssaetze der sogenannten Kleinen Gemeinde*. As implied by name, this was a short dissertation regarding certain doctrinal beliefs of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. These include the following points: One, regarding the separation of the Kleinen Gemeinde in 1812. Two, regarding discipline. Three, regarding the teaching of nonresistance. Four, with respect to attendance at debaucherous and hedonist gatherings as was the case with many weddings at the time. Five, regarding prayers of blessing at the burial of those who had lived in manifest evil. Abraham Friesen concludes this book with a recommendation and encouragement to read and follow the writings of the faith. The first heading has already been set forth in section 12.03 and the second in section 15.06. The concluding comments regarding the Anabaptist-Mennonite writings will be included in chapter seven-teen. Hopefully parts four and five can be dealt with in a future volume.

This section will include part Three which deals with the principle of nonresistance. The foremost reason for the original separation of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde had been the biblical doctrine of nonresistance. The 1827 "Petition for Michael Makowsky" (see Section 16.03) and the 1833 "Letter to Kronsgarten" illustrate that the departure from this fundamental teaching of Jesus was more than a passing phase for Molotschna Mennonite society. In the *Einfache Erklarung* Aeltester Abraham Friesen confirms that so-called Mennonites are still arresting and transporting prisoners and submitting each other to the courts of Justice for discipline in 1845. By now these practices have become firmly entrenched in the psyche of the average Molotschna Mennonite. It seems that the Kleine Gemeinde practice of the full gospel teaching of nonresistance has reluctantly been accepted for Aeltester Friesen notes that the criticism of his Gemeinde on this account is less severe than in former years. Here follows the third article of the *Einfache Erklarung*:

"We are also faced with a third accusation—years ago more so than now—that we have an erroneous understanding of the power of the government and that we had been accused before the higher authorities and summoned to give an answer for this reason. This occurred approximately in the year

1821, although the result of the matter was far different. Our opponents at that time would gladly have brought us unto ruination, but our good-minded district government for the greatest part acknowledged that we were correct. Acts 18, 12-16.

"My beloved reader, even though we are unable to resist evil, we confess nevertheless that there is a government which is ordained for that purpose by God, Matthew 5, 39; Wisdom 6, 4; and Romans 13, 1-7, which we are equally unable to resist. For it is the servant of God and a revenger to execute wrath upon those who do evil. Titus 3, 1-2. And Paul says, 'Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have the praise of the same.' We are not only obligated to be obedient and subject to the same because of the punishment, but also for the sake of our conscience and to be ready unto all good works. But should the government require anything of us which is contrary to the teachings of Jesus and the Word of God then we must obey God rather than men. Acts 5, 29.

"Therefore know, my beloved reader, that we do not oppose the government out of party spirit, nor of spite or envy, nor of a riotous or similar spirit. Nor is this our reason for refusing to arrest suspicious and evil people, transport prisoners, or to make an accusation against anyone with the government, or to aid anyone in imposing physical or pecuniary punishment, and the like. We refrain from this only and alone out of the fear of God, Philippians 4, 9; Ephesians 4, 28, and because we are unable to find anywhere in the New Testament that the Lord Jesus or his apostles have done these things themselves or that they taught their own to do them. Instead they have always committed these matters to the government and the mighty. Luke 22, 24. The believers have always submitted themselves in voluntary obedience and loyalty unto their government. Titus 3, 1-2. Accordingly we do not believe like those who oppose the government, for we know very well that they are opposing the order of God, and that they will receive a judgment against themselves, Romans 13, 2, just as was the experience of the Aeltester J.W. and others who were with him.

"As already mentioned, we refrain from such physical punishment which God in fact has instituted over evil and Godless people, and which instrument he has entrusted to the government. For this reason, gracious reader, we would rightfully although earnestly excuse ourselves for neither the Lord Jesus nor his apostles have demonstrated nor allowed such physical discipline or punishment against the contrary people, Matthew 5, 38 and 45. Instead we are to instruct and to admonish the offenders with the word of God, and are commanded that this alone is to be our punishment, in order that God would thereby grant repentance to the offenders to comprehend the truth, so that they may once more be freed from the devil's chains, unto whose spell their will has been captive. 2 Timothy 4, 2; and 2 Timothy 2, 24.

"The above briefly sets forth our basis regarding the punishment instituted of God. The same has been instituted so that good order, fear, honour, obedience, loyalty, peace, and acceptable submissiveness to the government might exist within the world as well as among the pious. Romans 13, 7 and 1 Peter 2, 17. To this I would add that this authority to punish originates with the apostles and has been recognized ever since then i.e. among the nonresistant Christians. The many sacrifices and blood offerings recorded in the *Martyr's Mirror* of T.J. von Braht bear witness of this.

"Although the pious have been persecuted and dispersed so severely, and martyred because of such a Christlike foundation and belief, they have also been tolerated by a number of Christian-minded regents. It has even occurred that there have been rulers who have interceded with other governments for the nonresistant Christians, which can be read in pages 815 to 819 of the 'complete' (large) *Martyr's Mirror* and in the 'small' *Martyr's Mirror* at pages 156-159. Here the reader will find further that the belief of the time, not to accuse evildoers before the authorities and more of the like, is in complete agreement with our present beliefs. It is also recorded here that the General Parliament of Holland submitted a petition to the government in Bern and Zurich in which they interceded for toleration of our brethren in the faith. Next to God, we are unable to sufficiently thank our district government and superior state officials for the same good favour and love for their people, nor can we sufficiently repay this favour and love with our most obedient fealty. Therefore I pray to God in the spirit with the words of the well-known poet from number 455: *Dir befehl' ich all das Mein? Oberherren und Verwandte; Auch lasz dir befohlen sein, Freunde, Feinde, und Bekannte. Gieb auch Brot und Trost den Armen, Lasz dich ihr Noth erbarmen*"<sup>29</sup>

## 16.21 Ministerial Election, 1846.

It is evident that the years 1843 to 1845 were very significant ones for the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. The natural alliance between the Kleine Gemeinde and some of the progressive elements in Molotschna Mennonite Society are again evident. This alliance has already been noted in the case of Klaas Wiens, the wealthy owner and founder of the estate Steinbach and the first Oberschulz of the Molotschna colony. Klaas Wiens had intervened on behalf of Klaas Reimer when the latter was threatened with imprisonment and banishment to Siberia in 1814 shortly after the founding of the Kleinen Gemeinde.

Through the natural affinity between Aeltester Abraham Friesen and Chairman Johan Cornies the Kleine Gemeinde again acquired a strong benefactor during the 1830's and 1840's. One of the results was that the Kleine Gemeinde was now accorded equal treatment and its views regarded as that of the senior Anabaptist-Mennonite Gemeinde in the Molotschna. This natural alliance would

again be renewed when Aeltester Johan Harder (1811-1876) replaced the spiritually insensitive Bernhard Fast as the Aeltester of the Orloff Gemeinde in 1860.

Peter Toews has noted in his **Sammlung** that 1843 had been a very important year for the Mennonite Kleinen Gemeinde and that the Gemeinde was treated very benevolently by the authorities (see Sections 16.13; 16.17) He also notes that whether this gracious treatment would be for the future benefit of the Gemeinde could not be so easily determined. It is evident that such benevolent attention was not always beneficial for the Anabaptist-Mennonite Gemeinde.

The year 1846 included another Kleinen Gemeinde ministerial election. According to the **Wahl-Liste**<sup>30</sup> of Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen election No. 13, the results were as follows:

Election List of February 5th, 1846, firstly for two deacons: Abraham Friesen-Neukirch 43 votes, Johan Dueck-Muntau 16, Ab. Friesen-Ruckenau 15, Peter Thiessen-Schoenau 26, Bernhard Fast-Rosenort 43, Heinrich Ens-Fischau 12, Peter Friesen-Marienthal 1, Jakob Friesen-Blumstein 2, Peter Friesen-Tiege 2, Johan Thielman-Neukirch 1, Cornelius Doerksen-Alexanderwohl 1.

Two ministers were now elected from among the resulting four deacons, namely: Isaac Loewen-Lindenau 3, Klaas Reimer-Tiege 50, Ab. Friesen-Neukirch 50, and Bernhard Fast-Rosenort 59. As two candidates now had equal votes lots were cast which fell upon Ab. Friesen. This election was completed by 81 members. The minister Bernhard Fast was removed from his office in 1848. This concludes the record of the 1846 ministerial election.

## 16.22 The Good Shepherd and his flock, 1846.

The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde had instituted evangelical discipline under the leadership of Aeltester Klaas Reimer. The same was continued by Aeltester Abraham Friesen in a most spiritual manner so that this could perhaps be considered as one of the more important aspects of his ministry. For the Anabaptist-Mennonite Gemeinde which did not maintain a sound balance between the teaching of the discipleship of love and evangelical discipline would be doomed to failure. Discipleship and discipline were parallel concepts which could not subsist without each other. Aeltester Abraham Friesen fulfilled these pastoral functions of his office earnestly and lovingly. Consequently a number of his letters contained in the **Sammlung** address themselves to this important aspect of faith and practice. Two of these epistles will further illustrate the ministry of Aeltester Abraham Friesen.

The first writing is an extract from a letter written by Aeltester Abraham Friesen to an individual who has apparently been awakened spiritually and who now wanted to join the Kleinen Gemeinde. As such this illustrates the positive aspect of the dichotomy above referred to, namely, the teaching of the message of redemption and regeneration in order to awaken the individual to the way of the Cross. At the other end of the spectrum were the more negative albeit evangelical ordinances of discipline which included excommunication and the ban. The letter from which the following quotation was taken is addressed to I.F. in the village of L:

“Beloved Friend. I understand that you may have a considerable opposition to the narrow way which leads to eternal life and only little interest in setting your course thereon just as I also experienced at one time. Therefore I wish you the wisdom from above, for it is the (Holy) Spirit within you which is understanding, holy, united, manifold, sharp, quick, persuasive, pure, clear, gentle, friendly, earnest, free, charitable, meek, firm, knowledgeable, certain, etc. All of which are absolutely necessary if together with Abraham, an individual is to leave his people as commanded by God. In so doing we are also accountable to our loved ones by being an inspiration for love and good works in order that none of our own would remain behind.

“Quite frequently I think of your wife and her beloved mother who have left our assemblies contrary to the teaching of Paul. In previous times the brothers Gerhard and Peter Dueck in Blumstein also left our assemblies and died in the middle of their years. But both of their widows have again married and have also once more turned to the Gemeinde together with their young husbands. And this not without emotion and remorse which at least partially also inspired their husbands to this end. 1 Peter 3, 1-2. Oh, if only this might also be possible with your wife and mother-in-law. I believe that you would far more encourage and assist in this than to disrupt and hinder the same. I would literally weep with joy should this occur through your true earnestness and faith.

“But alas, my most beloved friend. If it should no longer be possible for your wife and her mother to again be renewed unto penitence in the manner spoken of by the apostle, how will this be possible for you? For among all of this you do not want to come into shame because of your hope. Rather if God moves and persuades you, and if God directs you in this manner, and if your spiritual ears hear the words spoken behind you as follows: ‘This is the way that ye shall go, not to the right and neither to the left’. And if because of your wife you are unable to give heed to this advice? That is not right. After all, Jesus says: ‘He that loveth anything more than me is not worthy of me’. And further: ‘If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren and sisters. Yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple’.

“Yet one cannot understand this as being a physical hatred but rather in the spiritual sense for in the same way we are not to hate our own life, and rather are to love, nurture, protect, and further the same above all: Likewise unto father, mother, wife, children, brother, and sisters. This will hold true for so long as the truth, namely: Christ and his word, is not cast down. At the same time we must be mindful that all believers have not loved their own lives unto the death but only unto so far where the same hinders the word in truth and threatens to interrupt the spiritual journey. This love must then be set aside for one must love Christ above all else, and render greater obedience unto God than unto men.

“Therefore this hatred does not consist of evil retribution, nor in revelling, but far more that in well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men, but at the same time not to allow oneself to be hindered or halted. ‘Denn wer des Kleinod will erlangen, der musz laufen was er kann; wer die Krone will emphanen, der musz er sich bei zeiten auf des besten zubereiten, alles andre mueszig gehn was ihm kann im wege stehn’. Even if it should be father, mother, wife, or children who are standing in his way, for a true warrior or journeying pilgrim cannot be hindered nor halted by this. Indeed, his heart must remain firm and well grounded in the manner of which the poet speaks in Number 175:

- (1) Sein Herz ist froh und recht gesinnt,  
Laest fahren Freunde, Schwestern, Brueder  
Auch Vater, Mutter, Weib, und Kind,  
Wenn sie ihm sind zuwieder.
- (2) Wer ihn beleidigt und verletzt,  
Der bessert ihn in seinem Grunde,  
Beim Wohlgehn wird er leicht verfetzt  
Aus seinem ersten Bunde.
- (3) Wer ihn verfolgt, das meiste druekt  
Dem soll der Pilgrim herzlich lieben,  
Das Boese machet ihn geschickt  
Im Guten sich zu ueben.
- (4) Er kennt nicht Rach, hat keinen Hasz,  
Vermag das Unrecht abzukehren  
Durch Liebes Werk und wird nicht lasz  
Mit Wohlthun sich zu wehren. u.s.w.

“My good friend. I have wanted to share with you the treasures of my heart in love. But our beloved Savior speaks and says, ‘A good man bringeth forth good fruit out of the good treasure of his heart: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. For that which fills the heart cometh forth from the mouth’. Likewise with this insignificant writing which has also flowed forth through the mouth from a full heart. Each and everyone may compare with the word of God as to the nature of the heart from which the same has originated. AMEN.

“With greetings and love from me ‘Abraham Friesen’ ”<sup>31</sup>

Revelations chapter 20 and 21 provide a portrayal of the church of Christ as the pure and unspotted bride of Jesus the lamb. Through the power of the Holy Spirit and the Word, the Gemeinde of Christ earnestly sought to implement this evangelical model in day to day practices. The second epistle to be presented in this section deals with this aspect of the pasturing of the flock.

The evangelical ideal of purity and truth which was entrusted to the Gemeinde was nowhere harder to apply than in the case of the very ministers who were to guide and teach the Gemeinde. Yet a very high standard was required of any member of the ministerial (Lehrdeinst) of the Gemeinde of Christ. Certainly the Mennonite Kleinen Gemeinde was no exception in looking to her spiritual leaders for the utmost in commitment, dedication, honesty, and example.

Thus it occurred that a minister was censored for having used insufficient discretion in one way or another in his farming affairs, or perhaps for having demonstrated insufficient love and concern. When this occurred the member of the ministerial would be censored by the Aeltester and perhaps also by the ministerial. If the matter was serious enough the Aeltester would have to undertake the painful task of bringing the matter to the brotherhood which had the evangelical power and duty to make a more serious disposition. Here it could happen that the member of the ministerial could be disposed from his office which also occurred in the Kleinen Gemeinde on a number of occasions.

Usually the cause of such action might be a relatively minor lapse of kingdom ethics with respect to a financial dealing or perhaps a lack of socio-economic concern for a neighbour, or perhaps simply carelessness in failing to set a good example for the members and youth of the Gemeinde. It was not the case that such a disposed member of the ministerial of the Gemeinde was henceforth subjected to never ending shame and rebuke. Provided of course that repentance had truly and remorsefully been sought and forgiveness obtained, such a one would invariably continue as a treasured, well loved and leading member of the Gemeinde. This is illustrated by the following letter to Peter Penner of Prangenau, in which Aeltester Abraham Friesen advises him that he has been deposed

from his ministerial office:

**A Letter to Peter Penner in Prangenau:**

“Beloved Friend Peter Penner. Although we do so with heartfelt sorrow we cannot omit to advise you with respect to the decision regarding your falling away, and in fact after the matter had been dealt with twice, that on the third presentation the brotherhood decided to depose you from your office. Therefore we hereby release you from the ministerial and all obligations and duties incumbent thereupon.

“For the teaching of the apostle Paul is that: ‘The ministers (Diener) must be reputable, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not carrying on dishonourable occupations (trades), who hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And may these also first be demonstrated and then allow them to fulfill the office of a minister, if they are found blameless.’ 1 Timothy 3, 8-10. Ah, behold my beloved! The matter is very serious. If this is the case during the time of the election then why not even more so during the service of the minister: ‘In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed having no evil thing to say of you’ Titus 2, 7-8.

“Therefore I ask that you do accept this decision in love from the ministerial as well as from the brotherhood and bear in mind that this has not taken place without heart rending sorrow. Would that you might also seek to be more supportive of your wife in order that she would remain favourably inclined towards the ministerial as well as the Gemeinde since through this matter she has become somewhat unfavourably disposed.

“Although this may be and remain the situation and consequence, we nevertheless acknowledge that you are our beloved fellow brother. For after all, in so far as we are aware, you have recognized and confessed your offenses which have been forgiven and extinguished in accordance with the teaching of the Savior in Matthew 18 and also Ecclesiastes 19, 13-17.

“In closing this insignificant writing we also ask of you as a brother, that in compassion you would wish to be of assistance in all the labours of the house, in everything which may be required therein, in order that you would not have received the grace of God in vain, namely the acknowledgement in this respect. Thus far from me in the name of the Gemeinde, together with a heartfelt greeting from your most imperfect servant.

Ruckena, the 7th of July, 1847.

‘Abraham Friesen’<sup>32</sup>

### **16.23 A simple declaration with respect to Aeltester Heinrich Wiens, 1847.**

One of the most saddening and depressing aspects of Molotschna Mennonite history for the first half of the 19th century is the constant fighting and squabbling between the reactionary-cultural Mennonites on the one hand and the pietist-cultural Mennonites on the other. Both groups had departed from the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith and yet were kept within the bounds and confines of the colonies by virtue of the special privileges enjoyed there by all the professed adherents of the Mennonite faith and their progeny. After 1824 the main battle between the reactionary-cultural Mennonites and the pietist-cultural Mennonites was led by Jakob Warkentin of the Grosze Gemeinde and Aeltester Bernhard Fast of the Orloff Gemeinde. Fast also provided leadership to the other pietist-cultural Mennonite groups in the Molotschna at the time.

In this battle Johan Cornies represented the progressive cultural Mennonites and a milder pietism which was more prepared to cooperate with the other groups of Christians such as the Anabaptist-Mennonites. By and large Johan Cornies and his Agricultural Society found that their efforts at progressive innovations in the field of agriculture, education, and industry, were invariably opposed by the leaders of the reactionary-cultural Mennonites. To them Cornies and his Society represented the “Anti-Christ”. In 1843 Cornies was able to deliver a crippling blow against his opponents when through his instigation the Grosze Gemeinde was divided into three smaller Gemeinden by the Russian Government authorities.

The remnant opposition was now consolidated around the person of Aeltester Heinrich Wiens who continued the fight against the progressive innovations of Cornies. As a result Cornies again took harsh measures moving to have the Russian Colonial authorities depose Wiens from his office, to place him under arrest and to exile him from Russia. Prior to leaving Russia, Aeltester Heinrich Wiens gave a farewell message to his loyal followers in which he inspired them to continue the battle against Cornies and his programs at any cost. Although the Kleine Gemeinde did not agree with the harsh measures employed by Cornies they did insist that authority was to be obeyed unless an explicit breach of conscience was required by so doing. Acts 5, 29. Here follows an epistle which Aeltester Abraham Friesen wrote with respect to this matter.



**"A Simple declaration with respect to the farewell-address of the former Aeltester Heinrich Wiens of Gnadenheim.**

Prepared and issued by the ministerial of the Kleinen Gemeinde in the Molotschna Mennonite colony in the year 1847.

"Search the scriptures: for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. The Gospel of John 5, 39. Jesus answered them, and said, my doctrine is not mine but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. John 7, 16-17. Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the father but by me. Gospel of John 14, 6.

**Introduction.**

"We say with King David: 'For the Lord will not cast off his people neither will he forsake his inheritance. But judgment shall return unto righteousness: and all the upright in heart shall follow it. Psalm 94, 14-15. But the Godless will pursue the ways of the wicked, and the Godless will not give heed to any of it' Daniel 12, 10. Christ promised his own that this generation, to be understood as the Christians, would not pass away until all these things (the tribulation) be fulfilled. Matthew 24. 'And the tares shall remain standing among the wheat until the time of the harvest'. Matthew 13, 30.

"Which teaching was earnestly and diligently opposed by many of the mighty and powerful adversaries of God during the first period of outpouring and exuberant growth. This attempt was also in part inspired by misunderstanding. Nevertheless they were not successful in being able to root out this generation (the Christians). But they were able to root out much noble wheat in the belief that they were rooting out the weeds. But the more that the seed of Christendom was persecuted by the Jews, heathen, and tyrants, the more this seed came into the light and blossomed with power.

"For the Gemeinde of Christ stands on an immovable rock. Psalm 42, 10 and 71, 3. Yes, upon the very foundation of the apostles and the prophets of which Christ Jesus is the cornerstone. Her love for God was not false for they hated the evil, wherefore God also perserveth the souls of his saints; he delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked. Psalm 97, 10. And upon this foundation they also build much pure gold which was preserved through the fire of tribulation.

"Even if there sometimes was a Judas among the twelve, or an Ananias and Sapphira among the larger numbers or an Alexander the coppersmith who associated themselves with them; these however were to be given over to Satan. 1 Corinthians 5, 5. Thus the believers achieved their own, and with complete earnestness demonstrated that they were faithful in their stewardship and that they also desired and would be true unto the end and that their love was not false. Romans 12. Whereof they could also comfort themselves that they would thereby save their souls and that they themselves would receive salvation even though much wood, hay, and stubble would be found among their works.

"However when this era had passed, and after Satan had directed mankind towards much prosperity and a life of pleasure: Yes, he led them upon the mountain of reason and revealed unto them all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them and promised to give them all to the ones who would fall down and worship him: Thereupon the people abandoned their simple and childlike worship of God and gave enough indulgence to their flesh and then were ensnared, through Mammon as well as through their own pursuit of honour. Consequently the root of all evil was free to increase until wickedness had become powerful, and became the instrument which arose and was able to deceive man through his reason. Whereupon the heart grew proud and because of the prosperity many were ruined. Yes, they rose up against the Prince of Princes but the same shall be destroyed without the hand. Daniel 8, 24.

"Through the pursuit of the life of pleasure Satan was able to destroy the well-being of the Christian church and in consequence the persecutions ceased completely after a time. Through the practice of a strict life style required because of necessity, and through outstanding diligence, the believers were able to achieve good favour and much freedom in their secular lives. Which of course is not harmful to any one if it is received with thanks and used properly just as with the vineyard of the house of Israel which is set on a very fruitful hill. Isaiah chapter 5. But how sad! That instead of the good grapes so many wild grapes were brought forth which caused great sadness to the Lord of this vineyard.

"For the invitation of the Czarina Katherina the great, the monarch at the end of the 17th century, is an earlier almost unknown decree of a head of State which was composed by the Lord Director and guardian G. Trappe. This most just and very loving summons to the Mennonite people consisted of three parts:

"Firstly, that in so far as possible the Mennonites be concerned that they have good teachers (Lehrer) and shepherds over their souls, who will see to the well-being and salvation of their souls and to the pious daily conduct of their charges, so that in Russia you might also let your light so shine before men that your good works would be evident and bring praise to your father in heaven.

"Secondly, I bid you my friends that in as much as possible you would be on guard, so that no blemished sheep might come among the herd, nor that wicked living in great vices, such as people given over to drunkenness, would come in among your fellowship: On account of which the good name of the Mennonites in Russia would be disgraced.

"Thirdly, it would be my heartfelt plea that you shall at all times harbour only love and trust for me, and that you might always have the firm assurance that until and with my last breath I will honestly be the true friend and benefactor of all the pious Mennonites.

"In brief all of which is emblematic of a Christian Gemeinde here on earth which must demonstrate in spirit and in deed what it is to be. Namely, a city of Peace. Without such a peace no Gemeinde can continue to stand on earth in the fellowship and grace of God. Nor can such a Gemeinde comfort itself with the hope of eternal life.

"Such a Gemeinde on earth in fact represents the bride, and the kingdom and the city of the Lord. Indeed, a living temple. Corinthians 3, 16. If such a Gemeinde ruins the temple, in direct disobedience to the teachings of Christ, and tolerates wicked members within it who live in manifest vices and works of the flesh, and if such a Gemeinde does not sweep out such leaven, then such a Gemeinde is given the heartfelt advice that they should buy gold tried in the fire, Revelations 3, 18, and to do penitence together with the five Gemeinden in Asia in order that the candle holders of the city would not be pushed away. Our honest, heartfelt wish for all Gemeinden is that they might remain true until the death together with the Gemeinde at Smyrna and that together with the Gemeinde at Philadelphia they might keep the word of his patience, so that in the hours of trial which come over the entire world, they might steadfastly continue to hold to the same."

#### **Declaration with respect to the farewell address of Aeltester Heinrich Wiens.**

"The packet attached hereto is the farewell address of the former Aeltester Heinrich Wiens from Gnadenheim which was delivered to his Gemeinde. The same has been directed to my hand and I have been asked for my assessment of the same. In accordance with the limited understanding which the Lord has entrusted to me I therefore feel compelled by that which is the true grace which Christ Jesus has procured for us who believe on him in all love and modesty, and based on the foundation of the scripture to give witness of the true grace which is procured through Jesus Christ for those who believe in him.

"For together with the apostle in Romans chapter 8, I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. Provided that we suffer as Christians who give none offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God. 1 Corinthians 10. Which Christ himself demonstrated through his teachings and his example in deed. Even though he and his disciple Peter were not obligated to pay the tribute money, they did so in order that those who received the same would not be offended. Matthew 17, 24-27. If anyone should believe that they had become partakers of the suffering of Christ by reason of the word of God, the same should study diligently as to whether they have abided in the doctrine of Christ and that they have not transgressed from the same. 2 John 9. Otherwise one might take note of the following rhyme.

- (1) Wie oft O Gott! wenn wir das boese dulden,  
Erdulden wir nur unser Thorheit Schulden,  
Und nennen Lohn, den wir verdient,  
bekommen Truebsal der Frommen?
- (2) Ist Duerftigkeit, in der die Truegen kalgen,  
Sind Hasz und Pein, die Stolz und Wollust tragen,  
Des Schwelgers Schmerz, des Neids vermiszte Freuden,  
Christliches Leiden?
- (3) Ist deren Qual die deinen Rath verachtet,  
Nach Gottes Furcht und Glauben nie getrachtet,  
Und die sich jetzt in finster Schwermuth quaelen,  
Pruefung der Seelen?

"Suffering at times has also occurred because of untimely and ungodly religious fervor. This has been demonstrated to us by the example of a number of persons. During the time of the apostles there is mention of a certain Theudas, who was slain for that reason and a Judas also perished and all those who obeyed him were dispersed. Acts 5, 36-37. During the more modern period when the nonresistant Christians were slaughtered like sheep, there also arose a certain man by the name of T.M. (Muentzer) who acknowledged certain teachings of the former innocent ones as being correct. However, he found it to be necessary to establish his own kingdom which he did contrary to the teachings of Christ, John 18, 36, for which he together with combined followers as well as others gave battle whereupon he was also slain and his empire dispersed.

"Because he in many respects had dealt according to the teachings of Christ and was in agreement with the teachings of the true Christians, the latter hereafter now had to carry the shameful name of 'Insurgents of the sect of Muenster'. Consequently they had to demonstrate with many many reasons and much persuasion in teaching and in their lives that they had had no fellowship with him and rather that they were completely independent from those who did not obey the authority of the government which had been ordained from God.

"Firstly one finds it somewhat questionable to so freely declare that the only reason that the dear man H. Wiens had to leave house and home and be banished from the land was because of hatred, jealousy, slander, and the desire for revenge. Which accusations one can readily understand, are directed against the local authorities appointed over us here. We know nothing about their 'false' accusations to the higher government authorities but we do find this charge rather hard to believe as the appointed authorities have frequently demonstrated that they honestly seek to further the well-being of these Mennonite colonies.

"Yes, to put this in the manner of an example, it is noteworthy that where the Priests and Levites

passed by, the zeal of the beloved local authorities wisely restricted the mad life and free and easy transgressions against the commandments of God. Only recently the goddess rioting on the streets, and the running around in gangs, and in worldly associations by the youth was seriously confined by the edict of the authorities which activities, so to say, had freely arisen in defiance of the teachings of Christ. And sad to say, that although the Aeltesten and ministers have not actually partaken in these activities they have fallen silent in the face of the same and have often been present themselves. Accordingly we are not aware of any complaints which we could put before the authorities that they have in some way desired to suppress the faith, or that contrary to right and the word of God, they have endeavoured to compel someone to transgress from the teachings of Christ.

“When the Pharisees came to the Saviour with numerous covert questions in order to ensnare him, and were apparently unable to achieve their intentions, they became inflamed with wrath and jealousy. They then sought to trap the Saviour with respect to the government authority through their false speech. Their desire for revenge, slander, hatred, envy, and their false accusations were made with the plan of putting the Saviour to death so that they could get him out of their way for they hated him because he gave honest witness that their works were evil.

“In sympathy and brotherhood we say: Woe unto us that we have sinned. For this our heart is faint . . . because of the mountain of Zion which is desolate. Lamentations 5, 16-18. We have also endeavoured to make ourselves of service in accordance with the teachings of — that, unfortunate are those who have done damage unto you, and who have rejoiced over your fall.

“It was most humiliating for every upright person to perceive approximately five years ago how some licentious residents of the colony were taken into confinement first by the honourable Cornies and then by the Gebietsamt. It was even more humiliating that people of other confessions had such an event to marvel and to talk about.

“The source of this reputation is unequivocally clear. It will be very easy for every person who hates evil, and who does not yield unto wrath, and who guards his tongue against slander and insult, and who does not do any evil unto his neighbour to decide in accordance with the truth. With full assurance regarding the matter of the beloved Ohm H. Wiens we say with the booklet Baruch 3, 11 ‘How happeneth it, that thou art in a foreign land? That is the reason, why you have forsaken the fountain of wisdom. For if thou hadst walked in the way of God, thou shouldst have dwelled in peace forever’.

“**Secondly:** It is very esteemed to have faithfully rendered a true service and every steward should be able to say so for his part, as this is most desirable. 1 Corinthians 4, 2. But the manner in which the faithfulness of a steward of God is to be known is described in the ninth chapter of second Corinthians. Here Paul boasts of the service of the Gemeinde and of its good will, in the provision of an abundant service and calls it an example which has provoked many. And the apostle Paul so earnestly and lovingly admonishes the Gemeinde unto this service in complete diligence just as he also allowed his earnestness with respect to the unconscionable reputation of the Gemeinde to be known. 1 Corinthians 5. Wherefore he was able to consider this his service as also being a faithful service, for he said, ‘The seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord’. 1 Corinthians 9, 2. And ‘Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men,’ 2 Corinthians 3, 2, and therefore not sparing with respect to the unpenitent, 2 Corinthians 13, 2, not gently with respect to those who have gone astray, 1 Corinthians 6, nor with respect to those who err in their teachings, 1 Corinthians 15, and more of the same in numerous additional references.

“Through the grace of God, this faithful apostle and steward of the mysteries of God has laid the foundations of the husbandry and building of God as a wise masterbuilder, upon which foundation another can build. 1 Corinthians 3. Just as a wise masterbuilder proscribes regulations unto his fellow labourers according to which the construction is to be governed, this apostle has also not allowed this to be left undone. For with his clear teaching he has taught us respecting those who will not inherit the kingdom of God and who are therefore unfit for the building of the Holy Temple. He has also taught us respecting those who are fit plants for this husbandry and who therefore stand to the benefit of the entire house. Galatians 5. What should one wish for more dearly but that the beloved Ohm H. Wiens had so truly been faithful in his service and that he now experienced slander and persecution for the will of Christ in order that after this only short life he could receive the eternal salvation together with all the other chosen saints.

“But alas! So sad! What misery! That his spiritually constructed house and husbandry can probably be compared with a city which is divided against itself. Matthew 12, 25. Although each one on bended knee assents to live a life of holiness and righteousness this is where it remains. Even though some live in all unrighteousness, drunkenness, anger, and hatred, yes, even in prosecution and adultery, they are comforted and admitted to the enjoyment of Holy Communion.

“However, the prophet Ezekiel, chapter 44, 7, speaks and says, ‘O ye house of Israel, ye make the abominations too great. In that ye have brought into my sanctuary strangers, uncircumcised in heart, and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in my sanctuary, to pollute it, even my house, when ye offer my bread, the fat and the blood, and they have broken my covenant because of all your abominations’. This is further underlined by the fact that one article of the teachings of Jesus in John 13, which is footwashing, is not carried out in practice.

“Whether such a steward who does not practice what he preaches can be considered to be faithful can be judged by all the wise in accordance with 1 Corinthians 15. Similarly with the taking of revenge which is completely forbidden by another article and against which we are taught by the gospels.

Contrary to the scripture, wrong is done and taken advantage of. One brother quarrels with the other, which is said to the shame of the Corinthians. 1 Corinthians 6. Indeed, so gladly one rushes to the duly appointed authorities of the district respecting matters the loss of which would not even be sufficient to cover the costs, in order for them to provide justice regarding temporal matters whereby such a matter without question is being brought before the judge.

"It is totally and completely unscriptural when the consequent decision of the authorities is not considered to be valid or even considered to be contrary to the Word of God. For if the judge does not have the authority to judge the matter and to punish the offender then I simply have no comprehension of the authority of the government which does not carry the sword as the servant of God without purpose. For it is provided that 'Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, thou shalt have praise of the same.' Romans 13. We hold to the position that a faithful steward will provide his household with meat in due season. Matthew 24, 45. Not merely sustenance but also work and punishment. 2 Timothy 4, 2. See also Sirach 33, 25.

"Oh precious reader. Do search the entire holy scripture in our Bible how a faithful steward, Aeltester, bishop, or shepherd is to pasture his sheep. And you will truly find the same spiritually and in truth, just as nature and our reason also teaches us with examples. The pasturing of the flock of Christ truly requires a faithful shepherd who does not allow the wild beasts into the herd nor perhaps even to call them sheep. Such a shepherd must also take note of those who are sick and knows how to differentiate between these and those that are well. Jude, verse 22.

"Oh shepherd! Oh precious watchman! If only the scripture which is the precious word of God might alone be the standard by which the flock is carefully pastured. The writings of the aged (forefathers) are also a sure support of which we find written in the **Martyrer Spiegel** of T.J. Braght. And especially in the **Foundation Book** of our leading Aeltester Menno Simons. These human writings also correspond with the actual life and practice of the writers and are truly to be cherished as sustenance and nails. These are written by masters of assemblies and are given by one shepherd. And other than these books one should be on guard against the many others more. Ecclesiastes 12, 11-12.

"**Thirdly:** Reference is made to the thoughts of release from physical oppression, which is exceptionally strange to me. This reference may well have intended to refer to the construction of houses which is lawfully regulated in an orderly manner by the authorities as a part of this physical oppression. But these regulations are only for the purpose of providing for the construction of accurate and durable houses and can in no case be considered as a form of oppression.

"This is clearly evidenced by many people and one sees numerous occasions where the desires of the owner of the house being built far exceed what is required by the law. Therefore this can not in any way be called an oppression. What this pride should be called has not yet been prescribed by the authorities, for in consequence of the lust of the occupants many coloured bricks are erected and coordinated together with all manner of colours. Nor does the government proscribe that one shall become enflamed for the children of the Assyrians who come well clothed in their finery in order that it would appear as if they were powerful people and how everyone was to emulate them. Ezekiel 23.

"Nor can one regard the planting of trees as any oppression for the same was earnestly implemented by the Verein which has made progress expeditiously since then. In fact it was the since deceased Czar Alexander himself who had wished that every landowner would plant trees on a one-half desjaiteinen parcel of property. And the usefulness of the mulberry plantation has already been demonstrated by the silk industry. There is no commandment in the Bible against the same. When the Jews were carried away from Jerusalem unto Babylon the prophet Jeremiah stated the commandment of God to them: 'Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit thereof. And seek the best for the City . . . and pray unto the Lord for if it goes well with the City things shall also be well with you.' Jeremiah 29.

"Although the regulations in this regard have been somewhat harsh and continue till now to be so, I believe that in this respect I can truly say with the prophet Jeremiah; Your own wickedness is the reason why you have been so humiliated, and your own disobedience that you have been so punished. Jeremiah 2, 19. For in times past you have always broken your yoke and have torn your harness and said, 'I do not wish to be so subjected'.

"For precious reader! Do ask the aged who are still alive and they will relate to you that already earlier the planting of trees was prescribed by the authorities. But the same was never carried out. Therefore, why is it such a wonder when such earnestness is now applied. Nor need it seem so foreign when those who are disobedient are punished especially as this punishment has already been practiced in this manner for such a long time. And now they want the one who has exercised the same the most freely and zealously to be a much milder and more circumspect Chairman (Vorsteher). After all the smoking of tobacco was earlier practiced everywhere as a matter of free conscience by the authorities and ministers. But an unfortunate one may be chastised and punished with a beating. No wonder, for our current authorities would have no power to punish that in which they themselves would transgress.

"However we believe that we should be obedient in all things which are not contrary to the word of God. To obey our beloved Lord not only with eye service for the pleasing of men, but rather with singleness of heart and in the fear of God. Yes, knowing and saying with respect to the regulations of the authorities, 'But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons'. Colossians 3. There is no need for us to be unduly concerned

in this regard if perhaps too much has been commanded of us, for the authority appointed by God will also have to give an account for itself.

“**Fourthly:** Regarding purification without which the Gemeinde cannot remain standing. This has properly been referred to but whether this misfortune can be called a purification of the faith has not yet been demonstrated to me from the holy scripture. I find no reference to support this, rather only the contrary for even the example of nature teaches us that one throws away the slag where gold is being purified. When a sick and offensive member is cut off and cast away in accordance with the teachings of the scripture, then the entire body and all the healthy members must thereby be grieved, and this is even more so where the most healthy and strong member of a body must be cut off. But in this case there is no grief and no sorrow among the members of the beloved Ohm Wiens.

“Nor is there any firm adherence to the fundamental commandments of Christ and God. This is evident from the conduct of the people and especially from that of the youth. They give free rein to the pursuit of their fleshly lusts to which lusts they render their fealty by gathering in bands and gangs. I say with the prophet Jeremiah 2, 24, ‘He who wishes to perceive, need not look afar, for on the festive days it is readily seen.’ It cannot be argued that a purification is to occur and has occurred in those who are Christlike. It is to be wished from the heart that the Gemeinde of Ohm Wiens would correctly understand this purification and practice the same and that they themselves would put out those who are evil. 1 Corinthians 5; So that the Lord would not come unto them quickly and find their Gemeinde to be unpenitent, and to throw away the beacons from their place. Revelations 2, 5.

“Oh that many people might be able to submit themselves unto true penitence while it is yet time. For truly the Lord still stands before the door knocking. Oh how blessed is he who will hear his voice and open the door, for the Lord wishes to enter and to partake of the last supper with him. Revelations 3, 20. Oh precious reader! Are we able to transmit to anyone the peace and the regeneration which must be the consequence of sincere penitence? I say again, may we give the same to anyone? For we would truly do so much to achieve that end.

“Oh precious soul. The Word is near unto you and you may receive the same without price. Yes, do come and buy without money. Do not spend money for that which is not bread. Isaiah 55. Rather do allow the precious word of God to be your guide and believe what is written from the heart and you shall be saved. Romans 10.

“But alas. It is so lamentable that so much evil is practiced: With respect to which anguish must be expressed for it cannot be imagined that the ignorance of the foolish could be choked up with piety. Therefore a reasonable and loving government has found reason to punish so many.

“We read of the first people of Israel whom Moses led out of Egypt that for forty years God endured their manners in the wilderness. Acts 13, 18. And as the Lord says, ‘When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years’ according to Hebrews 3, 9. For when the Gemeinde was purified the disloyal people fell, just as we read of Dathan, Korah, and Abiram together with their bands. Numbers 16. However, Moses and Aaron together with the remnant of Israel remained alive. For there was preservation from the great plague. But when a purification and persecution afflicted all of Israel they admonished themselves and practiced righteousness and judgment and were preserved and delivered from out of the hand of the wicked. Psalm 97, 10.

“Yes, we can truly say, ‘We have a strong City; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. . . . For when the judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness’. Isaiah 26. But when the entire people of Israel fell and left the way of righteousness, it also occurred frequently that the prophets had to endure slander and persecution, and also that many were put to death as we find written in Christ’s own words. Matthew 23, 34-35. Until the Lord looked upon his Zion as a cottage in the vineyard, and as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, and as a besieged City. Isaiah 1, 8. Whereupon he instituted a cleansing, and according to the teachings of Zephania he put away the proud pious ones and only a poor and lowly people was allowed to remain. Chapter 3. And the prophet Zechariah also speaks of a cleansing, and that in the land two parts shall be cut off and die but that a part shall be left therein. And the same third part shall be refined through the fire.

“Should this Gemeinde stand during a time of cleansing through persecution as the nonresistant Christians did some 300 years ago and earlier, then they would also walk, look and inquire with respect to the former ways. Oh yes! For then they would discover how the deportment of the nonresistant Christians against their persecutors and enemies had reflected the teachings of Christ. And how often they repaid their evil with good, thereby heaping coals of fire upon the heads of their enemies. For then at least they would not believe the lies nor so gladly attribute truth to the speeches which have been composed out of hatred and slander but rather to discuss the matter with the neighbour in accordance with the teaching of Sirach, Chapter 19. For one would frequently find the matter not to be what was said.

“With my entire heart I wish that a good many might contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. Jude 3. That we henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive. Ephesians 4, 14. For there is only one God and he has provided only one means unto mankind through which they can be saved, which is Jesus Christ. For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollo; are ye not carnal? 1 Corinthians 3. And as there is only one God and Father, and only one faith and one baptism, and also only one manner of hope unto salvation; it must needs follow that those who wish to be saved must be united in this faith.

“We commit ourselves and all those who have and exude love, unto God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. Amen. I will now conclude this insignificant booklet and say with the historian that if we have done well this was truly our intention. 1 Maccabees 13, 39. And if this is too insignificant then we have done the same as well as we could.”<sup>33</sup>

## 16.24 A Letter to Bernhard Fast in Halbstaedt, 1846.

The Declaration of Aeltester Abraham Friesen regarding the farewell-address of Aeltester Heinrich Wiens reveals that very little spiritual and moral improvement had occurred in the Molotschna Mennonite colony since the founding of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in 1812. It is tragic that the large majority Mennonite group in the Molotschna was still resisting and opposing the benevolent innovations of the government authorities even though these programs in no way conflicted with evangelical faith.

It is reassuring that the leaders of the Kleine Gemeinde are still professing sound doctrine and an evangelical spirit. Aeltester Abraham Friesen could easily have taken the position that the exile of Aeltester Wiens was not his problem and that Wiens had only received his just reward. On the contrary Aeltester Friesen realized the serious consequences which such errors in teaching could hold for the Mennonite world and accordingly he decided to at least try to help others avoid these same pitfalls by enunciating the full gospel teachings of the faith. Aeltester Friesen does not attack Aeltester Wiens on the grounds that his group has not been progressive enough but he does point out that to openly contradict government authority in the absence of clear scriptural direction is contrary to the teachings of the gospel.

Aeltester Abraham Friesen closes his remarks with the expression of a warm evangelical love and by reference to a manifold and abundant grace which so aptly characterizes his ministry. Although the Savior has cleansed and purified he is looking and calling to those who would hear his voice. Indeed the Savior is seeking for the lost little sheep and wishes to enter into their hearts and to commune with them. Aeltester Friesen goes on to point out that through such a cleansing the Gemeinde of Christ is purified like gold in the fire. He admonishes his readers to once more seek to come to the true teaching which is the word of God.

The foregoing treatise by Aeltester Abraham Friesen provides valuable detail pertaining to the battle between the reactionary-cultural Mennonites and the pietist-cultural Mennonites in the Molotschna. The deposition, imprisonment, and exile of Heinrich Wiens by the forces of Johann Cornies became one of the legendary chapters of Russian Mennonite history. The incident divided and split the Molotschna Mennonites. It emphasized sharply that the divisive forces inherent in the Molotschna colony in 1804 were still present and very much magnified some 40 years later.

To the conservative-cultural Mennonites, Heinrich Wiens became the venerable hero whose tragic banishment became representative of the sinister ambitions of the pietist-cultural Mennonites who would stop at no means in order to achieve fulfilment of their socio-economic and pseudo-cultural aspirations. To the conservative-cultural Mennonites, the harsh and ruthless tactics of Johan Cornies came to represent the spear-head of the progressive and pietist-cultural Mennonites in Russia. The feelings of animosity became so strong that many of the Grosze Gemeinde people at the time actually regarded Johan Cornies as the “anti-Christ”. It is noteworthy that Aeltester Heinrich Wiens described these events in a book entitled *Ein Abschied und Bericht wie es in der Molotschner Kolonie in den Fruherenjahre zugegangen ist, und wie die vorgesetzten den Ehr. Aeltesten Heinrich Wiens von Gnadenheim aus dem Lande verwiesen haben*.<sup>34</sup> Heinrich Wiens became a martyr in the eyes of the conservative-cultural Mennonites who published his account of this tragic episode in Manitoba, from where it was taken along to Mexico where it is cherished as a classic work of martyr literature.<sup>35</sup>

But by and large, historiography has adopted the interpretation of this event propagated by the pietist-cultural Mennonites who represented the other end of the Russian Mennonite religious-socio-economic spectrum. This group seemingly adhered to the belief that Zinzendorf, Bangel, and Jung-Stilling represented everything which was wholesome, good and Christian under the Mennonite sun. This school of thought is generally best represented by historian Peter M. Friesen who published his monumental work in 1910 at the very height and pinnacle of the pietist-cultural Mennonite empire in Russia. In the very extreme, this view holds that all the non-pietist Mennonites in Russia were ignorant, indigent, illiterate, uncultured semi-heathen who had not yet come to an understanding of Christianity.<sup>36</sup> To this extreme group Aeltester Heinrich Wiens represented the spearhead of these

unchristian forces who and whose supporters and sympathizers were to be villified and humiliated at every conceivable opportunity.

In fairness to Peter M. Friesen it must be said that in a footnote he disclaims the most extreme view of the Cornies admirers by stating that "In this instance our sympathy does not lie with our ideal: Johann Cornies and Privy Councillor Hahn, even though our old and new jingoistic Cornies admirers—the man was victorious and so one naturally shouts hurrah three times—were and are of the opinion that they must pour contempt on Wiens and constantly fall on their knees and fold like a pocket knife every time Cornies' name is mentioned."<sup>37</sup>

Consequently the foregoing treatise by Abraham Friesen is a refreshing neutral view of the battle between these two opposing forces. The Anabaptist-Mennonites represented the third and the most insignificant faction among the Russian Mennonites at the time. Although the Kleine Gemeinde and other Anabaptist-Mennonites had no reason to take sides in this battle one way or another they were terribly concerned with respect to the desolation and subversion of the Russian-Mennonite world which was represented by the Heinrich Wiens incident of 1847. The Anabaptist-Mennonites had difficulty in discerning the love and compassion of Christ in the position of either side. And yet, by refusing to become involved in this and similar battles the Kleine Gemeinde of Mennonites earned for itself the scorn, enmity, and derision of both the conservative-cultural Mennonites as well as the pietist and progressive-cultural Mennonites.

It is also necessary to consider the pietist-cultural Mennonites who represented the other extreme in the Molotschna theological spectrum. The Kleine Gemeinde was unable to endorse the unscriptural means which Johan Cornies employed in achieving his ends. These strong-man tactics were responsible for a good deal of the reactionary opposition which Cornies encountered in the Molotschna. It is easy to understand how opposition would be aroused. Reference is made to the Orloff Verrein school which was established in 1820 as a great progressive step for the Molotschna Mennonites. The only problem was that the school came complete with a pietist teacher imported from Prussia whose main claim to fame was his use of the classroom to propagate the teachings of pietism which at the time deemed the Anabaptist-Mennonite confession to be invalid and unchristian.

This type of spiritually void leadership was also evident in Aeltester Bernhard Fast upon whose shoulders much of the blame for a century of infighting and disputation in the Molotschna can be laid. Aeltester Bernhard Fast propagated pietist teachings which were contrary to the very fundamentals of evangelical faith. His idea of sensitive leadership over his flock was to join forces with the Bible Gesellschaft whose leaders at that time apparently lived in open ostentation, pride, and immorality. The very purpose for existence of the Bible Society was to spread the same pietist teachings which opposed the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. His association with such an organization was earnestly opposed by the majority of his group. Notwithstanding Fast went ahead and allowed a pietist missionary who propagated such views to partake of communion with his Gemeinde. Another demonstration of his leadership occurred in 1820 when he was quite content to allow Franz Thiessen to languish and die in a lice infested prison in spite of the entreaties of the Kleine Gemeinde.

All in all it was no wonder that over three-quarters of his Gemeinde renounced his pietistical leadership in 1824. It is even less wonder that such short sighted and narrowminded leadership eventually resulted in a backlash to anything which appeared to be progressive and innovative. Even traditional Anabaptist-Mennonite activities such as prayer meetings, Bible studies, and gatherings for the singing of psalms and the songs of the faith became suspect with many when these activities were repeatedly used as a means of spreading the message that the Anabaptist-Mennonite conversion and salvation were invalid and that true spiritual inspiration was to be found only in the teachings of Jung-Stilling, Bangel, and other separatist pietists.

In concluding this examination of the period 1824-1849 one more example of interaction between the Kleine Gemeinde and the pietist-cultural Mennonitism represented by Aeltester Fast should be considered. This also involved the matter of Aeltester Heinrich Wiens. It seems that Aeltester Bernhard Fast and his pietist-Mennonite colleagues reacted to the plight of Aeltester Heinrich Wiens by enacting a judgment in which they condemned him and endorsed the fate of imprisonment and banishment which awaited him. One would suspect that the ever political Johan Cornies might have requested this endorsement in order to assist him in convincing the Russian Colonial authorities to approve the harsh measures which he sought to implement. Aeltester Bernhard Fast now departed from his customary attitude of spiritual superiority and condescension to the Kleine Gemeinde by asking that they also partake of this measure. On the 18th of September, 1846 the Kleinen Gemeinde Aeltester Abraham Friesen replied to this request as follows:

“A Letter to the honourable Aeltester Bernhard Fast in Halbstaedt”

“Regarding your honourable writing and presentation with respect to the seriousness of the offenses of Aeltester Heinrich Wiens and that I together with all the ministers of the Kleinen Gemeinde was invited by you to also take part in your decision in that regard. In response I request that you please be advised that I beg to be excused from the meeting called for that purpose.

“Not that I do not recognize the apparent transgressions of Ohm H. Wiens. Rather that surely you will not have forgotten that in the year of our Lord 1838 under the date February 23 you permitted a writing to come to me in the name of your fellow servants. According to my understanding this letter excluded me from all fellowship and spiritual gatherings. And with this I am more than satisfied. And in this regard I say with Paul, ‘For what have I to do with them that are without, that I should also judge them?’ 1 Corinthians 5, 12. Accordingly the so-called Kleinen Gemeinde has held itself separate in all such instances now for almost twenty years. And in our weakness we have judged our members who are within. With friendly greetings I remain your well meaning friend.”  
Ruckenuau on the 18th of September, 1846 “Abraham Friesen”<sup>38</sup>

### 16.25 Aeltester Election, 1847.

Reference is again made to the **Wahl-Liste** of Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen for the record of the Aeltesten election which was held on June 10, 1847. For the first time the Kleine Gemeinde would have an orderly succession of Aeltesten. By 1847 Aeltester Abraham Friesen was no longer in good health and therefore he made sure that a new Aeltester was elected and ordained while he was still alive. No doubt it was his hope that the problems which the Kleinen Gemeinde had encountered during the previous successions could be avoided.

The votes in the Aeltesten election of 1847 were cast as follows: Peter Penner-Prangenau 1, Klaas Friesen-Rosenort 9, Johan Friesen-Neukirch 66, and Bernhard Fast-Rosenort 15. The election was completed by 91 members and the new Aeltester was ordained by Aeltester Abraham Friesen in Ruckenuau on the 17th of August, 1847. It is of interest to note that the new Aeltester Johann Friesen was the son of minister Johan Friesen (b. 1763) of the Grosze Gemeinde to whom reference is made earlier in this book. The mother of the new Aeltester Johan Friesen (1808-1872), was a sister to the former Aeltester Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) and to the minister Klaas Friesen of Rosenort.

### 16.26 Ministerial Election, 1848 and 1849.

For the year 1848 the reader is referred to the Kleine Gemeinde donation of 483 ruble and 50 kopeken silver to the Russian Czar as a token of their loyalty and love for their fatherland. This episode will be dealt with in somewhat more detail in a subsequent chapter. In his **Sammlung** Aeltester Peter Toews has also included the 1848 ‘Letter to the Hutterian Brethren’ by Aeltester Abraham Friesen. This epistle will be dealt with in chapter seventeen.

Another ministerial election was held on July 22, 1848. We refer again to the **Wahl-Liste** of Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen. The votes for deacon were as follows: Peter Thiessen-Schoenau 65, Johan Dueck-Muntau 43, Heinrich Ens-Fischau 23, Ab. Friesen-Ruckenuau 23, Peter Friesen-Marienthal 9, Peter Friesen-Tiege 9, Peter Heidebrecht-Blumstein 1, Cor. Jansen-Neukirch 1, Gerhard Kornelsen-Lichtenau 1. One minister was then elected from among the three deacons, namely: Klaas Reimer-Tiege 12, Peter Thiessen-Schoenau 40, and Johan Dueck-Muntau 38. The election was completed by 90 members. It is also noted that the minister Bernhard Fast was deposed from his office in 1848 because of insufficient uprightness regarding his debts. Aeltester Peter Toews has also noted that the deacon Isaac Loewen was removed from his office in 1848 because of complacency over the unscriptural conduct of his son-in-law.

Another ministerial election was held the following year, June 21, 1849. Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen was noted in his **Wahl-Liste** that the election had to be conducted by Johan Friesen the new Aeltester, because the Aeltester Abraham Friesen was already too sick. The votes for deacon are recorded as follows: Heinrich Enns-Fischau 28, Jakob Friesen-Blumstein 7, Gerhard Kornelsen-Lichtenau 1, Peter Friesen-Tiege 26, Klaas Friesen-Neukirch 7, Peter Friesen-Marienthal 4, Ab. Friesen-Ruckenuau 11, Jakob Wiebe-Schonau 1, and Cor. Doerksen-Alexanderthal 1. A minister was then elected from among the three deacons, namely: Klaas Reimer-Tiege 9, Johan Dueck-Muntau 62, and Heinrich Ens-Fischau 14. The election was completed by 85 members.

### 16.27 The Death of Aeltester Abraham Friesen, 1849.

Aeltester Abraham Friesen died on July 1, 1849. He was buried in the Ruckenuau village cemetery on July 3, 1849. The reader is referred to his dying admonition to the Gemeinde.<sup>39</sup> (See Section 15.08.) In 1845 Aeltester Abraham Friesen had concluded his **Einfache Erklarung** with a poetic



admonition to his readers to take up the way of the cross. In this poem Aeltester Abraham Friesen encouraged everyone to put aside their misdeeds and offenses and to demonstrate that they belonged to Christ and to seek his honour only. This poem forms a fitting conclusion to this chapter.

### Schlußlied.

“Ihr, die Ihr unterwiesen werd’t  
Um Eure Fehl’ und Sünden,  
Mit Zorn Euch nicht dawiderkehrt;  
Nur Bess’rung sollt d’rin finden.  
Eu’r Mund sei stets zur Wahrheit,  
Eu’r Herz zur Buß’ bereit  
So werd’t Ihr Gott gefallen.

“Die hier vor der Bestrafung flieh’n,  
Die müssen, wenn sie sterben,  
Da sie hartnäckig war’n und kühn,  
Einst kommen in’s Verderben.  
Ohn’ alle Hilf’, ganz unvermuth’t;  
Wer hier nicht wahre Buße thut,  
Kann Gottes Reich nicht erben.

“Ein schweres Kreuz ist’s offenbar,  
Wenn man durch das Vergehen  
Der Fleischeslust kommt in Gefahr,  
Sein’n Untergang muß sehen.  
Nur der nach Sirachs Lehren  
Das Gute hält in Ehren,  
Ist Gott stets angenehm.

“Doch wer noch ungestraft will sein,  
Ein Thor hinfort nicht bleiben,  
Der lebe mit der Schrift gemein  
Die Welt laß ihn nicht täuben.  
Denn wer des Weisen Rath veracht’t,  
Ist nicht auf’s wahre Heil bedacht,  
Muß leider darob leiden!

“So viele Unlust, Haß und Neid  
Wie Manche blicken lassen,  
Ist’s nicht verkehrt und ungescheidt,  
Wenn man die sucht zu hassen.  
Die uns aus Lieb’ und Güttigkeit  
Ermuntern stets zur Seligkeit,  
Zu unserm Wohl und Besten.

“Apostel Paulus, ohne Scheu,  
Hat seine Pflicht gekannt;  
Er sprach zu den Galatern treu,  
War nie von Zorn entbrannt;  
Die Freundschaft würd’ bei ihm nie alt,  
Er liebte stets mit allgewalt  
Jedweden, der ihm folgte.

“Manch Einer für ’nen Gräuel hält  
Was fromme Männer lehren;  
Man über sie ein Urtheil fällt,  
Sucht Bess’re zu bethören.  
Dem Fleische wohl es sehr behagt,  
Doch an der Seel’ der Wurm stets nagt,  
Kann nimmermehr gut enden.

“Sie stellen für uns Netze fein,  
Und Stricke unsern Füßen,  
Drum seht Euch vor und lauft nicht d’rein,  
Sonst ist’s nicht abzubüßen.  
Flieht stets vor And’rer Schmeichelei’n,  
Und seht, daß diese nur zum Schein,  
Doch liebt die, so Euch ärgern.

“Legt Eure Fehl’ von Herzen gern,  
Von ganzer Seele nieder;  
Laß jedes Laster von Euch fern,  
Zeigt: Ihr seid Christi Glieder,  
Folgt immer gutem Unterweis’,  
Vor Allem sucht des Herrn Preis,  
So thut ihr weise Schritte.”<sup>40</sup>

“AMEN.”

## FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER 16. THE GOLDEN YEARS

1. Unpublished booklet, Courtesy of Henry Past, Steinbach, Manitoba.
2. The reference here appears to be to the Orloff School Society (Verein) founded in the early 1820's. Or the reference could also be to the Bible Society.
3. The reference seems to be to the Orloff Gemeinde which represented the "Progressive" wing of the old Grosze Gemeinde after the fatal schism of 1824, the same year in which this letter is written.
4. This is the only document presented in Chapter 16, which was not included in the **Sammlung** of Aeltester Peter Toews. This letter was contained in a booklet bearing the name of "Abraham M. Friesen, Blumenort". The latter was a nephew of Aeltester Abraham Friesen. He had a considerable historical consciousness and collected a great deal of writings pertaining to various aspects of the history of the Kleine Gemeinde. The booklet referred to was included on Microfilm No. 51. Mennonite Library and Archives, North Newton, Kansas, and was included in a packet of material apparently donated to MLA by Elizabeth P. Friesen, Box 77, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada. John I. Friesen, a son of Abraham M. Friesen, had a daughter by the name of Elizabeth P. Friesen and so this is likely the chain by which these documents came to MLA.
6. Aeltester Peter Toews, *op.cit.*, 50-53.
7. According to N. Springer and A. Klassen, **Mennonite Bibliography 1631-1961**. *op.cit.*, p. 446, this **Letter to Kronsgarten** (1831) was also published as a four page booklet in 1831. This would make it the first acknowledged Russian-Mennonite publication. This letter was also published by Editor Abram R. Reimer in the **Familien Freund**, October 3, 1980.
8. In his **Samlung**, *op.cit.*, p. 61, Aeltester Peter Toews has noted that this man was his father's brother. Apparently Cornelius Toews (born on October 31, 1802). This suicide is also confirmed by other sources.
9. Peter Toews, *Ibid.*, 151-157.
10. *Ibid.*, 158-161.

11. Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen, **Wahl-Liste**, *op.cit.* 2.
12. Peter Toews, **Sammlung**, *op.cit.*, 170-171.
13. Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 134.
14. Peter Toews, *op.cit.*, 171-175.
15. **Ibid**, 184-185.
16. **Ibid**, 186-198.
17. **Ibid**, 198-200.
18. Franz Isaac, *op.cit.*, 92-93.
19. Peter Toews, *op.cit.*, 52.
20. The Correspondence in this section and section 16.14 is found in Peter Toews **Ibid**, 200-208.
21. Also found in Franz Isaac, *op.cit.*, 92.
22. Peter Toews, *op.cit.*, 211-215.
23. **Ibid**, 211-216.
24. **Ibid**, 216-221.
25. **Ibid**.
26. **Ibid**, 222-225.
27. The Correspondence in this section is found in Peter Toews; **Ibid**, 225-237.
- 27a. See Peter Peters, **Ibid**, 69-71.
28. Peter Toews, **Ibid**, 238-241.
29. **Ibid**, 241-272.
30. Abraham L. Friesen, **Wahl-Liste**, *op.cit.*, 6-7.
31. Peter Toews, *op.cit.*, 273-276.
32. **Ibid**, 278-280.
33. **Ibid**, 280-299.
34. Heinrich Wiens, **Ein Abschied und Bericht** (Gnadenthal, Man. 1903, Abraham A. Wolfe), 64 pp.
35. Cornelius Krahn, "Heinrich Wiens", ME 4, 949.
36. Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 592-608.
37. **Ibid**, 994.
38. Aeltester Peter Toews, *op.cit.*, 277.
39. **Ibid**, 310.
40. Peter Toews, **Sammlung**, *op.cit.*, 270-272.

# Part Six.

## Epilogue

### Chapter Seventeen.

#### Books and Publications

##### 17.00 Introduction.

This study of the golden years of the Kleine Gemeinde will conclude with an examination of two specific areas of faith and practice, namely, books and publications, and socio-economic policy. These topics require a review of the entire 70 years of the Kleine Gemeinde sojourn in Russia. For this reason these chapters are appended to this work as an epilogue.

First, the subject of books and publications, which was one of the most significant Kleine Gemeinde contributions to the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. In fact, this translation and publication effort was one of the major achievements of the Russian Mennonite church until the time of the 20th century martyrs. This examination of books and publications will consider the following: The spirit and founding of this effort under the leadership of Aeltester Abraham Friesen. A second program of translation and publication which came to fruition during the 1860's under the leadership of Heinrich Enns. Third, a concluding phase of this endeavour under the leadership of Aeltester Peter Toews.

It is evident that the writings of the early Anabaptist-Mennonite leaders were widely read among the members of the Kleine Gemeinde. Over the years many of these writings were translated into German by various members of the Kleine Gemeinde. These translations were then recopied and distributed among the Kleine Gemeinde and among others who were interested. i.e. The Kleine Gemeinde promoted the writings of the Anabaptist Mennonites by translating the same from Hollandisch or Dutch to German, and also by circulating these writings through handwritten copies.

Historian Peter M. Friesen certifies that the members of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde not only "enjoyed reading these books in the Dutch language, but also translated into German and circulated many of the old Anabaptist writings. **Weg nach Friedenstadt, Die Wandelnde Seele**".<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately Peter M. Friesen seems to have considered this effort to be merely additional evidence of the "narrowmindedness" and "isolationism" of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. Nevertheless his statement is a striking testimony to the depth and power of this aspect of the Kleine Gemeinde mission in Russia. Through these efforts the Kleine Gemeinde exerted a stabilizing influence on the Russian Mennonites which far exceeded the limited number and resources of such a small group.

##### 17.01 Abraham Friesen and the writings of the Faith.

The writings of Aeltester Klaas Reimer and Rev. Heinrich Balzer included significant references to the literature of the Anabaptist-Mennonites which the Kleine Gemeinde loved so dearly. However, it is probably Aeltester Abraham Friesen who was most involved in the establishment and promotion of this work. In the conclusion to his 1845 **Einfache Erklarung** in which he has aggressively defended the teachings and practices of the Kleine Gemeinde, Aeltester Abraham Friesen goes on to explain the interest of his group in the Anabaptist-Mennonite writings:

"In the foregoing I have written something for the open-minded reader in the hope that he will receive it graciously, and that I will not have expressed myself too strongly. Certainly, I will have said too much for those who are always offended and angered by the truth, and who revile and scoff the Godly and say: 'He creates much displeasure for us, and establishes himself completely contrary to our doings and admonishes us, that we are sinning against the law and maketh infamous our lives of sin', etc. Wisdom of Solomon 2, 12. Of myself I am incapable, for the apostle Paul also preached unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are chosen, both Jews and Greeks, the power of God and the wisdom of God, 1 Corinthians 1, 23.

"Beloved reader, I must admit that during this writing I have frequently had the feeling inside me, that if only I would not indicate hereby that I was wise of myself. However, the words of Paul, in which it is stated 'Quench not the spirit' 1 Thessalonians 5, 19, overpowered me. Oh, how good would it not be if in the breakneck racing of this earth a number of people might still be torn from the Prince of this world: From the spirit which now worketh through the children of disobedience; among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lust of our flesh and of our reason, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. Ephesians 2, 2-3. But it is indeed the will

of God that all men be saved and that they come unto the knowledge of the truth, 1 Timothy 2, 4. Accordingly I hereby intend to lend out at interest the gifts which God has entrusted to me, so that they might gain something more for my Lord. Luke 19, 18.

"Nevertheless my beloved reader, I will refer you to the writings of other men, who were blessed with greater gifts of the spirit than myself, who, by comparison to my one, were entrusted with 10 talents. The writings of Menno Simons, the unabridged or large *Martyrs Mirror* books of T. J. von Braght, the *Confession of Faith* by George Hansen, another *Confession of Faith* by Hans von Steen, *The Way to the Heavenly City of Peace* and the *Mirror of Greed* by Peter Peters, and the wonderful *Handbook* by the Aeltester Dirk Phillips of 1578 in the Dutch language and which with the support and gracious help of our Lord will hopefully also come to light in the German language.

"It is to be wished that each and every one who loves the truth would pursue and exert himself for such writings. I would venture that such readers would obtain no small benefit therefrom. But in fact I most gladly declare that the New Testament is the foundation, the solid basis of all truth and the underlying doctrine of all other books, upon the supremacy of which each and everyone must lay his cornerstone and building. As Paul also says, 'For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.' 1 Corinthians 3, 11. However, many today are building on nothing but wood, hay, and stubble, which as the apostle says, will also burn away on that day. But the men mentioned above have apparently built upon this foundation with gold which was pure and fine, for their teachings stood up very well during the persecutions, as they shall also stand before God in eternity.

"Therefore I do bid each and everyone, who has love for his own salvation, to read these books, to study them and to take them to heart. I trust that these writings might still be able to help many to come out of their dreams. As matters here for some time have been so discontented, unsettled, and disputative, many a one might find it easier to receive the truth through these writings. Indeed, it is to be hoped that these venerable writings would be put to use instead of the new ones, which are spreading over the entire land like a flying letter, so to say, and according to which all thieves and all prejurers are spoken of as being Godly and therefore are considered a curse by Zechariah. I believe that this is the manner in which one would understand John 10, 1.

"Oh! If only one could allow the numerous books by the advocates of foreign faiths to remain in their place and instead, as Solomon says, to take heed against such writings. Ecclesiastes 12, 12. And rather to become familiar with the writings whose authors have sealed their faith with their own blood. Just as the Lord Jesus himself also sealed his teachings with his blood. Oh how easy it is for a person—as soon as he means it from the heart—to come to the way, the truth, and the light which is Jesus himself. John 14, 6.

"Ah my beloved reader, I have no doubts that if it would be your earnest desire, you would quickly find edification, comfort, and revival for your soul in these books. You will also discover therein, what goes on and what should go on in the Gemeinde of God: And how every sin, as different as they might be must be confessed and forgiven in love, or must also be earnestly punished according to the word of God. Here you will find how those who are punished should and must be avoided, and how this should induce them to a true return and regeneration. 1 Corinthians 5, 11; 2 Thessalonians 3, 6-14.

"In his writings Menno Simons also provides very fine and righteous teaching with respect to the raising and rearing of children, and concerning how one is to live and conduct himself here in this life, if in the end one wishes to inherit heaven and to receive eternal rest for the soul, and also as regards many other topics. Overall these are excellent teachings which are in accordance with the Holy Scriptures.

"With this I will now conclude. But I would bid that my beloved and gracious reader would lovingly excuse and goodheartedly forgive my mistakes in this writing as well as otherwise, and also to consider me as a weak and fragile human being. They should certainly not believe that I have now attained the truth or that I am already perfect. Ah, but no! Beloved reader, No! But even in my very great imperfection I am prepared and anxious to pursue him so that I may attain that for which also I am apprehended by Christ Jesus. Philippians 3, 12.

"Grace be with all that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. AMEN. Ephesians 6, 24."

"A.F."2

This was the spirit and genus which motivated the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in its promotion of the Anabaptist-Mennonite writings. However, a problem existed for most of the writings of the faith had never been translated into German and many of those writings which had been translated to German were already out of print. Because the other Mennonite groups had either lost interest or had turned to pietism for spiritual renewal, it seems that there was no general demand for these writings among the Russian Mennonites. Consequently the task of making the Anabaptist-Mennonite writings available for themselves and others who might be interested apparently fell on the Kleine Gemeinde by default.

This object was firstly accomplished by the translation of numerous Anabaptist-Mennonite writings from the Dutch into the German and the circulation of these translations by handwritten copies. In this effort the Kleine Gemeinde did not restrict itself to the particular Danzig Flemish Mennonite tradition of Klaas Reimer, but was quite prepared to look to other branches of the Anabaptist-Mennonite

faith for added spiritual depth. In the case of a conflict in these teachings they would of course give precedence to the writings of M. Simons, D. Philips and G. Hansen who stood in the direct spiritual ascendancy of the Prussian and particularly the Danzig Flemish Gemeinde.

Thus a handwritten copy of a writing of Gerhard Roosen, of the Hamburg/North German branch of the Mennonite Church was recently found among the writings collected by Blumenort, Manitoba, farmer-historian John E. Friesen.<sup>3</sup> Also found in this collection was a handwritten autobiography of Cornelius Regehr (1743-1794), Aeltester of the Heuboden Gemeinde in Prussia, who had ordained Peter Epp, the father-in-law of Aeltester Klaas Reimer. A similar transcription was included among the papers of Mr. and Mrs. Klaas P. Reimer of Blumenort, Manitoba.<sup>4</sup> The foregoing indicates that the Kleine Gemeinde sought to maintain a diverse and solid theological base.<sup>5</sup>

## 17.02 The Mirror of Greed, 1827.

The second part of this Kleine Gemeinde mission consisted of the publication in German of a number of these writings and the distribution of the same. It seems that Aeltester Abraham Friesen was a key figure and inspiration in bringing this publication effort into being. In fact it could be said that the publications of the Kleine Gemeinde during its 70 year sojourn in Russia were a crowning glory to his ministry. These books included the following: **The Spiegel der Gierigkeit** by Peter Peters, the three volume **Foundation Book** of Menno Simons, and the 1845 **Einfache Erklarung** of Abraham Friesen.

The first book to be considered is the **Spiegel der Gierigkeit** by Peter Peters. Peter Peters (1574-1651) was a mild mannered minister of the Waterlaender Mennonite Gemeinde in Holland during the first half of the seventeenth century. His writings were dearly loved by the Kleine Gemeinde as a warm and inspired guide to the everyday evangelical piety of the believer. His book **Der Weg nach Friedensstaedt** (See Section 4.09) had been translated into German and published in Prussia in 1790. With this exception the writings of Peter Peters were only available in Dutch.

The **Spiegel der Gierigkeit** was a book of 131 pages which dealt with the theme of greed as the principal motivation of human sin. The title translated into English would be **The Mirror of Greed**. The German edition of the book was published in 1827 by which time the Molotschna colony has achieved considerable financial prosperity. The rapid secularization brought on by this economic success was dimly viewed by the Anabaptist-Mennonites and it appears that the Kleine Gemeinde published **The Mirror of Greed** as a means of fighting the forces of individualism and greed among the Russian Mennonites.

The **Spiegel Der Gierigkeit** was the first book to be published by the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. It also appears to be the first book published among all the Russian Mennonites. At least according to historian Peter M. Friesen who has otherwise stated that the old **Gesangbuch**, which was published by the Kirchen-Convent in 1844, was the first book to have been published. It seems unlikely that anyone other than the Kleine Gemeinde would have published the **Spiegel der Gierigkeit** as they were the only group known to have endorsed and promoted the writings of Peter Peters.

By its publication effort the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde perceived itself to be following in the tradition of the Danzig Flemish Mennonite Gemeinde which had published a good number of books during the preceding two centuries. It is noteworthy that many of these books bear little clue as to the identity of the writer, publisher, or translator. This omission had its origin at least partially in the fact that the early Anabaptist-Mennonite writers were usually fugitives from the various church and government authorities with a price on their heads. Later the lack of identification came to signify that the writing was undertaken in humility and as part of the commonwealth not to be attributed to the glory of one individual who finally put the pen to paper. Regrettably this policy now makes it very difficult to properly determine who was responsible for these writings.

The lack of identification in the manner and style of the early writings of the faith can also be taken as a clear indication that the particular writing or publication originated with one of the Anabaptist-Mennonite groups. For example, George Hansen, one of the early Aeltesten of the Danzig Mennonite Gemeinde, published his major works with only the initials "G.H." to identify him.<sup>8</sup>

Aeltester Abraham Friesen also signed some of his publications and writings with only the identification of the initials "A.F.". An example of this is seen in the conclusion to his **Einfache Erklarung** of 1845 which is concluded only with the initials "A.F.". Similarly the individual who translated the **Spiegel der Gierigkeit** from Dutch to German has identified himself only with the initials "A.F." in the style of Aeltester George Hansen, The title page bears only the inscription "aus dem Hollaendisch ueberstetzt ano 1827 von A.F.". It might also be noted that the copy of the **Spiegel der Gierigkeit**

in the possession of Mennonite Library and Archives, Newton, Kansas, bears the handwritten memorial "Abr. v Riesen, October 17, 1856". This would appear to be an unmistakable reference to Aeltester Abraham Friesen (1782-1849). Consequently the 1827 translation and publication of the *Spiegel der Gierigkeit* can safely be attributed to Aeltester Abraham Friesen and the Kleine Gemeinde.

### 17.03 The Foundation Book, Menno Simons, 1834.

The second publication of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde was the 1834 Peter von Riesen edition of the Menno Simons *Foundation Book* of 1539.<sup>9</sup> This was the most important and best known publication. The *Foundation Book* consisted of a selection of the most important writings and teachings of Menno Simons. The story of its publication is one of the most fascinating chapters in the history of the Anabaptist-Mennonites in Russia and Prussia. It has already been mentioned that Peter von Riesen was a prosperous Danzig merchant who seemingly functioned as the Prussian representative of the Kleine Gemeinde. How did it come about that an individual such as Peter von Riesen undertook the task of completing a German translation of the *Foundation Book*? And why was it that the little Kleine Gemeinde had to shoulder the responsibility for the publication of this major work?

The answers to these questions are found in the *Sammlung*<sup>10</sup> of Aeltester Peter Toews which contains copies of some of the correspondence between Peter von Riesen in Danzig, Prussia, and his brother Aeltester Abraham Friesen in Orloff, South Russia, pertaining to this matter (see Section 16.05). Even more helpful is a small book entitled *Eine Seltsame Begebenheit*<sup>11</sup>, written and published by Aeltester Peter Toews in 1911, in which he describes this sad chapter in the history of the Prussian and Russian Mennonites. Aeltester Toews explains that he wrote the booklet as a response to an inquiry about the publication of the 1834 *Foundation Book* made in the *Mennonitische Blaetter* several years previous by Professor Mannhardt of the Prussian Mennonite Church.

It seems likely that another important inspiration for the 1911 publication of *Eine Seltsame Begebenheit* was the appearance during the preceding year of the *Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia* (1789-1910) by historian Peter M. Friesen. The latter book, which purported to some extent to be a history of the entire Mennonite brotherhood in Russia, does not even mention the Peter von Riesen *Foundation Book* except for a brief quotation with respect to child baptism. The quote is unmistakably from the Peter von Riesen edition as the reference is made to its publication "in the first third of the 19th century".<sup>12</sup> No doubt Aeltester Toews felt that it was incredible that the story of the translation and publication of the *Foundation Book* was not even mentioned in a work consisting of over 1000 pages.

The work of Aeltester Peter Toews in *Eine Seltsame Begebenheit* confirms his excellent historical methodology. He introduces the topic with personal recollections of the principal participants, and then provides the reader with a brief summary of the facts taken from a writing of Professor Mannhardt who was normally not favourably inclined to the Anabaptist-Mennonites. In this way Toews also establishes the veracity of his evidence. Toews then goes on to set out extracts from the correspondence between Peter von Riesen and Aeltester Abraham Friesen, two of the principals involved. He concludes his appraisal with a few comments clearly identified as his own opinion. Aeltester Toews also mentions that he has been encouraged to publish his little work by Senator Peter Jansen of Beatrice, Nebraska, and by John I. Friesen, co-owner of the Steinbach Flour Mill, who were the grandsons of Peter von Riesen and Rev. Klaas Friesen, respectively, two of the principal characters involved in this most amazing incident.

In his commentary Toews points out the irony of the situation where in 1835 the Mennonite Aeltesten in Prussia confiscated the writings of their founder Menno Simons and then in 1860 wanted to proceed with the construction of a monument and college in his honour. It should be noted that according to the *Mennonite Bibliography* the other Mennonite groups in Russia did not deem it necessary to publish a single one of the Anabaptist-Mennonite writings. i.e. With the exception of the *Gesangbuch* and catechism. Thus it is no wonder that the Kleine Gemeinde later felt such kinship to John F. Funk and his American Mennonite Church which in contrast published a good stream of Anabaptist-Mennonite writings during the 19th century.

In considering the significance of the 1834 publication of the *Foundation Book*, or "Fundamente boek" as our grandfathers called it, it must be noted that no German translation of the complete works of Menno Simons was available until 1876, when such an edition was published by John F. Funk of the American Mennonites Church. It appears that the *Foundation Book* which contained the most fundamental teachings of Menno Simons was partially translated into German as early as 1575.<sup>13</sup> But the writings of Menno Simons remained generally unavailable in German until some excerpts

were published by the great Dutch Mennonite leader and publisher Joannes Deknatel (1698-1759).<sup>14</sup> However, Deknatel was one of the Dutch Mennonite leaders who had fallen from the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith and turned to pietism for his inspiration. Accordingly his volume of 279 pages contained selected paragraphs according to Deknatel's own doctrinal scheme. Dr. Robert Friedmann explains the significance of this work as follows:

"A service of great value was Deknatel's edition of some of the writings of Menno Simons in 1753. A German translation of it was published in 1758 under the title **Kurzer Auszug von Menno Simons Schriften, verfassend und entschiedliche merkwürdige Verhandlungen und wörtliche Auszüge aus seinen Werken** (279 pages). This is the book which is sometimes referred to as **Der Kleine Menno**. In its first half it contains well-selected treatises and essays, but not Menno's chief work, the **Foundation**. In its second half it brings selected paragraphs chosen according to a doctrinal scheme of Deknatel. The intention of this part is to present to the religious reader selections out of Menno Simons' works which fit into the new trends of piety without offending anyone by the sharply polemical statements of ancient controversies and by the strictness of primitive Christianity as it was understood in early days. Thus, a good orthodox theologian and exhorter for a more living faith was well presented, but the great leader of a brotherhood which actualized a true Christian life and admirably withstood the agonies of persecution was dropped, and with this the spirit of Anabaptism. A pietistic Menno Simons was produced. It is not surprising that by these qualities our book, the first popular German edition of Menno Simons' writings, became a great success. It was through the mediation of Deknatel that Jung-Stilling, the famous Pietist, writer, and physician, learned to know Menno Simons and his ideas; and Jung-Stilling was probably the main channel through which the name of Menno Simons became more widely known in German Protestantism. The new Menno Simons of Deknatel and Stilling was no shock any more but only a welcome supporter of the new pietistic Christianity in its struggle against secular philosophy and liberal thought."<sup>15</sup>

Thus the only writings of Menno Simons which were available in German during the first part of the 19th century was **Der Kleine Menno** which was not really representative of his teachings. This pietistic Menno was known to the Kleine Gemeinde as Johan Toews (1794-1873) purchased a copy of the book in 1828. This volume in turn was preserved by his son Aeltester Peter Toews. The circulation of such a misrepresentative treatment certainly will have been a matter of grave concern to those loyal to the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. Naturally the Dutch editions of the works of Menno Simons were even rarer among the Russian Mennonites than **Der Kleine Menno**. However the Kleine Gemeinde did possess various writings in Dutch including two complete works of Menno Simons.<sup>17</sup> In any event these volumes were out of print and quite rare by this time.

The lack of a good German edition of Menno Simons' writings seemingly did not cause too much concern among the Prussian and Russian Mennonites in general. Because of the rapid abandonment of evangelical teachings the attitude towards these and other writings of the faith seems to have varied from total indifference by those who had fallen morally and spiritually, to the dismay and fear of others such as Peter M. Friesen who felt that, "On the whole, Menno's polemical writings do not belong to those that one reads with spiritual pleasure, indeed one cannot read them without a feeling of spiritual uneasiness."<sup>16</sup>

The lack of a good German edition of the principal writings of Menno Simons was a matter of deep concern to the leadership of the Kleine Gemeinde. Peter von Riesen undertook the tremendous task of completing the German translation of the **Foundation book**<sup>18</sup> while the brothers, Abraham Friesen (later Aeltester) and Klaas Friesen, as ministers of the Kleine Gemeinde, were responsible for the publication of the resulting three volume edition.<sup>19</sup> In their book **Exiled by the Czar** Gustav E. Reimer and G. R. Gaeddert explain the situation and some of its consequences:

"In the Kleine Gemeinde, where primarily books by Mennonite authors were read, a need was felt for a new edition of Menno Simons' **Fundamentbuch** of which only some old Dutch editions or the selections by Deknatel were available. Peter von Riesen undertook to have this main work of Menno revised, and printed several thousand copies in a three-volume edition. He intended, after having delivered the number ordered by his friends in Russia, to sell the rest among the Mennonites in West Prussia. He was, however, prevented from doing so by the Mennonite elders.

"This strange story is told in a small booklet **Eine seltsame Begebenheit** by P. Toews, who published a correspondence exchanged in 1835 and 1836 between Peter von Riesen and his brother Abraham Friesen, who was a minister at that time, and later elder of the Kleine Gemeinde in the Molotschna settlement, South Russia. Peter von Riesen did not fail to obtain the permission of the local censor, the censorship being very severe in Prussia at that time for all printed literature.

“The printing was not yet finished when a volume came into the hands of a Lutheran farmer who was displeased at some passages in which Menno defends himself against the Reformed and Lutheran clergy. As soon as Mennonite ministerial leaders learned of this they were afraid that others of their neighbors would be stirred up. It was at the time when the Mennonites began to be concerned for the loss of their privileges. While the progressive wing, especially the urban groups, were moving toward complete emancipation and were striving for full rights as citizens, the conservative wing—especially the congregational leaders—tried to avoid any publicity whatever, for fear that it might remind the public and the authorities of their somewhat unstable legal position. The Mennonite elders and ministers of the West Prussian congregations immediately held a conference, followed by three others, where they decided to confiscate the writings of the founder of their own church. Peter von Riesen was summoned twice before the conference, and finally was ordered to deliver the whole edition and threatened with excommunication for failure to do so.

“Out of consideration for his family and after an intense inner struggle, he agreed. Excepting the books destined for Russia and a few copies for some friends, a list of which he submitted, and copies for his own family, he delivered the rest to Elder Peter Regier. The books were stored in the attic of the Tiegenhagen Mennonite Church where they were to remain for about twenty years, exposed to great damage from moisture, mold, and mice.

“A letter from Elder Abraham Regier of Heubuden to the congregations in South Russia terminated the sale of these books there. That meant more than a financial loss for von Riesen. This undertaking certainly had been something extraordinary and he perhaps felt bitter about the failures of one of his life’s ambitions. Six months later he wrote a letter to all the elders and ministers who had signed the decisions of the conference, asking each one to make a copy of the deposited books and to read it for his own benefit. He was persuaded that once they really read the book they would change their minds and also that they would try to improve their work for the salvation of their congregations. Finally, he hoped that his children would be able in the future to free the books and return them to their proper destination. Later the elders graciously permitted the exportation of the confiscated copies of the Menno Simons’ *Fundamentbuch* to Russia whence some have found their way to America, where they can even now be found in some homes of former members of the Kleine Gemeinde and in historical libraries.”<sup>20</sup>

The Prussian Mennonite opposition to the Menno Simons book was apparently led by Peter Regier, the elder of the Tiegenhagen congregation 1833-56, whose father Abraham Regier, elder of Heuboden 1804-51, stopped the sale of the book in Russia. Another leading figure in the “revival” movement was one David Epp, to whom reference already has been made. Epp attacked the publication in his correspondence and offered to send several hundred tracts to Russia to convert the Kleine Gemeinde.<sup>21</sup> Part of the reason for the opposition to the Menno Simons writings was that many Prussian and Russian Mennonite leaders had adopted the doctrines and beliefs of separatist pietism. The result was a flood of pietist writings among the Russian Mennonites. This is illustrated by the claim of one writer that the Jung-Stilling novel *Heimweh* was to be found in almost every Russian Mennonite home where it was revered as a second Bible.<sup>21a</sup>

In a letter to his brother Peter von Riesen, of May 18, 1836, Aeltester Friesen points out that in his view the underlying reason for the amazing action of the Aeltesten in seizing and banning the **Foundation books**, was that most of the Prussian Mennonites by now were no longer practicing the teachings of Menno Simons and that accordingly they were afraid and ashamed to have these writings come to light (see Section 16.05). Dr. Robert Friedmann seems to concur with this view stating that the Mennonites in Prussia by this time had become the *Stillen im Lande*. The stronger ones among the Prussian Mennonites had emigrated to Russia and the ones left behind did not want to offend anyone, and rather wished to erase any distinction which existed between them and their Protestant neighbours.<sup>22</sup> Thus it could be said that for the Prussian Mennonites the axiom “Die Stillen im Lande” had now come full circle from its meaning of “the evangelically nonresistant ones in the land” of the Anabaptist-Mennonites, to being the “quiet ones in the land” of the cultural-Mennonites, to being simply the “passively, peaceful ones in the land” of the Pietist-Mennonites.

In the letter referred to above Aeltester Friesen also goes on to refer to the attitude of the Russian Mennonite leaders to the Menno Simons writings. He mentions a meeting at the home of Klaas Reimer in Petershagen, where Aeltester Jakob Warkentin, of the Grosze Gemeinde stated how dissatisfied he was with the Menno Simons writings. This statement was made in the presence of four other Aeltesten. Aeltester Warkentin then went on to state that he had never read these writings and that he would be sure to avoid the same in the future. Aeltester Friesen goes on to remark that because of injunction by the Prussian Aeltesten and the negative position of the Russian Aeltesten the sales of the **Foundation Book** in Russia came to a halt. Another source confirms that these books



were only to be found among the members of the *Kleine Gemeinde*.<sup>23</sup>

In the view of Aeltester Friesen the Mennonite leaders should have had no higher goal than that their charges might have been able to become acquainted with the teachings of the man of God whose very name they carried. "On the contrary their ministers and leaders seized and imprisoned these writings as if a horror were to be found therein, in order that they can proceed unhindered with the new teachings: So that one can rightfully say and lament with the prophet, "O my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy path".<sup>24</sup>

In spite of the opposition of the Prussian and Russian Aeltesten the **Foundation books** were made available to the members of the *Kleine Gemeinde* and also to others among the Russian Mennonites who were still interested in these teachings. When the *Kleine Gemeinde* emigrated to America in 1874 many of these three volume sets were brought along so that even today copies of this most rare edition can be found in the various Mennonite archives. The rejection by the leaders of the Prussian and Russian Mennonites of the writings of their own founding Aeltester and leader Menno Simons whose very name they carried, was a major tragedy for the future of the Russian Mennonites.

For the Mennonite *Kleine Gemeinde* the episode was a victory in the sense that a dedicated and overwhelming effort by some sixty families resulted in the publication of a major three volume work. This remarkable accomplishment will no doubt stand in history as one of the most singular achievements of the Russian Mennonites. It again evidences a basic Anabaptist-Mennonite precept that a small dedicated group which pursues and advances the faith to the best of its abilities and resources can indeed move mountains.

The publishing endeavours of Aeltester Abraham Friesen would best be compared with the publication work of John F. Funk, of the American Mennonite Church, a half a century later. In fact the publishing work of the *Kleine Gemeinde*, founded by Aeltester Abraham Friesen, would later influence that of Funk, when he did several reprints of the book "The peaceful kingdom of God", which was published by the *Kleine Gemeinde* in Russia in 1875. To the Anabaptist-Mennonites such achievements would be viewed as continued evidence of the paramouncy of the commandment of Christ to live a life of evangelical piety (the piety of the gospels) instead of allowing discipleship to be subverted into a well meant but completely misunderstood overemphasis on the emotional aspects of subjective or internal piety.

#### 17.04 **Einfache Erklarung, 1845.**

This was not the end of the Abraham Friesen writing and publication effort. In 1831 a four page letter **Ein brief an Jakob Klassen und dessen Familie zu Kronsgarten** was published. (See Section 16.04) This was followed in 1845 with a 40 page theological defense of the Mennonite *Kleine Gemeinde* against her critics and maligners by Aeltester Abraham Friesen. The full title of this work was **Ein Einfache Erklarung ueber Einige Glaubenssaetze der sogenannten Kleinen Gemeinde. Wohlmeinend aufgesetzt von einen truen Diener am Worte des Herrn im Jahre, 1845.** (Danzig, Druck der Gerhardschen Offizin). (See Sections 12.03, 15.06, 16.20 and 17.01 for excerpts.) An additional writing by Aeltester Abraham Friesen was published later in America under the title, **Eine Kurze Beschreibung des Aeltesten Abraham Friesen, zu Orloff an der Molotschna, Sued-Rusland, anno 1820.** (Beatrice, Nebraska, druck von Paul Springer, 1904). Presumably the publisher was the Nebraska Mennonite *Kleine Gemeinde*. The contents of **Einekurze Beschreibung** are set forth in Sections 15.02 and 15.08.

The writing and publication ministry of Aeltester Abraham Friesen benefited greatly from his wide exposure to a diversity of Anabaptist-Mennonite literature. His reference material was not restricted to the writings of the Danzig Flemish branch of the Mennonite church. Aeltester Abraham Friesen refers several times to the sermons of Jakob Denner who was a minister of the North German Mennonites in Altona near Hamburg, whose work had a warm and spiritual basis.<sup>24a</sup> The writings of Peter Peters represented a mild although theologically sound teaching from the Dutch Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition.

Of course the *Kleine Gemeinde* leaders such as Aeltester Abraham Friesen would have given first precedence to the writings of their own direct spiritual forebears such as George Hansen and Dirk Phillips. But this openness to refer to the wisdom of other branches and traditions within the Anabaptist-Mennonite fold indicates that *Kleine Gemeinde* theology had a much wider spiritual base than has been indicated by some historians in the past. This concludes the review of the translation and publication effort of the Mennonite *Kleine Gemeinde* under the leadership of Aeltester Abraham Friesen.

## 17.05 “Die Wandelnde Seele”, 1860.

A second phase of the Kleine Gemeinde translation and publication effort came to fruition in the early 1860's when a series of three major publications was undertaken. These were the following: **Die Wandelnde Seele** (1860), **Das Kleine Martyrerbuch** (1863), and **Ausgewaehlte Scriften** by Peter Peters (1865). All three of these books were the same size, 7 inches by 4½ inches and were tastefully bound in a plain, usually untitled hardcover, with a dark leather binding on the spine and corners. All three books were printed in Stuttgart, Germany, by J.F. Steinkopf. According to Aeltester Peter Toews, the driving force and inspiration behind these publications was Heinrich Enns (1801-1881) at that time a leading minister of the Kleine Gemeinde.<sup>25</sup> Heinrich Enns also served briefly as the fourth Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde from 1866-1868.

**Die Wandelnde Seele** was one of the most widely read books among the Mennonites.<sup>26</sup> It was written by J. P. Schabalie who like Peter Peters was a minister of the Waterlaender Mennonite group in Holland. It is generally considered to represent the same milder type of Anabaptist-Mennonite piety to be found in the writings of Aeltester Peter Peters. The book was a bible history and consisted of a free paraphrase of the scriptures but was also based on some twenty other contemporary historical sources which the author lists in the book. The work consists of some 530 pages. The book deals with a disembodied soul which appears on earth at stated intervals to interview Adam, Noah, and later Simon Cleophas who was a contemporary of the infant apostolic church. The book is a “kind of mirror of virtues and is full of moral admonitions. Its style is often verbose and sentimental, but its spirit is a good Christian one of peacefulness and emotional warmth. This was the first popular Bible history of modern time.”<sup>27</sup> The entire book was an admonition to daily discipleship and also reflected the Kleine Gemeinde emphasis on a simple and humble evangelical lifestyle.

The book was apparently translated into German by B.B. Brechbill (1665-1720) a leader of the Swiss Brethren. This translation was very popular and was reprinted numerous times by the American Mennonites during the 17th century and on. A European edition was published five times between 1744 and 1811, of which three editions were published in Basel, Switzerland. It appears that the various German editions were not readily available to the Prussian and Russian Mennonites. No doubt this was the reason for its publication by the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in 1860.<sup>28</sup>

The 1860 edition became a mainstay in every Kleine Gemeinde home and also found its way into numerous other Anabaptist-Mennonite homes in Russia. It might be mentioned that it was a common practice among the Kleine Gemeinde for retired or other well-to-do farmers to purchase a number of copies of these books when they were published which they would later give to their children and grandchildren or other relations and friends as gifts. In this way anyone who was able could help so that such publications could be accomplished. An example of a gift of a copy of **Die Wandelnde Seele** by Heinrich Reimer (1792-1884) together with the translation of his memorial of admonition and encouragement to his granddaughter Maria R. Brandt (Mrs. Isaac L. Plett) is to be found in **History and Events**.<sup>29</sup>

## 17.06 The Abridged Martyr Book.

The second book published by the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde during the 1860's was the book commonly known as **Das Kleine Maertyrer Buch**. The full title was **Geschichte der Maertyrer oder kurze historische Nachricht von den Verfolgungen der Mennoniten**. The author of the book was Isaac van Dühren (1725-1800) a Mennonite weaver and dyer in Danzig who also served as a Frisian minister from 1775 until his death. Although the book was published anonymously in good Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, Dühren has been identified as the author.<sup>30</sup> The book consists of selected extracts from the **Martyrs Mirror** of T. von Braght reducing its 1500 pages to 236. The extracts were designed to present and emphasize Anabaptist-Mennonite martyrs and their teachings. The book also covered the persecution of the Mennonites by the Lutherans and also by the Calvinists in Switzerland, Holland, and England. The book closes with a presentation of the case for infant baptism and a scriptural rebuttal. Dühren defends the Mennonites from the slander of being the descendants of the Muensterites. He also presents the view that the Mennonites were derived from the Waldensians.<sup>31</sup>

According to Dr. Robert Friedmann the book was a real success as it was published only two years prior to the emigration to Russia in 1789. “In general, the keynote of the book is loyalty. Keep your heritage! be incited by love! Renounce the world! This book did not aim to tell the world about the Mennonites, but wanted to tell Mennonites something about the obligations deriving from their heritage”.<sup>32</sup> Dr. Friedmann goes on to state that the book was written and designed in order to counter

the tremendous movement in favour of pietism among the Mennonites at the time. When many of the more active and stronger members of the Mennonite Gemeinden in Prussia moved to Russia and took their books and traditions with them the trend towards pietism in Prussia was left largely unopposed.<sup>33</sup>

Thus the Van Duehren book was written and published under almost the identical circumstances as were found nearly a century later when the book was republished by the Kleine Gemeinde. No doubt the previous edition published in 1787 was long since out of print and so a reprint was badly needed. The theme was "Keep your heritage; be aware of the deeds of your ancestors; Follow their faith." Certainly one can hardly imagine a situation where the publication of such a book would have been more appropriate. It is also interesting to note that the van Duehren **Martyrs Mirror** was republished in 1939 by the Anabaptist-Mennonite groups in Manitoba.

### 17.07 "Selected Writings" by Peter Peters.

The last of the three books published by the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde during the 1860's was the **Ausgewahlte Schriften** by Peter Peters. Several references have already been made to the writings of Peter Peters. See Section 4.09. Needless to say he was a century long favorite of the Kleine Gemeinde. The first book by Peter Peters to be published in German was called **The Way to the City of Peace** and was published for the first time in 1790. The translation and publication of the second book **Spiegel der Gierigkeit** in 1827 has already been discussed. The 1865 edition of "The Selected Writings" of Peter Peters included both of these works as well as two additional writings, namely, **The Mirror of Charity** and **A Christian Epistle**. The edition totalled 388 pages. In the preface the editor had identified himself only as "Euer euch liebende Freund". By now we recognize this type of identification as pointing unequivocally to the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. The reason for the publication according to the introduction is "To forstall the great danger of seduction to apostasy from the faith of our fathers", The doubt the writer of this preface was Heinrich Enns, a very gifted and eloquent minister of the Kleine Gemeinde at the time, who spearheaded the Kleine Gemeinde publication effort of the 1860's.

The translator of parts three and four of the **Ausgewahlte Schriften** can be more positively identified. Both Harold Bender<sup>34</sup> and Robert Friedmann<sup>35</sup> identify the translator to be Gerhard Kornelson of the Molotschna. This is undoubtedly Gerhard S. Kornelsen (b. 1816) the veteran Molotschna school teacher who has already been referred to. (See Section 9.12) Kornelsen was a very capable man who later drafted the school regulations for the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde school system in Manitoba. He had also served as an insurance adjuster for the Molotschna Brandordnung. There appears to be no doubt that he was the Gerhard Kornelsen who translated parts three and four of the **Ausgewahlte Schriften**. In addition it happens that Gerhard S. Kornelsen was married to the sister of Aeltester Heinrich Enns who is known to have been the instigator of this publication.

In his book **Mennonite Piety through the Centuries** Dr. Friedmann also goes on to suggest that it was "not improbable that the volume under discussion was asked for by this awakened group" whereby he refers to the newly organized Mennonite Brethren group.<sup>36</sup> This seems completely impossible when it is considered that the very intention of the book was to battle apostasy from the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith such as was represented by the adoption of pietist beliefs. In fact it would probably be more correct to say that the van Duehren **Martyrs Mirror** was the type of book which would have been found in the book burning bonfires of the new groups.<sup>37</sup>

In the same paragraph Friedmann goes on to quote historian Peter M. Friesen to the effect that the Peter Peters books were widely read among the Russian Mennonite congregations.<sup>38</sup> However this should be clarified as in the sentence referred to by Dr. Friedmann, Peter M. Friesen merely states that "the Kleine Gemeinde" enjoyed reading books such as those by elder Peter Peters.<sup>39</sup> i.e. Peter M. Friesen does not state that these books were generally read among the Russian Mennonites. In fact Friesen apparently regarded the reading of such books as reflecting a very narrow minded Mennonitism.

Dr. Robert Friedmann then goes on to mention that another edition of **Ausgewahlte Schriften** was printed by the Mennonite Publishing House in 1901. This edition included the four Peter Peters books already mentioned and also a fifth book entitled **Touchstone of Mankind**. Dr. Friedmann goes on to suggest that this edition was published by Aeltester Isaac Peters and his Evangelical Mennonite Brethren group.<sup>40</sup> However, this also seems to be incorrect as the introduction to the 1901 edition bears the initials "A.L.F." These initials undoubtedly stand for Abraham L. Friesen, the Aeltester of the Nebraska Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde at the time. Like his fellow Aeltester Peter P. Toews,

Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen was very seriously interested in such a publication effort and was a knowledgeable and literate man. He was the grandson of Aeltester Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) the second Aeltester of the Russian Kleine Gemeinde.<sup>40a</sup>

To complete the story of the century long Kleine Gemeinde love affair with the writings of Peter Peters, it might be mentioned that another one of his books was published in 1906. This work was entitled **Die Himmlische Hochzeit** which was also presented in the form of a dialogue and dealt with the preparation of the children of Christ for their heavenly wedding with their Lord. This 1906 edition was also printed by the Mennonite Publishing House of John F. Funk and the book itself was the exact same size and followed the same format as the 1901 edition. Accordingly one would conclude that both books were published by the same sponsoring group. In any event both books became standard features in all Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde homes in Manitoba, Nebraska and Kansas, until well into the 1930's. In addition the Kleine Gemeinde account books, which will be discussed later in greater detail, show that considerable expenditures were made to acquire and distribute the Peter Peters books.<sup>41</sup>

This postscript concludes this review of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde publication effort of the 1860's. This was an accomplishment of almost miraculous proportions when one considers that even after several decades of steady growth the membership of the Kleine Gemeinde only consisted of some 200 families during the 1860's.

### 17.08 Aeltester Peter Toews and the Literature of the Faith.

Aeltester Peter Toews led the final phase of the Kleine Gemeinde translation, publication and book distribution effort. Like Abraham Friesen, Toews was a great lover and promoter of the literature of the faith. In his 1872-1874 correspondence with John F. Funk of the Mennonite Publishing House in Elkart, Indiana, Toews writes very candidly with respect to these writings which were so dearly loved among his Gemeinde.<sup>42</sup>

In his first letter to Funk dated June 1, 1872, Toews mentions how dearly the members of his Gemeinde would love to be able to obtain copies of a German edition of the **Martyrs Mirror** of some 1500 pages. He mentions that even the Dutch editions of the complete **Martyrs Mirror** were very scarce among the Kleine Gemeinde and that the lovers of such writings among the other Mennonite groups in Russia would simply be too small to warrant republication of the Thielmann von Braght **Martyrs Mirror**. However he states that the members of his Gemeinde would eagerly grasp at the opportunity to purchase these books. In his next letter to Funk dated August 25th, 1872, Aeltester Peter Toews again refers to the fervent desire of his group that they might be able to obtain copies of the Anabaptist-Mennonite writings available from Funk's publishing company. In the letter Toews writes as follows:

"As we cannot know for how long we will be able to enjoy our freedom of conscience and our faith as nonresistant Christians, it may hardly be worthwhile for us to order the books here in Russia. But just like the physical body cannot subsist and live without food and sustenance; likewise also, and even less so, can the spiritual body be deprived of the nourishment which can provide the strength for eternal life. This is the case with the history of the martyrs, as in our time and in our circumstances, these books will serve for the encouragement and strengthening of our faith. Particularly of our beloved youth, so that they can see the end to which the martyrs came, and to follow the faith of the martyrs who thereby received the promised land. So that the youth also might know ardent zeal and that we shall not be dispersed by anything unusual. For until the present time we have not had to shed our blood in the battle against sin."

In his next letter to John F. Funk, dated December 6th, 1872, Toews again mentions the matter of the Anabaptist-Mennonite writings. It seems that he is simply overjoyed to have made the acquaintance of Funk and his church who shared the evangelical faith of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde and also their love of the writings of the founders of the faith. In this letter Toews refers to the incident involving the Peter von Riesen edition of the **Foundation of Christian Doctrine** by Menno Simons which was confiscated by 29 Mennonite Aeltesten and ministers, in Prussia, which has already been considered earlier in this chapter. Toews states that "Because the Aeltesten themselves here in Russia did not have the Menno Simons writings nor did they read them; our Gemeinde through the grace of God, was able to have the banned books sent to Russia; and had always recognized these teachings as pure Christian doctrine which we are obligated to follow".

The books which the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde ordered from the Mennonite Publishing House of John F. Funk in Elkart, Indiana, illustrate the thirst for spiritual nourishment which existed among the group, especially during the troubled years leading up to the emigration. In his letter of June

1, 1872, Aeltester Peter Toews ordered single copies of the Thielmann von Braght **Martyrs Mirror**, a church history of the Mennonites by Eby, the book **Ehe der Christin** by Dietrich Phillips, and also a copy of the Dirk Philips handbook **Spiegel der Taufe**. On August 30th, 1872, the Kleine Gemeinde posted the following order for books from John F. Funk: 24 copies of the **Martyrs Mirror**, 12 **Spiegel der Taufe**, 12 **Ehe der Christen**, 1 copy of **Hoffart Und Demut**, and one copy of the **Complete Works of Menno Simons**. In the **1872-1878 Diary** of Aeltester Peter Toews record is also found of a second and third order from Funk which together consisted of 17 copies of **Spiegel der Taufe**, and 62 copies of **Hoffart und Demut** by John M. Brennehan (1816-1895).<sup>43</sup>

To provide the reader with an indication of how serious the Kleine Gemeinde was with respect to the study of these Anabaptist-Mennonite writings, reference is made to the **Martyrs Mirror** of Thielmann von Braght which were purchased at a cost of about 5 Ruble each in 1872. Only two years later many of the members of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde sold their farms, consisting of improved land with buildings, for about 10 rubel per desjatein. This came to about four ruble or three dollars per acre of land. The equivalent land value in today's terms this would have amounted to over \$1,000.00 for such a book.<sup>44</sup> It should also be borne in mind that by the time these books were ordered in fall of 1872 many of the Kleine Gemeinde must have had frequent thoughts as to whether they would not have to sacrifice everything for the sake of their faith. To the pietist-cultural Mennonites, such expenditures must have appeared to be the height of folly.

### 17.08 Book Distribution.

The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde interest in the writings of the faith was evidenced by a serious book distribution effort. In addition to its own publications the Kleine Gemeinde also purchased other books for distribution among its members and anyone else interested. This included Bibles, Bible stories (Bibliche Geshichten), songbooks (Gesangbücher), Catechisms, and such evangelical writings as were available elsewhere. It was only in the last several years that the Kleine Gemeinde had easy access to a wide range of Anabaptist-Mennonite writings through John F. Funk in Elkhart. Since the time of the emigration to Russia the members of the Kleine Gemeinde would have tried to supplement the supply of books which they had brought with them, by purchasing used books privately wherever possible and by purchasing new books when and if available. Fortunately Bibles and books such as Gesangbücher, Bible stories, catechisms, were also used by the other Mennonites so that these were generally available. e.g. Peter M. Friesen records that the first book to be published by the Russian Mennonites was the **Gesangbuch** which was first printed by the Molotschna Kirchen-Convent in 1844.<sup>45</sup>

In the later years the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde also purchased books and Bibles from the Evangelical Bible Society in St. Petersburg. The letter collection of Aeltester Peter Toews contains a number of letters from the General-Adjutant of the Bible Society in St. Petersburg acknowledging various payments for books. This included a letter acknowledging 10 silver ruble on August 21, 1873, and a letter acknowledging 25 silver ruble on December 21, 1873. A letter from the President of the Board of Directors of the Evangelical Bible Society in St. Petersburg dated July 16, 1874, sheds some light on the meaning of these payments made by the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. Here follows the text of this letter:

Bible Society in Russia.

Board of Directors: St. Petersburg,  
June 16, 1874; No. 89

To the Honourable Church Aeltester  
Peter Toews in Blumenhoff

"The undersigned acknowledges with heartfelt thanks the sum of 19 ruble and 50 Kopeken as full payment for the Bibles and New Testaments sold to date, which was received together with your writing of June 21. I also acknowledge the fears which you so lovingly expressed in your letter that the bond which has existed until now between the Bible Society (Board of Directors) and yourself, will be broken by the emigration to America of the Mennonite Gemeinden.

"I am honoured to share with you that your inquiry as to whether the Board of Directors of the Evangelical Bible Society will also undertake to support your Gemeinde to America with letters of reference, will be presented to the next sitting of the gentlemen of the Board of Directors. I will advise you of their decision immediately thereafter."

President of the Board of Directors  
of the Evangelical Bible Society  
"Baron R. Mirbech"

It is evident from the foregoing that the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde had a long standing relationship with the Evangelical Bible Society in Russia to sell and distribute Bibles and New Testaments for them on consignment. i.e. The Kleine Gemeinde would receive the books, then sell them, after

which they paid the Bible Society in St. Petersburg. However, the Evangelical Bible Society decided that it would not assist the Kleine Gemeinde in its emigration plans nor continue this relationship should this emigration take place. The Evangelical Society had different ideas of its function and role than the Kleine Gemeinde which assumed that the Evangelical Bible Society would be happy to disseminate Bibles and other books such as Bible stories, wherever there was a need. In a letter to Aeltester Peter Toews dated November 15, 1874, the President provides the following explanation for its decision:

To the Worthy Church bishop  
Peter Toews in Blumenhof.

Evangelical Bible Society of Russia  
St. Petersburg, November 15th, 1874

“The undersigned is honoured to hereby impart to you honoured friend, that the Board of Directors of the Evangelical Bible Society at its sitting of November 8th considered the matter of your Gemeinde, which is preparing itself for emigration to America. You had requested that we also provide you with Bibles and other sacred writings postage paid and on credit in America, as has been our practice until now. Regrettably the Board has come to the decision that it cannot comply with this wish as this would overstep the legally appointed boundaries of the Board of Directors which is the Russian Empire. The Board is prepared and would be glad to ask this of the American Bible Society, if you and your Gemeinde would so wish. However our hope remains alive that in consideration of the changes in circumstances you might still abandon your plans to emigrate and thereby your relationship with the Board of Directors can remain undisturbed.”

President of the Board of Directors  
of the Evangelical Bible Society  
“Baron R.V. Mirbeck”

It is evident that the Kleine Gemeinde had developed an interesting mechanism by which it distributed Bibles and other devotional writings. The Bibles and Anabaptist-Mennonite books were not only for their own edification but were also a means of spreading the gospel among the Russian Mennonites and colonists. It seems that everybody in the Gemeinde was admonished and encouraged to take part in the effort as part of their evangelical duty. Many members would buy more than one copy of the Kleine Gemeinde publications in order that the printing could be paid for. These extra copies could later be used as gifts to family members. It was common for Kleine Gemeinde children to receive a Peter Peters or other Anabaptist-Mennonite book when they turned 21, or when they became members of the Gemeinde. In other cases these books were simply used as birthday presents, etc. Frequently an exhortation to be true to the heritage and faith was endorsed in the front of the book. (See Section 17.05)

In addition extra copies were retained by the more well-to-do members of the Gemeinde for resale in the future when there would again be a demand for the book. Interestingly enough, this tradition of book distribution by informal grapevine seems to have survived among the descendants of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia. More than 50 genealogy books have been published among these descendants since the start of the 20th century. All of these have been published and distributed without the official assistance of any Gemeinde or church organization. In each case many dedicated individuals were prepared to volunteer their services without pay or recognition, in order to act as informal book agents, to distribute books, and to remit payment for the same when sold.

Reference to available Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde records demonstrates the extent of this book distribution effort. The most important records are those of Aeltester Peter Toews. Some of his diary entries in this regard are included here in order that the reader might get a feeling for the type of activity involved in this mission.

“On March the 4th, 1871, I sent four copies by mail to Johan Riesen, Berjansk, regarding the Menno Simons books. June 22, 1871. Wrote to A. Friesen in Kleefeld, regarding the Menno Simons books at J. von Riesen, Berjansk. April 18th. Sent to Isaac Warkentin, on the new settlement at Sagrodof at No. 6, the money 2 ruble for the books from I. Kehler.

“June 21, 1872. Wrote to the book distributor Taubensee in Halbstadt, and requested that he bind the 24 copies of the Gesangbucher which I had left with him. Also if he could look through them to see if the 25 copies of the page 51 which are missing here might be among them. And if he could advise me. On July 1, I wrote again to the same, regarding the names on some of the Gesangbucher, and also ordering two copies in addition to the ones referred to above.

“On August 12th, I posted a letter to Fast in Gnadenfeld regarding the missing page in the new Gesangbucher. 10 copies. Also wrote to the book binder Taubensee, in Neu Halbstadt, that he should send the books he has already finished, namely the Dutch ones, along with Kroeker. On August 23rd I wrote to the book binder in Neu Halbstadt regarding the 26 Gesangbucher which are ready, and also sent him 35 ruble. Also a **Martyrs Mirror** for binding. November 21, 1872. Wrote to Gerhard Kornelsen regarding the D.

Phillips book at the book binder. If he could forward the same to me.

“January 15th, 1873. Wrote to Abram Wiens in Kleefeld regarding the *Martyrs Mirror* which he had received. March 29th to Kornelsen in Lichtenau, in order that he attend to the letter and book for Warkentin in Altona. March 28th. Letter to Peter Bearg in the Crimea. I send him 2 books, 1 *Spiegel der Taufe*, and 1 *Ehe der Christen*. May 5th, 1873. Wrote to Funk. Ordered the books ‘Dymond ueber der Krieg’, and ‘Christen Thun und Krieg’, by Brennenman. June 24th. Wrote Hiebert in Alexanderwohl of our safe return journey and of my father’s death. Also sent him four copies of the *Harold der Wahrheit*. July and August for both the years 1871 and 1872. December 7th, 1872. Wrote to I. Wall, Odessa, regarding Russian testaments. December 29th. Wrote to Abram Wiebe in Olgafeld and advised him of the Peter Peters books and other books.’”

The foregoing are extracts from the letterbook of Aeltester Peter Toews. Aeltester Peter Toews has noted a more substantial order for books in his 1872-1878 Diary: “On September 2, 1873, I forwarded to Sagradowka the following: 13 Bibles at 1 ruble and 5 kopeck each. 8 P. Peters books at 63 kopeken each. 1 Testament at 40 kopeken”.<sup>46</sup> The book distribution effort involved numerous individuals in the Kleine Gemeinde. This is illustrated by a few entries from the diary of the Kleine Gemeinde teacher Abraham R. Friesen, in Lichtenau, Molotschna: “September 27th. I wrote a letter to D. Friesen quoting him the prices of the catechisms. November 1, 1872. I sent 10 copies of *Biblisches Geschichten* along with Cornelius Plett to bring to Cornelius Fast in Steinbach, Borosenko.”<sup>47</sup>

### 17.09 Some Sample Correspondence.

It is evident that the Kleine Gemeinde book distribution effort was a many faceted one. Various correspondence in the letter collections of Aeltester Peter Toews will further illustrate this aspect of Kleine Gemeinde life. The former Aeltester Heinrich Enns in a letter dated November 25th, 1870 advised Aeltester Peter Toews as follows:

To Peter Toews, Blumenhoff.

Fischau, November 25, 1870

“With friendly greeting. I report to you that I have received your letter together with the 6 ruble from Johan Warkentin. Also that on October 1, of this year I have again paid the current soul money for yourself and your wife, for your parents, Cornelius Toewses, and Joh. Goossen. In total 8 souls at 34 kopeken per soul.

“You have also talked with Johann Friesen about approximately 30 copies of the Peter Peters books. And also some for yourself. I will send 30 along. There were 64 copies of this book left here so that 34 copies will remain.

“Otherwise I do not know of much to write for this time except that physically we are well and in good health. With respect to the soul I must cry out together with the poet in 514 (*Gesangbuch*), confess my circumstances and lament to the Lord. Finally I greet you and your wife and all other friends who are there around you, and wish you all the peace of God which is above all understanding and which will keep you unto eternal life.”

“Heinrich Enns”

According to this letter Aeltester Enns, still has 64 copies of the Peter Peters *Ausgewahlte Schriften* on hand in 1870 which was 5 years after the publication of that particular work.

Another interesting letter is found in the Peter Toews letter collection for the year 1871. This letter is from John V. Riesen in Berjansk.<sup>48</sup>

To Peter Toews in Blumenhof:

Berjansk, January 12, 1871

“Because of sickness I am only now able to answer your letter of November 8th. I am still in possession of a number of copies of the Menno Simons writings and also believe that I will be able to allow you to have the quantity asked for. However, all of my books have not yet arrived. I am expecting the same in the month of May or June because they first have to be processed by the censor. If this is important enough for you to wait until that time then you should advise me accordingly by another letter.

“If you should be familiar with Jakob Friesen formerly of Blumstein in the Molotschna and now resident in Neu-Heuboden near Nikopol, I would ask that you extend my greetings to him and also let him know that I am planning to visit him this summer if the Lord will grant me good health.”

Together with a greeting I remain Yours Respectfully. “J.V. Riesen”

According to this letter from J.V. Riesen, Aeltester Toews is trying to purchase additional copies of the Menno Simons book which was published in 1834. It appears that the J.V. Riesen must be John von Riesen the son of Peter von Riesen who had originally translated this edition. As Peter von Riesen was able to save some copies for each of his children when the books were confiscated by the Prussian Aeltesten this would explain why there were still additional copies to be purchased. From the tone of the letter it is clear that he is in no panic to sell which would indicate that these books were getting to be quite rare by 1871.

It has already been mentioned that the Kleine Gemeinde obtained books on consignment for sale

from the Evangelical Bible Society. The fact that the Kleine Gemeinde employed the same arrangements to sell these and other books is apparent from the following letter.

Worthy Friend Peter Toews: Einlage, February 19th, 1871  
"Pursuant to the instructions of Wilhelm Riegel I report to you that the books which you had consigned to him for sale cannot be sold. Riegel has requested that I return to you the balance of the said books, 8 in number, together with 1 ruble and 26 kopeken in money. These books and funds you will receive together with this letter.

"Together with a friendly greeting your friend," "Abr. Unger"

It has already been mentioned that a number of books such as Gesangbücher, Biblische Geschichte, Catechisms, and other such books were in fairly general use among the Russian Mennonites so that the Kleine Gemeinde were able to purchase sufficient supplies of these without any difficulties. In a brief extract from a letter by Kleine Gemeinde minister Abraham Klassen in the Molotschna dated April 12, 1871, he reports to Aeltester Peter Toews with respect to Gesangbücher. "You have written with respect to the Gesangbücher. In February I paid for your order at 80 kopeken per book. In total 48 ruble for 60 copies. You had only ordered 58 but Reimer, Junior, ordered another two so that the total was 60. It is sufficient if you forward the money after the harvest."

The foregoing provides an interesting illustration as to the extent of the use of Gesangbücher in the Kleine Gemeinde. No doubt some of the books were for resale. Another letter written by Jakob Kethler in Nuanlage on October 13th, 1871, indicates that Aeltester Toews has attempted to purchase some Dutch Anabaptist-Mennonite books which the latter had for sale.

Worthy Friend Peter Toews. Nuanlage October 13th, 1871

"I have received the letter which you had directed to me which I also appreciate very much. You had wanted to know if the Dutch books were for sale or if I wanted them to be returned. Accordingly I am notifying you with this writing that you may have these books. The price is 2 ruble which you may pay your neighbour Jakob Warkentin, No. 6, who lives there not far from you and who will forward the money to me at his convenience. But if these books are somewhat too expensive for you, which I hope is not the case, then please be so kind as to see that these books are delivered to the same J.W. from whom I will receive them in due course. A heartfelt greeting to you all together with all brothers and sisters who are united in Jesus."

"Jakob Kethler"

Another letter in the Peter Toews collection indicates that Jakob Kethler is a minister in the church in Halbstaedt which was a part of the former Orloff Gemeinde. It seems that Toews had originally received these books from the deceased J. Martens in Tiegenhagen in the Molotschna, for the purpose of translating them.

The Kleine Gemeinde was also well known to Johann Taubensee the bookbinder in Neu-Halbstaedt. In a letter to Aeltester Peter Toews dated August 2nd, 1872 Taubensee advises Toews with respect to the binding of Gesangbücher.

Honoured friend Peter Toews. Neu-Halbstaedt, August 30th, 1872.

"First of all I must ask that you excuse me for taking so long in answering your letter. At that time we had numerous guests here and I laid your letter aside after only a cursory glance. I report to you that there were no extra pages with these 24 Gesangbücher. They are all done and you may have them picked up together with the other books which you brought here at that time. Also I have made up two more Gesangbücher than what you brought at that time. You may pick them up at any time should convenient occasion arise there.

"In the hope that you will be tolerant of my inadvertence, I subscribe with a friendly greeting."

"Johann Taubensee"

In a letter of August 17, 1872, Taubensee advises that he has sent the Dutch books and also a Gesangbuch for Gerhard Siemens along with Kroeker of Steinbach. In another letter of August 30th Taubensee explains that he has sent 26 Gesangbücher along with Friesen who has already paid for the books at 50 kopeken each. The two books which Toews had brought in to be bound are expected to be ready in about a month's time. Another letter from Gustav Rempel from Gnadenfeld, dated August 25, 1872, provides a clue as to the reason for all the Gesangbücher which have recently been purchased by the Kleine Gemeinde.

Mr. Peter Toews, Blumenhof. Gnadenfeld, August 25th, 1872

"May this serve to answer your inquiry of the 10th of this month, which was transmitted to me by Is. Fast. The desired pages which were missing in the new Gesangbuch which I have caused to be published, can be obtained from me at any time in exchange for the extra pages which you have there."

Yours respectfully Gustav Rempel.

Thus it appears that the Kleine Gemeinde had purchased a large quantity of Gesangbücher because a new edition had just been printed.



The foregoing letters serve to illustrate the means by which the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde distributed its own publications as well as Bibles and Anabaptist-Mennonite books available from other publishers.

### 17.10 The Reading Material of the Kleine Gemeinde.

This examination of books and publications among the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde is not complete without another reference to the writings available within the Gemeinde. Reference has been made to the fact that the leaders and lay members of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde were versant in a wide range of Anabaptist-Mennonite literature. This includes writings which originated with the Danzig Flemish Mennonite Gemeinde as well as other branches and traditions of the Mennonite faith in Europe and later also in America. The libraries of the Kleine Gemeinde included books which originated with the Frisian Mennonite Gemeinde in Prussia, the Dommelpelaars from the Hamburg/North German Mennonites, and the Waterlaenders from among the Dutch Mennonites.

An interesting reference in the **1872-1878 Diary** of Aeltester Peter Toews sheds considerable light on the the devotional and reference material of the Kleine Gemeinde. In an unrelated diary entry for April 2nd, 1879 Aeltester Peter Toews has noted that pursuant to a request he has forwarded the following books to John Holdeman: 1. **Das Biblische Namen und Chronikbuch** by P.J. Twisck, Hollaendisch. 2. **An Exposition regarding the 20th Chapter of Revelations** entitled **Das Friedensreich Christi**. 3. **Spiegel des Lebens** by George Hansen, Hollaendisch. 4. **Fundamentebuch** by George Hansen, Hollaendisch. 5. **Confession of Faith** also by George Hansen. In Latin and German. 6 and 7. **Geschiedenis der Christen . . . Mennoniten Genant** by Herman Schijn. Edition of Gerardus Maatschoen. 8. **Ein Confession oder Glaubensberichten der Alten Flemischen Taufgesinnten**, (Probably the Hans von Steen confession of faith) German. 9. **The work of Peter Peters**, Hollaendisch.

Unfortunately space does not permit a commentary as to the origins and significance in the Anabaptist-Mennonite literature of each of these works. However the reader will be somewhat familiar with the works referred to in this listing with the exception of the **Geschiedenis** being item number 6 and 7. Here it could be noted that Herman Schijn (1662-1727) was the great leader of the "conservative" Mennonites (Zonists) in Holland. He was well educated and had studied at the Universities of Leiden and Utrecht where he obtained his M.D. degree. Schijn wrote a large number of theological and historical works of which his **Geschiedenis** was one. Similar to Van Duehren over a century later, Schijn defended Anabaptist-Mennonite faith and theology and also supported the view that the Mennonites had no connection with the radical Muensterites and that from the beginning down to the middle ages they had been a peaceful group of biblical Christians. In his **Geschiedenis** he provides biographies of early Anabaptist-Mennonite leaders and also summarizes the contents of their writings.<sup>49</sup> It is evident that the **Geschiedenis** would have been an invaluable reference work and resource book for the Kleine Gemeinde who shared the same historical views.

In view of the foregoing it is rather surprising that certain historians such as Peter M. Friesen have dismissed the Kleine Gemeinde as never having made a profound impact because they were "too narrow-minded, too frightened, too isolationist and opposed to education". Perhaps what historian Pete M. Friesen really meant was that the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde refused to discard the faith of their fathers to flock to the banner of his particular brand of separatist pietism. It is regrettable that Peter M. Friesen did not rather challenge the source of the faith of the Kleine Gemeinde which was represented by the Anabaptist-Mennonite literature referred to above, instead of disparaging them for practicing and promoting this faith.

### 17.11 "The Peaceful Kingdom of Christ" by P. J. Twisck, 1875.

The concluding phase of the Kleine Gemeinde translation and publishing effort in Russia occurred under the leadership of Aeltester Peter Toews during the 1870's. This was the publication of **The Peaceful Kingdom of Christ** written by Peter Janz Twisck. The earliest reference to the publication of this book in the records of Aeltester Peter Toews is in 1873. Thus it seems likely that the decision to publish this remarkable dissertation by Peter J. Twisck was made after the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde had already decided to emigrate. No doubt it was intended as one last parting gift for their former beloved homeland and one last entreaty to their fellow Mennonites who were remaining in Russia to return to the faith of the fathers before they were led and enticed unto complete spiritual and physical ruin.

The publication story of this small work will be set out in greater detail in a subsequent volume. But it is necessary to take a closer look at the contents of this book in order to determine the significance

of its publication at this troubled time. The full title of the work by Peter J. Twisck was **Das Friedensreich Christi oder Auslegung des 20. Capitel in Offenbarung St. Johannis**. Peter Jansz Twisck (1565-1636) was an outstanding teacher and Aeltester of the "Hard Frisians" in Hoorn, Holland.<sup>50</sup> He was an Orthodox leader who energetically defended the teachings of Menno Simons and Dirk Phillips against the pietist influences of Waterlaender leaders such as Hans die Ries. Hans die Ries could be regarded as an early forefather of the type of Pietist-Cultural Mennonitism later practised by the Doopegezindte in Holland and by many of the Mennonites in Prussia (and later also in Russia) and which ultimately led to the ruin of these two branches of the Mennonite Church. Twisck who had personally known of such early Anabaptist leaders as Menno Simons unashamedly defended the purity of their teachings.<sup>51</sup>

**Das Friedensreich Christi** had a special significance for the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde as it prepared to leave Russia. During all its years in Russia the Kleine Gemeinde had valiantly battled against the forces of pietism which were rapidly infiltrating and overpowering the faith in Russia. One of the teachings of the pietists which was contrary to the teachings of the gospel was that of a future millennium. In the words of Aeltester Klaas Reimer those who had fallen under the influence of this "terrible misconception" now started preaching that after the second coming of Christ a "1000 year reign of peace" would take place. It was only during this millennium that the Christians would commence to live a life of piety in raptured union with God. Here the pietists, in the words of Dr. Robert Friedmann had found "clear evidence that the Kingdom of God which every Christian is looking for must be understood strictly in a spiritual sense and not as an imminent historical event." "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation," that is the only point to be taught according to Christ's own words.<sup>52</sup>

**Das Friedensreich Christi** was a brilliant exposition of the spiritual earthly Kingdom of Christ. This spiritual kingdom was inaugurated with the birth of Jesus Christ and therefore it was impossible to combine the reality of evangelical faith with the dream of a future millennium. Twisck develops this fundamental teaching to illustrate the hermeneutical fallacies of the chiliasts. In his treatise Twisck forcefully asserts his view that the proponents of millennialism were subverting the power of the gospel into a weak and ineffectual emphasis on their personal enjoyment of salvation. The result is a Christendom which cannot be distinguished from the heathen world which it replaced. In the view of Twisck such a deluded Christianity is far more dangerous for evangelical Christians than the fierce persecution of the Roman Empire, for the "new" Christianity employs the gentle speech and spiritual language of the Savior in order to lead innocent believers away from the "old truths" of the gospel.

It is evident that the 1874 publication of **Das Friedensreich Christi** was intended to be a final loving salvo against the erroneous teachings to which many of the Russian Mennonites had fallen prey. The Russian Mennonite world after the 1870's was too occupied with materialism and pietism to pay much attention to the truths contained in **Das Friedensreich Christi**. But the treatise did find a very warm reception in the American Mennonite church where John F. Funk reprinted the booklet several times. In fact the treatise was so popular that Funk translated and published it in English in 1913.

## 17.12 Conclusion.

Although the publication and distribution effort of the Kleine Gemeinde did not reverse the tide of events among the Russian Mennonites, it did no doubt help to keep alive some glowing embers of the faith of the fathers. When more powerful events intervened to devastate the pietist-cultural Mennonite empire in Russia several decades later, the current to which the Kleine Gemeinde effort had contributed was still alive and sparked a renewed and reborn Russian-Mennonite Church. This regenerated church knew from first hand experience about persecution and prevailing in the face of a present tribulation which was so much a part of the experience and faith of the Kleine Gemeinde in Russia.

The publication effort of the Kleine Gemeinde was probably its crowning achievement in Russia. A remarkable and almost impossible accomplishment for such a small and insignificant group. However compared to the wealth of the Russian Mennonite estate owners (approximately three hundred families in 1908), whose palaces and mansions are symbolically heralded as the ultimate pinnacle of Mennonite success in Russia, these humble publishing efforts take on a great significance which all descendants of the Russian Mennonites can be proud of. Indeed, all evangelical Christians can adopt these endeavours as part of their spiritual heritage. For here are seen the results of a living faith far greater than bricks and mortar long since destroyed and reduced to ruin and ashes.

## FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER SEVENTEEN. BOOKS AND PUBLICATIONS.

1. Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 133.
2. Aeltester Toews, *Sammlung*, *op.cit.*, 267-270. See also Aeltester Abraham Friesen, *Eine Einfache Erklahrung Ueber Einige Glaubenssetze der Sogenannten Kleinen Gemeinde* (Druck der Gerhardschinn Offizin, Danzig; 1845), 31-34.
3. Courtesy of Rev. Jac P. Friesen and Roy Loewen, Blumenort, Manitoba.
4. Courtesy of Mrs. Peter K. Penner, Steinbach, Manitoba.
5. This makes an interesting comparison to some of the pietist-Mennonites in Russia who seemingly sometimes selected one particular pietist writer such as Jung-Stilling whose ideas they espoused even at the expense of burning the books of other pietist writers. (See Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 256, 275, 325, 335, and 380).
6. Robert Friedmann, *op.cit.*, 109. It is noted again that Dr. Friedmann appears to be incorrect in characterizing Peter Peters as an early pietist apparently on the grounds of the warmth and mellowness of his teaching for surely this is also the essence of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith in the sense that Aeltester Abraham Friesen of the Kleine Gemeinde refers to Matthew 11, 28, "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you peace, etc.".
7. Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 831. It is noteworthy that on page 10 of his work Peter M. Friesen refers to Deknatel as having published a three-volume *Foundation book* of Menno Simon in 1765. However, no such work is listed by the Mennonite Bibliography other than the Peter von Reisen edition of 1835. Perhaps a small oversight?
8. Robert Friedmann, *op.cit.*, 132-134.
9. Ernst Crous, "Peter von Riesen", ME 4, 332.
10. Aeltester Peter Toews, *op.cit.*, 151-157.
11. Aeltester Peter Toews, *Eine Seltsame Begebenheit* (Hochstaedt, Man. Peter Toews, 1911), 22 pp.
12. Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 1007.
13. Cornelius Krahn, "Foundation" ME 2, 358.
14. Robert Friedmann, *op.cit.*, 125.
15. *Ibid.*, 126. The full title for the Peter von Riesen Foundation book is *Die Fundamente der Seligmachenden Lehre unsers Herrn Jesu Christi; aus Gottes Wort Kurz Zusammen gefasst von M.S., In drei Buechern.* Danzig 1834-1835.
16. Peter M. Friesen *op.cit.*, 18.
17. Aeltester Peter Toews, *Sammlung*, *op.cit.*, 344.
18. Presumably this required the compilation and editing of those portions already translated and published in German, as well as translating the remaining portions.
19. Aeltester Peter Toews, *Eine Seltsame Begebenheit*, *op.cit.*, 4.
20. G.E. Reimer and G.R. Gaedert, *Exiled by the Czar* (Mennonite Publication Office, Newton, Kansas; 1956), 4-5.
21. Ernst Crous, *op.cit.*
- 21a. James Juhnke, "East, West, and Home", in *Mennonite Life*, March 1975, pp. 10-11.
22. Robert Friedmann, *op.cit.*, 140.
23. H. Goertz, *op.cit.*, 70.
24. Aeltester Peter Toews, *Eine Seltsame Begebenheit*, *op.cit.*, 20-21.
- 24a. C. Neff, "Jacob Denner", ME 2, 36-37.
25. Aeltester Peter Toews, *Sammlung*, 336.
26. Neff/von der Zijpp, "The Wandering Soul" ME 4, 437-438.
27. Robert Friedmann, *op.cit.*, 114.
28. Harold S. Bender, "Kleine Gemeinde", ME 3, 199.
29. *History and Events*, *op.cit.*, 128-130.
30. H.G. Mannhardt, "Isaac von Duehren", ME 2, 107.
31. Robert Friedmann, *op.cit.*, 139.
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*, 140.
34. Harold S. Bender, *op.cit.*, 199.
- 34a. According to the 1883 R.M. of Hanover Assessment Records, Gerhard S. Kornelsen (b.1816) is shown to be living in the Kleine Gemeinde settlement of Lichtenau, near Steinbach, Manitoba. See *Mennonitische Rundschau*, August 17, 1892, Volume 13, Number 33 (Courtesy of Dennis Stoesz, Winnipeg, Manitoba), where Isaac Peters of Henderson, Nebraska, refers to Gerhard Kornelsen as his old school teacher colleague from Russia.
35. Robert Friedmann, *op.cit.*, 110.
36. *Ibid.*
37. Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 256, 275, 325, 380.
38. Robert Friedmann, *op.cit.*, 110.
39. Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 133.
40. Robert Friedmann, *op.cit.*, 110.
- 40a. Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen also published a four page reprint of "Ein Brief zu Kronsgarten" (Section 16.04). This booklet is also identified only by the initials "A.L.F." It is interesting to note that in his acknowledgements to his 1916 study of Menno Simons, John Horst has credited Aeltester Peter Toews and Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen as sources for his study.
41. *Eastern Reserve Kleine Gemeinde Deacon Record*, Unpublished Journal, Courtesy of Prairie Rose E.M. Church and Roy Loewen, Blumenort, Manitoba.
42. Courtesy of Mennonite Library and Archives, North Newton, Kansas.
43. Here, a valuable clue to the future theological development of the Kleine Gemeinde during its first quarter century in America.
44. See *History and Events*, *op.cit.*, 135.
45. Peter M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 832.
46. Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Milton Toews, Neilburg, Saskatchewan.

47. **Plett Picture Book, op.cit., 19.**
48. **He appears to be the brother to the wife of Consul Cornelius Janzen, and thus a first cousin to many of the Kleine Gemeinde leaders at the time.**
49. **Neff/van der Zjipp, "Herman Schijn", ME 4, 454-456.**
50. **Robert Friedmann, op.cit., 262.**
51. **Neff/van der Zjipp, "Peter Twisck", ME 4, 757-758.**
52. **Robert Friedmann, op.cit., 262-263.**

# Chapter Eighteen.

## Socio-Economic Policy

### 18.00 Introduction.

This chapter will examine the faith and practice of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde relative to socio-economic matters. This is undoubtedly one of the most important aspects of the life of any people and perhaps also the most difficult to document. The subject will be examined, firstly, with respect to the Kleine Gemeinde socio-economic philosophy and secondly, with respect to the implementation of this teaching in daily life.

The philosophy of all peoples are stated to be benevolent and compassionate. The most powerful social movements of the 19th and 20th century have been those which declared themselves to be the most supportive of the poor and oppressed and yet these same movements frequently were the ones that made the cruelty and oppression of their predecessors look mild by comparison. The study of socio-economic movements invariably reveals a tremendous discrepancy between the stated goodwill and the actual real life accomplishments.

A similar tendency is also discernable among religious movements. Positive and unequivocal declarations of love and charity are common and fundamental to all theologies. In western civilization Christianity had generally been yoked together with some form of *laissez faire* free enterprise system. It has also been generally accepted that those capable were to provide for those who were not. However, what seems to be a relatively simple principle in theory has frequently been observed more in the breach than in the doing.

During the Middle Ages and Reformation, the oppressed peasants and miserable serfs were harassed and blackmailed into providing the little resources they had for the building of majestic cathedrals which were to glorify God through their opulence and beauty. A cynical church sold spiritual assurances through indulgences and religious relics. The new state churches which arose from the theological and social ferment of the Reformation did not differ drastically in their social and economic teachings. Invariably the stated intentions and policies were the absolute best but action was seldom forthcoming.

It must also be borne in mind that no medical, welfare, educational or other social programs were made available by the government during the historical period under review. If someone was dying and had no funds to pay for medical assistance, he simply died. More often than not, medical help was crude and unavailable in any event. If the family was poor and without means they simply had to go and beg. If the family lacked funds to provide an education for their children, then the children simply did not receive an education. Older people were looked after by their own family and if there was no family or the family was poor, then the care was correspondingly limited. Of course the situation should not be exaggerated. No doubt many government and church programs existed in Russia, even during the 19th century. Without question, countless individual acts of benevolence and philanthropy were extended by individuals of all faiths. Many great men such as Leo Tolstoy were clearly aware of the dangers of the ruthless oppression of the Russian peasant. In considering the socio-economic beliefs of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde it is certainly helpful to have a general understanding of the environment in which these teachings originated and in which they were practised.

### 18.01 The Mirror of Greed, 1827.

The socio-economic beliefs of the Kleine Gemeinde were based on the Anabaptist-Mennonite teaching of a community of sharing. This fundamental doctrine was founded on evangelical truth and the practices of the Apostolic church. The full gospel doctrine of sharing had been asserted and practiced by early Anabaptist-Mennonite leaders such as Menno Simons and others. But the Gemeinden of the early Anabaptist-Mennonite church were hunted and persecuted so that the writers of this heroic period placed greater emphasis on the defense of the church and the polity of the Gemeinde. By the end of the 16th century the Dutch wrested independence from Roman Catholic Spain so that eventually a relative religious peace and toleration replaced persecution and martyrdom.

Writers and theologians now arose who would further develop Anabaptist-Mennonite teachings in various aspects of life. This also included the socio-economic sphere. One of these writers was Peter Peters (1574-1651) a mild mannered Aeltester of the Waterlaender Mennonites in Holland. (See Sections 4.09 and 17.02). His writings were very much treasured among many generations of

Mennonites. His inward warmth and positive outlook make this popularity easy to understand. His rustic pastoral prose, replete with peaceful imagery of flocks of sheep and fields of grain made for fascinating reading.

The teachings of Peter Peters were dearly loved among the Kleine Gemeinde and Kleine Gemeinde attitudes in many aspects of life closely mirrored his views. This was particularly true in the socio-economic realm. The fact that the Kleine Gemeinde chose the *Spiegel der Gierigkeit* as its first publication in 1827 underlines the authority of these teachings in the economic life of the Gemeinde and individual. The central focus of the *Spiegel der Gierigkeit* or *Mirror of Greed* is the principle that greed was the fundamental ruin of mankind. Peter Peters explains this concept in the introduction to his work:

“Beloved reader! If anything is particularly important, it is this: That above anything else man must seek to please God, and that Christ is the only pontiff. Christ alone may dwell in our innermost self, as if in a purified temple from which all buyers and sellers have been dispersed. Now then, in order to comprehend this necessity and to become aware that this is a very essential matter it is most necessary that the individual truly examine himself in order that the principal hindrance to this necessity does not dwell in our hearts namely, greed. It is still unfamiliar to many that greed is such a hindrance. This is the reason for the sake of which the present book has been written and composed as a dialogue. In order that the individual might learn to distinguish the damaging root of greed and thereafter to shy away from and avoid the same, in order that one would “not blindly run into ruination”.”<sup>1</sup>

Peter Peters used the theme of human greed to develop his understanding of evangelical community of sharing. All citizens of the spiritual kingdom of Christ were as one bread and one wine. God had entrusted certain material possessions unto the stewardship of each believer. The faithful steward would employ the property entrusted unto him only for the work of the kingdom and not for his own consumption and enjoyment. It was the will of the Lord that each believer utilize the earthly blessings lent to him for “the necessities of the saints”. Unfortunately Satan fought a vicious battle to eradicate this evangelical ordinance from the church of Christ. The evil enemy implanted greed in the heart of each and every would-be disciple, thereby seeking to subvert the power and might of the full gospel. In the following quotation Peter Peters explains the responsibility of each believer and the means employed by Satan to ensure that they would live to satisfy their own gratification and not for the kingdom of their Savior:

“In the first place we must see to it, as has previously been demonstrated, that we do not take ownership of temporal possessions, which have only been lent to us by God, as if we could do with them what we would want. For they are the possessions of the Lord which one only manages as a loyal steward, in accordance with the holiest will of God, who has given them to us as a borrowed possession. In order that we can at all times with a good conscience give an accounting to the one who has entrusted them to us, we must not devour these possessions with luxuriousness, or gluttony and drunkenness, or in numerous other avenues which are not necessities. For that is the ultimate greed, when one continually appropriates too much of these possessions for one’s own benefit, such as costly clothes and expensive and unnecessary household furnishings, of which we find far too much, together with expensive houses and other matters, etc.

“For one observes that because the individuals gather together so many treasures and riches they also start to consider them as their own possessions, even though these are the property of the Lord; which the Lord wants to have used in accordance with his will, and to be applied to the necessities of the poor.<sup>2</sup> But the individual uses the same in accordance with his own will and blesses himself as a disloyal steward. These are the offenses which are found in many individuals, which is truly to be lamented.

“An aged minister has written very excellently on this subject, namely, how an individual can occupy temporal possessions without hindrance, which he has set forth in the following three points. Firstly, that we do not consume any part of the possessions which we occupy other than for our necessities. Secondly, if we are aware that another good-hearted human is in want and lacks for something, that we would transfer it over for his necessities as freely as if it were his own possession, and to desire it as much for him as we would for ourselves. Thirdly, that if we lose all our possessions, we continue to remain at peace with our disposition and ourselves, as if we had never owned or occupied the same. If we truthfully have these three characteristics about us, then we are also truly poor in spirit and therefore the possessors of the entire kingdom, etc.

“This is very much in accord with what Paul says: ‘And they that buy, as though they possessed not, and they that have the possessions of this world as though they used it not, for the fashion of this world passeth away’. And in another passage he says, ‘We as the poor, yet making many rich, as having nothing, and yet possessing all things’. This is the life of the pious who pass through this world as true pilgrims; who do not cleave or encumber their souls anywhere, who allow the burden of the purchaser and seller to be driven from their hearts, and who continue on their journey, in love as well as during affliction, as those whose citizenship is in heaven. The apostle also disposed

himself to live according to these teachings, exactly as he advised the Philippians: 'Everywhere in all things I am disposed, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me'. Behold, for this is the entire meaning and conclusion of the matter. That man clearly stands in God, and does not seek for reputation in the creatures.

"But through self-love the greedy individual is so much inclined to favour himself, that he treats himself so sweetly and gently; so that in his chest, strong box, counting houses, cellars, and kitchen he has everything to overabundance and when he has niggardly given a penny to one of the poor, who then also eats or drinks something enjoyable to his tastes, he considers the poor one to be a squanderer and spendthrift, etc. Consequently, an individual looks past himself and believes that all the succulence belongs to him alone and that his miserable fellow humans deserve to suffer all offences according to his pleasure.

"In order to avoid the foregoing as well as other similar situations, it is necessary for a truly separated person to conduct himself as the most diminished, the lowest and the least, and in all things to make it understood that he is only a guest and a pilgrim here in this world and that he has died to all the lusts of the flesh and that he is not living for the things of this world.

"For it is impossible that an individual who loves himself so dearly, who blesses himself, looks after his own interest, and so greedily acquires for himself, can love his neighbour as himself, or do unto him as he would have done unto himself. Therefore it is most essential that a Christian person begins to weed out the evil root of greed, of self-love, and selfishness, the many comforts, and the devouring in excess of one's needs, and more of the same. For God must be feared, loved and obeyed, above all, before all and in everything. Christ does not want that some members of His body should conduct themselves so highly, so magnificently, and so voluptuously, and that others should be so depressed, so miserable, so naked and so hungry.

"Instead God wants there to be equality of love, harmony, and compassion, and that nothing be done out of disputation or vain honour. Rather that the one will love the other more than himself in humility and as if he would say, that whosoever would wish to be the highest among you shall be your servant. For then things will go well, for whatever one member possesses will for the sake of the Lord also be available for his neighbour as well as himself.

"Let us all take aim for this target, that we might attain our goal for it is truly a great dilemma, that we are so passive with respect to the rooting out and the elimination of such great offenses, which are so very damaging on the path of Godly salvation. Let us commence to ascend this mountain with zeal in order that we can at least make a beginning so that if death overcomes us before we have reached the peak, then at least death will not have fallen upon us while we were still standing still or even going backwards. Rather that the Lord might find us ascending, awake, and earnest. If only we might thus be found on the way to salvation, for the matter is far too serious not to proceed onward with all diligence.

"Let us have our Saviour before us at all times, let us take note of his example and earnestly follow him for then, truly, the greed for earthly treasures will die within us and the craving for the highest goodness will become alive in us. For everything our heart desires is to be found in Christ: A heavenly treasure, a perfect kingdom, wisdom which worketh righteousness, perfect purity, and no erring nor darkness. Rather a narrow and straight way to the eternal life, sweet rest for the soul, and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.

"Oh, how wise is the one who experiences this and who is a master over his own desires and with whom matters stand as is becoming in the truth. For the true believers who evidence themselves as brethren in the Holy Spirit are partakers of one bread and accordingly they are truly one bread and one body. The foregoing is a clear example of true Christianity. For in one bread, the fat and the lean kernels are crushed and ground together without distinction, they disperse themselves one among the other, are bonded together with water, and baked together in the fire. Similarly, the true Christendom is also baptized into one body, blended and kneaded into one dough which is then baked into one bread in the fire of love.

"Of this take note, you greedy acquirers! You who rake in everything only for yourself, and then want to think that you are still a member of the one body, and that you are baked and united into the one bread. You have filled your houses with overabundance, your cellars are full of wine, your crocks full of vinegar, brews and roasted meats to excess, your closets are full of all sorts of liquors, your silver beakers and basins, your chests full of ornamental treasures, your superabundance of napkins and tableclothes and all manner of expensive cosmetics.

"Everything which you can imagine has been filled to overflowing and everything which you could desire you obtain. The treasures of your eyes are hanging on the walls round about you, full of expensive useless paintings, your overabundance of clothes made of the finest materials, your necks are adorned with precious trinkets wrought of metals and you wives are garnished with expensive embellishments.

"In order to achieve all the foregoing you take of the Lord's property but your indigent brothers and sisters go about clad in cheap miserable clothes, their tables are uncovered as there is hardly enough linen cloth to cover their own bodies, their beds are hard and their blankets are barely sufficient to keep them warm, their beverage is diluted with water, and their victuals are sparse. Finally the differences in every respect are so great that no comparison can be made. Where is here the one bread and the one body? Is it not present merely in the name alone? For certainly the usage and the power is not present.

“Not that I wish to malign the status of the poor for if only the poor man has sufficient to get by, and if he is truly poor in spirit, then his situation as a righteousness-working Christian is better than that of other more elevated status. Notwithstanding that according to the flesh the latter might have a very good appearance, the matter is seen quite differently by God. For everything which is highly regarded in mankind is an abomination to God, etc.

“Now what must one do in order to emulate more clearly this likeness in order that we are truly to become one bread and one body? Follow the word of God. Put aside the clinging sins which are oppressing you. Inspire your arrogant nature, change your hearts of greed, which are only inclined for your own benefit, and seek also the profit of your neighbour. At all times give over what remains as surplus from your own, and distribute that part of your abundance which you can do without. Live according to what is necessary and not according to your own sensuality. Crucify your lusts and desires.

“Frequently think of the words of Christ, when a certain man said unto him, ‘Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest’. But what did your Lord say? ‘The Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the son of man hath not where to lay his head’. Therefore also deny yourself everything, flee away from all voluptuousness, and be prepared to carry the Cross of Jesus.

“For your remuneration in heaven shall be great if by virtue of your love for the heavenly bridegroom you can submit yourself to everything which will befall you here. The bridegroom hath submitted himself to a bitter death for you, in order to free you from death, and yet at all times you only wish to live for yourself? Oh no! Your flesh must also be crucified and Christ must live in you, if you wish to dwell with him in eternity.”<sup>3</sup>

## 18.02 Separatist Pietism and Community of Sharing.

The foregoing provides a clear exposition of the evangelical teaching of community of sharing. It is helpful to contrast this with the socio-economic teachings of separatist pietism. The different hermeneutics of the Anabaptist-Mennonite and the pietist would certainly result in conflicting socio-economic beliefs. The Anabaptist-Mennonite experienced his salvation in the context of the Gemeinde within which he also shared his material belongings. But for the pietist, salvation was a subjective experience to be pursued by each individual for himself. The pietist pursued his own individual wealth in like manner. Material success and socio-economic power was seen as the provident blessing of God which must be exercised unto abundant fullness in order to maximize such benevolence. As a result the pietist was invariably more than happy to fade into the environment in which he originated and to accommodate himself to prevailing morals. Too often it was obvious that the repeated declarations of love, compassion and peace of the pietists, were meant only for their “inward selves” and were not relevant to their relationship and obligations to others.

It is understandable that the *Mirror of Greed* would not be popular with the adherents of separatist pietism in Russia. In his work Peter Peters attacks the pietist-cultural Mennonites of his day in Holland who later became known as the *Doopegeszindte* and he does not mince words. Peter Peters makes unequivocally clear his view that those who have filled their house and spirit with earthly treasure should give the matter some deathly serious thought if they wanted to be considered as a part of the holy body of Christ. For their actions demonstrated something entirely different.

For the separatist pietist the teachings of Peter Peters represented the height of stupidity. Could these spiritual neanderthals not for once abandon their eternally narrow-minded ignorant Mennonitism? Could they not understand that Count Zinzendorf had already stated that true Christianity consisted only of “grace”, “grace” and nothing but “grace”? What was the point of such anti-cultural behaviour? For true Christianity consisted of nothing more and nothing less than continual rejoicing in the Lord, and the enjoyment of his abundant goodness. The Lord in turn would bless such material and spiritual self indulgence and consequently the abundant life would ever increase.

The Pietist would further argue that surplus in this spiritual and material abundance, if any, should be directed towards the fulfillment of the “great commission” so that others too could learn to rejoice. Indeed the commandment to spread the “Gospel” must take precedence over all others. Even the instruction “to take up the Cross and follow Christ” must be ignored in order to fulfill this mission. This program must be completed as quickly as possible for the Second Coming of the Lord could not take place until this had been achieved. Then, finally with the second coming, the Lord would commence his heavenly reign of peace on earth, the great millennium.

According to the decrees of Jung-Stilling and Bangel the institution of the peaceable earthly Kingdom of Christ and the ethics of the Kingdom had been postponed to the future 1000 year reign. Only then, and then only, and without any thought on his part, would the rejoicing Christian instantaneously be regenerated and perfected in love and truth. In an instant, greed and inequality would be eradicated. At this point the socio-economic teachings of Christ would take effect. Thus said the pietist.<sup>3a</sup>



This was the true socio-economic policy of the Christian. Those who did not adhere to the above mentioned teachings or one of the countless variations thereof among many branches of Pietism, were only demonstrating that they had no joyous message to share. By suggesting that conversion to Christ was represented by the immediate institution of the socio-economic teachings of the Kingdom of Christ, the Anabaptist-Mennonite merely demonstrated that he lacked a joyous understanding of the grace of God. And should such a one declare after conversion that he was contented and at peace merely to labour quietly and meekly in the earthly vineyard of his beloved Lord; And that he was not prepared to centre his whole faith, life and deportment around the enjoyment of salvation and the complete and continual reassurance thereof, then such a one must immediately be condemned and denounced as being spiritually proud and arrogant. From the foregoing it is evident that a great deal of religious tension would result whenever pietism invaded the Mennonite world.

### 18.03 A Letter to the Hutterian Brethren, 1848.

The evangelical doctrine of community of sharing was central to Mennonite *Kleine Gemeinde* faith and practice in Russia. In a **Letter to the Hutterian Brethren** of 1848 Aeltester Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) provides an intimate view of *Kleine Gemeinde* socio-economic policy. The Hutterian Brethren had settled in the village of Hutterthal near the Molotschna colony in 1842. They had fallen into poverty and abandoned their age old teaching and practice of community of property prior to moving to Russia.<sup>4</sup> Many individual Hutterites now sought to reinstate community of property and to establish a *Bruderhof* among them. Regrettably this had resulted in a great deal of internal dissension. This had also resulted in conflict with Johan Cornies and his Agricultural Society which was the governmental authority in charge of the Hutterian settlements.

As the senior Mennonite spokesman in the Molotschna in 1848, the government authorities now called Abraham Friesen from his well-earned retirement in order to advise the Hutterites with respect to these difficulties. In his letter of September 4, 1848, Abraham Friesen counsels the Hutterites to overcome their internal dissension. He also advises them to look beyond the practice of the *Jerusalem Gemeinde* for their model and example:

“A writing by Aeltester Abraham Friesen to the Hutterian Aeltesten, written at the request of the authorities to advise the Hutterian Aeltesten against the establishment of a *Bruderhof*, and advising them to cancel and abandon their efforts in that regard as follows:

“Beloved Friends and Brethren:

“As one who is less than the least of all the blessed ones currently among you: Firstly, I wish you the holiest blessing for the peace of God and love and unity among each other: That with the wholesome teaching of Titus, Chapter 2, you might again become mighty in the admonition of the *Gemeinde* entrusted to you, and to punish the dissidents.

“Yes, that together you might embrace your flock in order to pasture them according to the word of God. Revelations 22, 18-20. And to do so, not because of compulsion but voluntarily. Not merely for the sake of shameful personal gain but from the heart. Not like those who rule over people, but rather to be an example to your flock. So that when the chief shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a Crown of glory that fadeth not away. Amen. 1 Peter 5, 2-4.

“Now regarding the community of temporal possessions with respect to which you are involved and appear to be in disagreement with each other. Alas this causes us woe. We see the greatest danger for you arising thereby, in temporal as well as in spiritual matters, and particularly for those who are so aggressively favouring this community, John 3:14, and inciting the same.

“Alas, how sad, how sad, that this apparently concerns both Aeltesten. But oh, beloved Aeltesten. Do allow yourself to be helped while there is still time, and do receive good advice from your lowly fellow Aeltester. And do not so jealously have your eyes directed only towards the first and only *Gemeinde* in Jerusalem. Although we do not in any way wish to belittle or to diminish this *Gemeinde* nor their community of property, it must be pointed out that the Holy Apostle Paul was subsequently awakened by God, to be a chosen instrument for his Lord: And who through the grace of God imparted to him, as a wise masterbuilder, has laid the foundation upon which we are now to build, which is Jesus Christ.

“Behold! For this beloved apostle, who most certainly was a man after God’s own heart, has not expressly directed towards the community of property, but rather to benevolence with respect to the poor. He has superabundantly provided and bequeathed fine teachings and examples to us, as to how we are to keep house in the House of God, or *Gemeinde* of God; How we are obligated for the necessities of the saints; How we are to be cheerful givers and to be helpful, and how we are to carry each others burdens; In order that we fulfill the commandment of Christ. Romans 12:15.

“Oh my beloved, accordingly I hope that there will be no more need for a *Bruderhof* of a community of goods: Namely, when we take note of the teachings of the apostle and consequently are obligated for the necessities of the saints. These are the following: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, be hospitable to your visitor, clothe the naked, visit the sick, and so on. Oh my beloved. For on that final day this will be said, ‘Verily, Verily, I say unto you. Inasmuch as ye have done

it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me’.

“Oh my dear and beloved colleagues in office. In addition another matter presses heavily upon my heart. Yes, how sad I was to perceive from you that you were not quite satisfied with your authorities, which are ours as well, who have demonstrated so much benevolence and goodness towards you as well as towards us. Even if the authorities out of love from time to time punish the stubbornness of uncivil people, we must take the blame upon ourselves; that as overseers we do not keep our Gemeinde in good order, thereby allowing such an occasion to arise.

“However, we have not yet had reason to complain in such circumstances where the administrators have taken hold of our offenders. i.e. If something irregular has taken place with one of our members without our knowing about it, that we were thereby unable to punish the same according to the teachings of Jesus and his apostles. For this we are presently very thankful, as also the apostle teaches us and says: ‘In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you’. 1 Thessalonians 5:18.

“Oh, but how my heart would rejoice if I might again be able to hear, that you have once more achieved a contented disposition with respect to your authorities as well as with your fellow servants and that you were again in unity with your entire Gemeinde. Yes, that ye might purge out the old leaven so that ye may be a new lump and that you might then live in the grace and fellowship of God, in order that in the end, through grace you might also receive eternal salvation. May God grant this prayer, which is my heartfelt wish for you. From your weak and insignificant menial servant of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen ”

Blumstein, the 4th day of September 1848

“Abraham Friesen”<sup>15</sup>

A great deal of sympathy and love for the Hutterian Brethren is evident in this letter. This respect and appreciation must have been mutual or else Abraham Friesen would not have been asked to intervene. The “Letter to the Hutterian” again evidences the Kleine Gemeinde interest in other evangelical Christians.

As always, the teaching of Aeltester Abraham Friesen is mild mannered, positive and sound. He develops the full gospel teaching of community of sharing in terms of the Apostle Paul’s admonition for Christians “to look to the necessities of the saints”. In the process of defining the socio-economic obligations of Christians Aeltester Abraham Friesen illustrates the principles of biblical interpretation followed by the Anabaptist-Mennonites. He points out that community of property was only practiced by the Gemeinde at Jerusalem. He reasons that no aspect of evangelical faith and life can be resolved solely by reference to one biblical example or teaching. The entire Bible must be reviewed in order to perceive the full gospel teaching on any particular point. Only then can a proper biblical basis be determined. In this case he points out that according to the Apostle Paul, the teachings of Jesus are to be paramount. But Jesus did not prescribe community of property by either command or example. Aeltester Friesen notes further that the apostle Paul did not teach a community of property, but rather that the followers of Christ were “to be obligated for the necessities of the saints”.

By this teaching, based in part on Romans chapter 12, the individual was obligated to cheerfully and lovingly provide for those who were hungry, thirsty, naked, etc. To complete the evangelical basis of this teaching, Aeltester Friesen refers back to Matthew chapter 25, where he quotes the words of Jesus to the effect that if this duty for the necessities of the saints is fulfilled, the deed of kindness will stand as if done for Jesus himself. This positive duty of love, this “obligation for the necessities of saints”, clearly was the underlying foundation of Anabaptist-Mennonite teaching with respect to socio-economic matters.

#### **18.04 “By Their Fruits Ye Shall Know Them”.**

How were the evangelical principles of community of sharing applied in the every day life and practice of the Kleine Gemeinde? Was this also a case where platitudes were plentiful, but no doing was evident? The Bible teaches that the spirit is known by its fruits. The remainder of this chapter will consider the implementation of these teachings in the day to day experience of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia.

Needless to say, this is not an easy aspect of life to document. The Sermon on the Mount as recorded in Matthew chapter 5-7, was interpreted literally in the Kleine Gemeinde. This also included the admonition by Jesus, “to take heed not to do your alms before men, nor to be seen of them”. Accordingly this was not an aspect of life which was to be recorded and documented in diaries and memoirs. In addition, the time period is too far in the past in order for oral tradition to be of much assistance. Consequently the major area of alms and charitable assistance extended informally between members of the Gemeinde and by the Gemeinde to its members as well as others has simply disappeared into the mass of unrecorded and unremembered history.

It is fortunate that some of the leaders of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde during the 1860’s and 1870’s were conscious of the importance of documenting the experiences and history of the group.

The foremost of these leaders was Peter Toews who was elected as Aeltester of the Blumenhoff Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in 1870. One of the more important documents from among his writings is his **1872-1878 Diary**.<sup>6</sup> In this diary he has recorded some of the noteworthy events and discussions within the Kleine Gemeinde, thereby providing valuable insight in many aspects of faith and practice.

Of special interest is a resolution enacted by the brotherhood of the Blumenhoff Kleine Gemeinde on Sunday the 29th day of July 1873, as follows:

“That the policy of the Gemeinde with respect to the general treasury be continued as has been the practice in the past. Namely, that financial support was not only to be given to the poor individuals after they were completely penniless, but rather prior to this in order that he would also be able to carry on his gainful occupation: Provided of course that the individual is otherwise healthy: And that such support was only to be considered a loan later when the individual was better established. And then, the support received was to be returned to the Gemeinde treasury to be used for the support of other poor people.”

This is an unequivocal statement by the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde with respect to its treatment of the poor. They were not to be maintained in submissive penury and poverty. Indeed no! They were to be assisted so that they could carry on their own enterprise and eventually become established in their own right. Then these funds were paid into the treasury not to be returned to the original donors but to be used to help the next poor individual. Presumably such a fund would keep growing as after a poor family had become established they would hopefully provide eager support for this program. In the Kleine Gemeinde the assistance to allow the poor to become established invariably would have meant to become established in the enterprise of farming. Presumably money was available from this fund to assist families to acquire farms and property to start farming or to expand a farm which the individual repaid when he was able.

It was also frequently the case that a young farmer simply needed some credit in order to expand his farming operation or in order to buy a larger and more economic farm unit. The same would hold true for someone wishing to expand his blacksmithy, manufacturing shop or feed mill. The Mennonite Kleinen Gemeinde had a unique way of ensuring that such credit was available to everyone and not merely to those who had the good fortune to come from the more well-to-do families. This is demonstrated by a resolution which was enacted by the brotherhood of the Blumenhoff Mennonite Kleinen Gemeinde on Sunday, May 6th, 1873. Aeltester Peter Toews has recorded as follows in his **1872-1878 Diary**: “It was discussed that it was not wrong to require (a guarantor) and to act as a guarantor where monies belonging to widows and orphans were involved: And that if anyone did not have sufficient credit his closest brother would be his guarantor, or the Gemeinde. That the same was endorsed by the Gemeinde. As a result everyone shall have credit.”

In this way the Kleine Gemeinde sought to give application to the principles of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. No doubt the practice of these teachings was full of human weakness, error and misjudgment. Nevertheless the Kleinen Gemeinde clearly demonstrated its commitment to the actual implementation of the full gospel teachings of community of sharing.

### **18.05 Faith In Practice. The “Landless” Battle.**

One of the most significant Kleine Gemeinde applications of the evangelical principle of “looking to the necessities of the saints” as Aeltester Abraham Friesen so aptly puts it, occurred during the so-called “landless” dispute of the 1860’s. The lamentable chasm which had developed between the poor and the well-to-do among the Russian Mennonites has already been mentioned earlier. It seems that a landless or lower class developed with the emigration of some of the poorer Prussian Mennonites after 1817. This nucleus was seemingly fueled by the increasing secularization and prosperity of the new settlement which resulted in the concentration of more and more wealth in the hands of a small privileged group.

By as early as 1841, only 1,033 out of 2,733 families in the Molotschna were land owning farmers, while 1,700 families were either small tenant farmers or were engaged in various trades and small businesses.<sup>7</sup> By the 1860’s close to 70 per cent of the Molotschna Mennonite population consisted of servants, labourers, tenant farmers and tradesmen. As will be discussed in a later volume, no effort was made on the part of the general Molotschna community to assist this poor or lower class until they were forced to do so by the intervention of the Russian government authorities in the late 1860’s and 1870’s. Notwithstanding the consequential founding of numerous daughter colonies the trend towards a concentration of wealth continued so that by 1910 the biggest part of Russian Mennonite wealth was owned by some 300 families:<sup>8</sup> Only about 4000 families, or less than a quarter of Russian Mennonite families in 1910, belonged to the illustrious and highly esteemed full farmer class (Vollwirten) who owned full village farms of 65 desjatinen or 178 acres.<sup>9</sup>

Naturally the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde was also subject to the social and economic forces which prevailed among the Russian Mennonites. What is important is the fact that the Kleine Gemeinde as a community aided its own poor. In his *Sammlung*, Aeltester Peter Toews has recorded that in 1863 a group of the poorer members in the Kleine Gemeinde petitioned the ministerial to purchase or obtain land for them on a community basis. Apparently this caused quite an issue in the Gemeinde with considerable heated debate as to whether such a program should be implemented in the Gemeinde. Furthermore if this was proceeded with, was it to be done by the entire Gemeinde as a community or by a number of the more well-to-do in the Gemeinde as a partially private endeavour.<sup>10</sup>

Seemingly this issue was not resolved to everyone's satisfaction. However a decision was made to provide land for the landless families in the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. Naturally this decision was not made solely for the purpose of aiding the poor: Certainly the obtaining of large parcels of land also represented great opportunities for advancement for the more well-to-do in the Gemeinde by obtaining quantities of good land at a reduced price. It appears that in the end some land was purchased and leased by the Gemeinde as a community and in addition some land was purchased by individuals in the Gemeinde privately.

According to Aeltester Peter Toews the leasing of land was commenced in 1863.<sup>11</sup> The Kleine Gemeinde settlement of Markuslandt was founded in 1863 and consisted of leased land, or "Pachtland".<sup>12</sup> Therefore it can be concluded that the Markuslandt settlement was the first Kleine Gemeinde settlement out of the Molotschna and also that a good number of the Kleine Gemeinde landless were settled and established on Markuslandt. It is noted that leasing land was a common means of acquiring land among the Russian Mennonites at the time.

Aeltester Toews goes on to indicate that the first land was purchased for the poor in the Gemeinde in 1865. The Kleine Gemeinde settlement northwest of Nikopol, which became known as Borosenko, was founded in 1865. From this it can be concluded that the first land purchased by the Kleine Gemeinde for its poor was part of the Borosenko settlement. Apparently the balance of the land purchased for this purpose by the Gemeinde was purchased between 1865 and 1868.<sup>13</sup> According to William Schroeder, the Russian Mennonite cartography expert, the village of Steinbach is the only village shown on a 1866 map of the Borosenko area.<sup>14</sup> As some of the children of several families in the Gemeinde known to have been less well-to-do lived in the village of Steinbach, it appears likely that Steinbach was the first of the Kleine Gemeinde Borosenko villages to be established. Naturally many of the landless would have been eager to settle here at the first opportunity.

It is noteworthy that such a program had many positive long term effects. For example it is well known that Abraham F. Reimer (1808-1896) did not live up to the financial success of his father Aeltester Klaas Reimer, nor that of his brother Klaas F. Reimer (1812-1874). Instead, he had an extensive interest in astrology and other more intellectual pursuits. However, no doubt assisted by the opportunities provided by this land settlement program, all the children of Abraham F. Reimer became quite well-to-do, and were also earnest and zealous supporters of the Gemeinde. Thus son Klaas R. Reimer (1837-1906) became a prosperous pioneer merchant in Steinbach, Manitoba. Youngest son Johan R. Reimer (1848-1918) was one time Schulz of the village of Steinbach. Son Abraham R. Reimer (1841-1891) became a deacon and the leading pioneer businessman and farmer in the village of Blumenort, north of Steinbach, Manitoba. Son Peter R. Reimer (1845-1915) also of Blumenort, became a leading minister and prosperous farmer.

What an enormous difference such care and consideration on the part of the Gemeinde made here. Had this family been a part of the unfortunate majority of Russian Mennonites these extremely talented and capable men might have been doomed to a lifetime of poverty and frustration as a part of the mass of labourers, small tenant farmers, tradesmen, or servants. The opportunities provided by the Gemeinde might well have made a crucial difference to these men. Certainly these opportunities must have made a crucial difference to many individuals in the Gemeinde. The situation of the "Landless" provides an example of a dedicated and devoted Gemeinde working together in Christian charity to overcome a major crisis in its history.

### 18.06 Loans To Assist Those In Need.

The Kleine Gemeinde policy of attending to the "necessities of the saints" was not restricted to such times of crisis. It appears that over the years the Gemeinde had accumulated a substantial sum of monies which could be used and applied in various ways for the aid of the members of the Gemeinde. Fortunately the writings and records of Aeltester Peter Toews are not the only documents

of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde to have been preserved over the years. Still available is a **Gemeinde Account book** which is apparently for the Blumenhof Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde.<sup>15</sup> Peter Wiebe (1835-1902) was the senior deacon of this Gemeinde and naturally would have been in charge of its financial records. He settled in the village of Blumenort in 1874 and apparently brought along this most valuable record. These accounts were then passed on from Peter Wiebe to his successor deacons Abraham R. Reimer (1841-1891), and Peter L. Plett (1858-1941), and so on through the years.

What is most fortunate about this source is that it contains records of loan transactions and other assistance to some members of the Gemeinde dating back to the 1840's. When the Kleine Gemeinde divided and regrouped as two separate Gemeinden in 1866, the two Aeltesten Heinrich Enns (1801-1881) and Johann Friesen (1808-1872) made a settlement and division of the treasury on behalf of their respective groups based on the simple principle, that each individual would owe his debt to whichever of the two groups he happened to belong to.<sup>16</sup> This principle was later reaffirmed by their respective successors. Quite possibly the Peter Wiebe Blumenhof **Gemeinde Account Book** was rewritten at this time as it only records loans still outstanding during the latter 1860's i.e. No doubt additional loans and other transactions of assistance had taken place but as they were already paid at the time of the reorganization of the Kleine Gemeinde into two entities, these accounts were not carried forward to be entered into the new account books. The Peter Wiebe **Account Book** contains a total of 9 individual accounts where some loan assistance had been extended to an individual prior to 1868.

It should be noted that there was to be no shame upon those who were in receipt of aid from the Gemeinde, provided that the recipient was legitimately unable to work and to provide an income for himself and his family. The Gemeinde was "one bread and one body" and so at least in theory no begging nor condescending was to occur in respect of such aid. Of course the practice will not always have lived up to the theory.

Some examples of the type of aid extended to the members of the Gemeinde will be considered. Reference has been made to Abraham F. Reimer (1808-1896) as one individual in the Gemeinde who was not always able to fulfill his economic obligations to his family and Gemeinde. In the words of his grandson Aeltester David P. Reimer he is said to have had a "real interest in many areas in which others were uninformed".<sup>17</sup> Fortunately he had married Elisabeth Rempel, a resolute and determined pioneer woman whose faithful care over her family offset much of her husband's lack of diligence in this regard.<sup>18</sup> In any event Abraham F. Reimer was not one of those individuals who was held back merely by poverty and lack of an opportunity. His father had owned a prosperous "Wirtschaft" in Petershagen and with only five children reaching adulthood each child would have had a sufficient inheritance to make a fine start of their own somewhere. On the contrary it seems that Reimer was one of those who was legitimately unable to further his own financial affairs because of his varied and diverse interests in other matters.

An examination of ledger sheet No. 2 of the **Gemeinde Account Journal** reveals that Abraham F. Reimer was the recipient of financial aid from the Gemeinde over a ten year period extending from 1847-1858. The reader should note that these transactions are recorded in rubles. The following are the entries in this account showing various loans made to Abraham F. Reimer and the later repayments of the same.

	Debit	Credit
1847, April 28. monies to pay debts	\$100.00	
1847, April 28. He also received money for a cow	69.86	
1848, March. Received money	90.00	
1848, Dito. For straw and pipes and fire insurance money	52.43	
1849, Received in money	54.58	
1853, Repair on the house, and also received money	117.45	
1854, August 17. Repaid by Abraham Reimer		\$450.00
Dito. Also discounted his debt		37.32
1856, He received money for building construction	541.25	
1857, September 22, Received money	24.20	
1858, April 24, Received money	42.00	
Total debt	\$1087.69	
Repaid and discounted of this amount	487.32	
Remaining debit in Banko (ruble)	600.37	
This sum 600.37 is 171R. 53 Kopek silver.		
1860 December, paid debt for him	107.53	silver
1861 paid for straw for fuel	4.00	
1862 August 8th. Paid debts	14.00	
In total this amounts to	125.53	silver

The foregoing provides an example of the assistance provided to an individual member of the *Kleine Gemeinde*. This demonstrates the socio-economic philosophy expressed earlier in this chapter. Although the man needs assistance, he is living in his own premises as the *Gemeinde* provided funds with which he could pay his fire insurance premium. When the man needed monies for building construction, funds were also available for that purpose. No interest was charged. The story of aid to Abraham F. Reimer comes to a happy ending. The *Kleine Gemeinde* in Blumenort, Manitoba, where he retired, extended additional loans to him during the 1880's. After the death of Abraham F. Reimer in 1896 his outstanding debt, now converted into Canadian dollars, stood at \$209.00. After his death his heirs paid these accounts in full. This love and concern on the part of the *Kleine Gemeinde* had earned vast dividends. It actually received its money back and also had obtained as loyal members the children, and grandchildren of Abraham F. Reimer all of whom in turn made substantial contributions to their community and *Gemeinde*.

Another example of this type of assistance is Gerhard Giesbrecht of Prangenau. This account also illustrates the assistance which was available for those who were not well or otherwise unable to completely provide for themselves and their families:

	Debit	Credit
1848 Received in money	\$50.00	
Dito. Received rye in the value of	2.74	
1852 Received money for the purchase of rye	153.26	
1854 Money for the Jahrmark (annual fair and exhibition)	87.50	
1853 Received in money and rye	54.93	
1853 Applied for linen cloth and rye	30.60	
1857 August 27, To pay debts	167.55	
1858 September. Borrowed money	105.00	
In total, Banko	\$658.58	
1861 May 21, to pay for flour and straw	9.80	silver
1863 The widow Giesbrecht repaid in silver		\$25.00
1868 September 16. For repairs and manure	30.00	
Net amount added here	\$14.80	

It seems likely that Geisbrecht was not healthy as he died at a young age. The **Gemeinde Accounts** indicate that no payments were made on this account. Finally in 1908 the East Reserve *Kleine Gemeinde* which had carried these accounts decided that all accounts where the debtor had already died were to be cancelled as the treasury of the *Gemeinde* at that time was in a very sound financial condition. In addition the *Gemeinde* at that time had had no loans on which it had been required to pay interest since 1888, and therefore all interest charges since that date were cancelled.

The **Gemeinde Accounts** indicate that the Treasury frequently acted simply as a lending institution. In fact it is believed that the bulk of the aid transactions will no doubt have been various loans on beneficial terms to the younger members of the *Gemeinde* eager to get on their own farms in order to establish themselves. No doubt most of these types of loans were promptly repaid and in any event were paid by the time of the revision of the *Gemeinde* Account books in the late 1860's.

Other loans going back to the 1840's and 1850's were made to school teachers Cornelius F. Friesen and Cornelius Fast (See Chapter Nine) and some small loans to Gerhard Siemens of Prangenau. Of these Cornelius F. Friesen received substantial assistance including aid to pay for a house, consolidate debts, and also to pay for land rental in 1871. Cornelius Fast received only small amounts of aid during the early 1870's in Russia as well as more considerable sums during his old age in Manitoba. Other records from the 1860's include smaller loans to the elder Johann Toews, a brother to Aeltester Peter Toews and delegate Cornelius Toews, as well as records of assistance in 1860-1864 to Peter Friesen and his widow of Hierschau.

An interesting entry is some small sums of money lent to David F. Thiessen between 1864 and 1876. This is noteworthy because according to the 1881 assessment records of the Rural Municipality of Hanover, Thiessen is by far the highest assessed farmer in the village of Blumenort, north of Steinbach, Manitoba. Although possibly some of this property was held in trust for the community or other villagers, this nevertheless illustrates the *Gemeinde* policy not to wait with extending aid until the individuals had fallen into poverty and penury.

### 18.07 The *Gemeinde* As "One Bread And One Wine".

It is noted that this was not the only form of mutual assistance available and provided in the *Kleine Gemeinde*. Naturally one of the very important functions of mutual self-help to be found in a closely knit group would be the financial advice which the younger farmers would have obtained from the experienced and more established farmers. In fact, in many instances an opportunity to seek

advice and to consult with someone knowledgeable and successful was just as important as the actual material aid extended. These were no doubt some of the informal applications of the Anabaptist-Mennonite likeness of the Gemeinde as "one bread and one body" for surely the senior members would have been happy to assist the junior and more struggling members in this manner.

However, this concept extended far beyond such informal mutual aid. A statement by Russian Mennonite historian Peter M. Friesen verifies that the Kleine Gemeinde, "unitedly guaranteed the debts of the brethren; for that reason no one was allowed arbitrarily to undertake new farming or business ventures without the consent of the congregation".<sup>19</sup> Appended to this statement is the remark, "How instructive". Although the foregoing statement is accorded only the status of a footnote it is nevertheless astounding when one considers the philosophical orientation of Peter M. Friesen, which has already been referred to in this book. Perhaps he is here comparing the policy of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde with what he calls the "land hunger," a social illness which seized the Molotschna Mennonites in the 1860's and which continued up to the date of publication of his book in 1910.<sup>20</sup> This "land hunger" basically consisted of a greedy and heartless pursuit of more land and property by almost everyone who was financially capable of such activity. Of course when such greed takes hold of a community no chance existed for the younger individuals or for those less well established.

In a Gemeinde where all debts were guaranteed by the whole community such a disease would not easily be able to take hold as support and approval was only forthcoming after the proposed project of the individual member had been discussed and approved by the brotherhood. In fact, Peter M. Friesen states that no farming or other enterprise could be undertaken without the approval of the Gemeinde. Of course if the motives were based on greed, these procedures would have exposed the objects and intentions of the individual to the light of day. Did the individual really need an extra farm to support and provide for his family and to insure that he would have sufficient resources to establish his sons in their chosen occupation? Perhaps the excess resources of the individual were needed more urgently in the Gemeinde treasury for the assistance of the poor or in order to assist other young farmers who were not fortunate enough to have a farm at all nor a wealthy father to help them get established.

No doubt these were the types of questions asked at these meetings. Of course such a policy made it impossible for one individual to quietly buy up all the available land for himself. The conclusion of the brotherhood might be that he already had a large enough enterprise, in which case he would have to dispose himself to the Brotherhood or leave the Gemeinde. This is also exactly what occurred on some occasions, e.g. It appears that Kleine Gemeinde families such as Bernhard L. Dueck and Jakob Penner left the Gemeinde and joined a pietist-Mennonite group when the restrictive teachings and practises of the Kleine Gemeinde interfered with their booming enterprises. Eventually Jakob Penner actually became one of the largest land operators among the Russian farmers. However, some years later his empire collapsed in bankruptcy followed shortly thereafter by his death brought on by the worry and grief over the loss of everything he had. Then the family and friends in the "lowly and much maligned" Kleine Gemeinde in Gruenfeld, Manitoba scraped together funds to aid his family and children so that eventually a good number could emigrate to North America.<sup>21</sup> Thus in the end Penner would have been better off had he remained in the Gemeinde and rather used his excess resources to assist his fellow brethren.

Striving for large enterprise and great wealth was certainly contrary to the Anabaptist-Mennonite teachings of the Kleine Gemeinde. Reference is made to the treatise **Faith and Reason** (See Chapter 14) in which Rev. Heinrich Balzer sets out his views with respect to the economic and social beliefs of the nonresistant Christian in terms of "simplicity in Christ:"

"One should not forget the exhortation of the Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Romans (12:16) 'Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate'. The lowest estate, that of a husbandman, is the most conducive one for the preservation of genuine simplicity in Christ. In it we can find a plentiful livelihood through industry and diligence under the blessing of God. And we should be satisfied in finding food and clothing; striving after greater wealth or a position of high distinction in this world would spiritually be only too harmful for the church. For expansion in (the realm of) the good things of this world certainly entails a restriction in spiritual benefits. 'What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?' (Matthew 16:26). Goods of this world beyond the standards of assigned estate are surely incompatible with the simplicity of our holy forefathers and the teachings of the gospel, for they demand something from man which he cannot possibly fulfill in loyal pursuit of our principles. And therefore once he has grown fond of these things he is ready to sophisticate (Kuensteln) the truths by means of reason, to reformulate them in ambiguous clauses, and at the end to find them altogether dispensable, rather than to part from the goods of this world."

It is evident that the individualistic pursuit of wealth and social standing was not only considered to be harmful for the Gemeinde, but also as being directly detrimental to the salvation of the soul of the individual.

### 18.08 A Daily Witness To The Faith.

The unity of the Gemeinde as one body extended far beyond the guaranteeing of debts and regulating and directing the entrepreneurial talents of the membership. Indeed, each individual member of the Gemeinde was taken to represent his Gemeinde at all times. This did not only include the payment of debts but also any other actions and promises of the members of the Gemeinde. Each member was to be a witness of his faith in all his daily actions and treatment of others.

Some actual examples of this aspect of the Kleine Gemeinde concept of the Gemeinde of Christ as one body will now be considered. The members of the Kleine Gemeinde were only frail human beings predisposed to error and lack of consideration and therefore it is natural that some form of chastisement and admonishment in love was sometimes necessary on the part of the ministerial. The high ideals and sought for purity of the evangelical Gemeinde (Revelations 21 and 22) no doubt also resulted in discipline among the members. The record of such pastoral activities will illustrate the point.

The **1872-1878 Diary** of Aeltester Peter Toews reveals that the ministerial worked diligently and whenever necessary to admonish and correct their members in their conduct. The following are some of the matters which had to be dealt with in 1872: "Receiving and responding to an unfounded claim against members of the Gemeinde in Friedensfeld. The members involved were advised to put the claimants at peace, which was done. Meeting as conciliators with members of the village complexes of Gruenfeld and Annafeld, Borosenko, with respect to a boundary dispute. Successfully resolved. Dealt with a member of the Gemeinde who was not paying his debts and also regarding his harsh treatment of his cattle. Dealt with another member who had revoked his promise to provide land. Dealt with the provision of dwelling quarters for two widows."

The foregoing are only the instances recorded by Aeltester Peter Toews in his personal diary which was certainly not an official record of all the disciplinary activities of the Gemeinde. Even so, when one considers that the Blumenhoff Kleine Gemeinde alone at this time numbered well over one hundred families, one is amazed that so little work in this area was required, and that there were so few circumstances where discipline and admonishment was considered worthy of note by Aeltester Toews. In fact, in all of the instances recorded for 1872 a loving admonishment and a heartfelt request to the brotherhood for forgiveness was sufficient to dispose of the matter in question.

An equally high standard was required from the members of the ministerial themselves. After all, their example and teaching was to "shine as the brightness of the firmament". As such they were responsible to maintain and uphold the full gospel teachings not only through their preaching but also through their life and example. Aeltester Peter Toews has recorded two instances where members of the ministerial were disciplined for their lack of propriety in this respect.<sup>23</sup>

Action was taken with respect to minister Gerhard Schellenberg (1827-1908) after he had overstepped a boundary line in harvesting hay. It appears that Rev. Schellenberg had cut a little hay over the other side of his boundary while making feed, as must have occurred frequently with the open field system of agricultural used among the Russian Mennonites. i.e. No fence lines or other boundaries divided the various "Kagels" or field allotments of each farmer within his village plan. It appears that he felt that the overstepping of the boundary had been too trivial and insignificant as his acknowledgements were slow in forthcoming. As a result he was removed from his ministerial office after the matter had been duly considered at numerous brotherhood meetings.

Earlier in the same year, 1870, another minister, Isaac Friesen, was chastised for his carelessness in allowing his cattle to stray unherded. Apparently this was not an isolated incident and so Rev. Friesen was also asked to step down from his ministerial office. The breach of evangelical socio-economic policy in both cases had resulted only in the surrender of the ministerial office. Excommunication was not even considered. Both ministers remained as valued and respected senior members of the Gemeinde as was usually the case when members of the ministerial lost their church office for other reasons. The removal from office was not in any way interpreted as a lasting shame and disgrace, provided that the member penitently acknowledged his mistakes and corrected whatever wrong had been committed.

These examples conclude this consideration of the responsibilities of the members of the Gemeinde as the integral particles which together made up the whole and who therefore represented the entire body of the Gemeinde in all their day to day deeds and action.



## 18.09 Treatment Of Employees.

The subject of employer—employee relationships within the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde will now be examined. This is certainly a most important aspect of the socio-economic policy of any group. Was the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde like so many other groups also run by a socio-economic elite who treated the rest of the membership and also their employees with ruthless disdain? One finds that the status of employees among the Russian Mennonites was usually not a very desirable one. Someone like Martin B. Fast recalled in his memoirs that every German farmer had a servant and that most of them also had a Russian maid. The former editor of the *Rundschau* goes on to recall that when these Russians were on the streets during a Russian holiday they were often beaten without compassion by the Mennonite authorities.<sup>24</sup>

According to oral tradition preserved among the descendants of the Russian Mennonites, employment conditions among workers in Russia were generally deplorable. Mrs. Gertrude Koop (nee Barkman) [the widow of Johan Koop, (1826-1896) who had been a prosperous and successful farmer in Russia as well as Manitoba] frequently related of what she felt was the inhumane treatment which many Russian-Mennonite employers bestowed upon their servants and employees. Mrs. Koop was 91 years of age at the time of her death in 1923 and many individuals today still remember her expressed concerns in this regard. It seems that the horses and livestock of some farmers were treated better than some of the Mennonite and Russian servants. Of course it must be pointed out that in general the lower classes in Russia during the 19th century had no rights and were treated more or less as slaves. No doubt the general Russian-Mennonite attitude was very humane by comparison.

What did the Anabaptist-Mennonite writers teach with respect to the treatment of servants and employees? A ready answer to this question is found in the writing of Peter Peters. In the conclusion to his book *The Mirror of Greed* Peter Peters has noted five indicators which he felt evidenced the fact that the inner man had been overwhelmed and possessed by the bondage of greed. He deals with the treatment of employees in his third point which is quoted here in order to illustrate the Kleine Gemeinde policy in this regard:

“Thirdly. If the individual tightfistedly seeks to beat the labourer out of his remuneration even though he very well knows that it is impossible that the labourer can properly subsist from such a miserly wage. Nevertheless he sharply squeezes the labourer and says, do you not want to work for the price? I can obtain someone else for that price. Then the poor working man reflects to himself. Is it not better that I labour for half a wage than that I go away empty? And he must grasp for what he can.

“Those who increase their empire of wealth in this manner are eating the flesh of the poor. And in chapter five, the apostle James speaks and laments with respect to these when he says, ‘Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh, as if it were a fire. Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth’.

“However, those who throw this speech of the apostle James into the wind, are assuring unto themselves that they might do well, namely, to ruthlessly exploit a labourer as much as possible; for they are counting only on their own advantage. How much can they consume in their household in one year? How much will their income be and how much can they save. In addition to this they think to themselves that the less they need pay out for the wages of the labourers, the greater their profit in and from the yearly rentals. But they do not consider that they are also to be economical with respect to their lavish household expenditures, for their huge houses which are constructed like temples, and also with respect to their costly clothes and feasts, household embellishments, paintings and other magnificence. Oh a most unfortunate empire of wealth which is assembled in this manner.

“And in addition to all of this, when they have to pay their labourer they frequently do so with bad coinage, which has been shaved down in weight, or which is not even legal tender, which the employee can not even readily pass on. And of course the labourer should not complain because of this, in that he must be scared to be treated sourly, or actually to be fired. But his wife at home quickly becomes conscious of the situation as she cannot even offer him the equivalent of the crumbs which fall from the table of the rich man.”<sup>24a</sup>

Here is a stern admonition by Aeltester Peter Peters to the Dutch Pietist-cultural Mennonites of the 17th century. It seems that this was also the position which was accepted among the Kleine Gemeinde. Fortunately there is record of a number of instances from the height of the class struggle among the Russian Mennonites during the 1860's in which the Kleine Gemeinde position is clearly demonstrated. Foremost of these is the case of Abraham F. Thiessen of whom a great deal more

will be said in another volume. It seems that Thiessen had dismissed his contract servant in 1865 and now did not want to take the man back into his employ even though he was legally required to do so. Then Thiessen claimed that he had parted peaceably with his servant and that he would take the servant back but that if he was disobedient he would report him to the Gebietsamt for punishment.<sup>25</sup> This was unacceptable to the Kleine Gemeinde. Thiessen had also recently beaten his servant girl and so there was no way that the Gemeinde leadership could support Thiessen in his battle with the Gebietsamt.<sup>26</sup>

As a result of the maneuvering of Thiessen he managed to embroil the Kleine Gemeinde with his dispute so that finally the Gemeinde had to take steps to punish him for his conduct. This eventually resulted in the excommunication of Abraham F. Thiessen in 1866. This excommunication became the final straw which resulted in the division of the Kleine Gemeinde into two separate Gemeinden in 1866. The fact that the leaders of the Kleine Gemeinde were prepared to go to such length as to endanger the very existence of their beloved Gemeinde for the sake of this principle illustrates this aspect of Kleine Gemeinde socio-economic policy very clearly.

The foregoing is not merely one isolated incidence. In the **1866 Diary** of Peter L. Dueck (1842-1887) we find record of two similar occurrences. On June 20th, 1866 the well-to-do Kleine Gemeinde farmer Abraham Rempel of Margenau, was chastised at a brotherhood meeting in Mariawohl for having struck his herdsman. Apparently Rempel must have confessed and asked for forgiveness as the notation is made that he was forgiven. A similar incident took place on the following Thursday June 24, 1866, when Cornelius Fast from Mariawohl also confessed that he had once struck his herdsboy. He confessed and apologized to his brethren, and was also forgiven. Thus it is evident that ruthless and arrogant treatment of employees was prohibited in the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde.

### **18.10 Charity To Strangers In Need.**

The writings which document Kleine Gemeinde history indicate that charitable and benevolent concerns were not limited only to the members of the Gemeinde and their employees. Aeltester Peter Toews has noted that on January 27, 1852, it was decided to conduct a collection for the Holstein Gemeinde (presumably in Northern Germany) which had been impoverished because of war in that part of Europe.<sup>27</sup>

Some time earlier in 1848 the Russian government through the Mennonite Gebietsamt had requested that a contribution and collection be made by the Russian-Mennonites for the support of the lawful authority and order, for the Russian Crown and fatherland. It appears that various revolutions in Europe in that year had caused no little concern to the Russian government authorities and in the population in general. In a letter dated June 20th, 1848, and addressed to the Molotschna Oberschulz Abram Toews, the ministerial of the Kleine Gemeinde announced that it would make a contribution of 483 Ruble and 50 Kopeken silver. Apparently the total contribution of all the Mennonites in Russia at this time was sufficient for the Russian government to purchase 130 horses. If one would estimate that a good horse in 1848 would have cost 20 silver ruble then it would appear that the Kleine Gemeinde had certainly contributed its share to this fund. Aeltester Peter Toews also makes the point here that the Kleine Gemeinde was not told and did not know that the monies contributed would be used by the Russian government for the purchase of military horses.<sup>28</sup>

Similarly the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde also provided a collection for the nursing care of wounded soldiers during the Crimean War.<sup>29</sup> Here Aeltester Peter Toews has noted his view that the Russian Mennonites, including the Kleine Gemeinde, went too far in yielding to the demands of the state in regards to the provision of drivers and vehicles for the transportation of goods for the Russian military.<sup>30</sup>

A final example of this sort of aid to an outside body or agency is to be found at the time of the emigration to America when the Kleine Gemeinde which settled in Manitoba contributed six hundred dollars to the Bergthaler Mennonite Gemeinde whose needs were reported to be even greater and whose resources were even more limited than that of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde.

### **18.11 The Emigration. A Crucial Test.**

By far the most serious test of the cohesiveness and oneness of the Kleine Gemeinde would come at the time of the emigration to America in 1874-1875. Would all the more well-to-do farmers decide that they would not give away their fine enterprises in Russia for one-sixths of their worth and rather decide to remain in Russia? Or would those who decided to emigrate nevertheless keep back their resources for themselves in order that they would later obtain an advantage over the others? It must be remembered here that the Kleine Gemeinde had experienced severe organizational trauma during

the preceding decade. Many members had abandoned the faith and gone over to one of a number of Pietist-Mennonite groups. The answer is very clearly that both branches of the Kleine Gemeinde survived the ordeal of the emigration and resettlement with flying colours.

The records of Aeltester Peter Toews indicate that no less than three funds were collected for various purposes pertaining to the emigration. These included a fund of 1300 ruble for the journey of the 1873 delegates to North America, various collections for the delegations of Aeltester Peter Toews, and others, to St. Petersburg and Jalta, etc., with respect to the negotiations with the government authorities in the years 1872-1874. In addition the Kleine Gemeinde also collected a special fund in order to pay for the travelling expenses of all the poor families in the Gemeinde. By June 1874 this sum amounted to 1182 Ruble so that the Gemeinde already had sufficient funds on hand to be able to make a commitment that all the poor members would be transported at the cost of the Gemeinde.<sup>31</sup>

In addition there were individuals who were prepared to sacrifice their own needs to the needs of others in the Gemeinde in order that the emigration as a Gemeinde could take place. This, in spite of the fact that they were forced to dispose of their properties at prices which were about one-third of the fair market value in the Molotschna and as low as one-sixth of the fair market value in the other Kleine Gemeinde settlements where the market was even worse. Thus even if an individual had had only a 1000 Ruble debt owing on his "Wirtschaft", he was now automatically penurious if he agreed to sell his 6000 Ruble Wirtschaft for the giveaway price of 1000 Ruble which was offered to him. This illustrates the sacrifice which had to be made by those who nonetheless were prepared to extend the loan of monies to the Gemeinde.

There need be no shame in listing some of these individuals whose identities are known. Reference is made to the **Gemeinde Account Book**<sup>32</sup> of deacon Peter P. Wiebe which contains a listing of five individuals who had extended major loans to the Gemeinde at the time of the emigration. These families and the amounts of their respective loans are as follows: Peter Brandt (1848-1930)—\$300.00. The Peter Brandt family settled in Rosenort, Manitoba but later moved to Nebraska and still later to Kansas. Johan Koop (1826-1896)—\$250.00. Johan Koop was a well established farmer who together with his own sons and sons-in-law established the village of Neuanlage northwest of Steinbach, Manitoba in about 1879. The widow of Isaac L. Plett (1842-1927)—\$600.00. Isaac L. Plett had been a successful young farmer in the village of Friedensfeld, near Nikopol, who had died in 1871. His widow came to Blumenort, Manitoba in 1874 and then moved to Gruenfeld the following year, and later to Steinbach in 1883. Johan L. Warkentin (Junior) \$200.00. Johan L. Warkentin (1845-1908) was a successful young farmer who settled in the village of Blumenhoff, Manitoba. In addition Jakob Barkman (1794-1875), who was one of the oldest Kleine Gemeinde emigrants from Russia, extended a temporary loan of \$466.33 during the course of the journey from Russia to Manitoba. Jakob Barkman died at the home of his children Peter W. Toews in Blumenort, Manitoba in 1875. Other benefactors can be identified from oral tradition e.g. Cornelius S. Plett who assisted some of his less fortunate brethren with loans and gifts of money when he arrived in Manitoba in 1875.

According to the record of the deacons, additional loans were made in subsequent years so that the following amounts were still owing to a number of individuals in 1883. These included the following: Heinrich Reimer, Gruenfeld \$83.00; Heinrich Enns, Rosenort \$200.00; Johan Esau, Gruenfeld, \$173.00; Abraham Schellenberg (through his trustees Gerhard Schellenberg and Gerhard Kornelsen) \$296.95; Johan Friesen (through his trustees Jakob Kroeker, Rosenhoff, and Jacob Friesen, Rosenort) \$200.00; Mrs. Isaac L. Plett (through her trustees Franz Kroeker and Heinrich Brandt of Steinbach) \$437.10; Johan Loewen, Rosenort, \$336.65; Peter Harms estate (through trustee Gerhard Schellenberg) \$61.60; deacon Abraham R. Reimer, Blumenort, \$50.00. It seems that the Gemeinde accounts were consolidated and reorganized by deacon Abraham R. Reimer in 1883.

## 18.12 The Charity Of The Pioneer Gemeinde.

With the aid of many voluntary contributions to the treasury as well as more major loans such as these, the Kleine Gemeinde was able to complete its emigration and resettlement in America. These funds were expended for numerous purposes. First of all, money was advanced to a number of families to assist them with their travelling expenses which could run to about \$400.00 per family. Others received loans and gifts to purchase a cow, or oxen, or to assist them to construct their first crude pioneer homes in the new homeland. One of the more unusual expenditures included a fund to purchase flour and apples which could then be resold to those who had money to buy them or simply given to those whose resources had already been expended.

A survey of the entries in the deacon Peter Wiebe **Gemeinde Account Book** includes the following

examples of aid which the Gemeinde extended to various families during this time of testing and crisis: Paid to Jakob Barkman the travel expenses of Cornelius F. Friesen (1812-1892) in the amount of \$412.25 of which his daughter Maria (1844-1925) had paid the sum of \$14.00. Monies were also advanced for the purchase of an oven and stove pipes as well as for the support of Margaretha Wiens who would appear to have been in the charge of the Friesen family. Other disbursements during the first years include \$1.20 for meat and \$4.75 for a bag of flour.

Another example of such aid and support was in the case of Cornelius Fast. The account records show a payment of \$105.00 to A. Friesen for reimbursement for travel expenses. Thus it appears that at the time of emigration some of the more able individuals informally assisted other brethren for which the Gemeinde then later reimbursed them in part or in total when sufficient funds became available to the Gemeinde. Other disbursements include monies for flour and potatoes. Similar advances for flour and potatoes are recorded for the elder Johan Toews (1829-1885).

Ledger Number Six records that the sum of \$35.00 was disbursed to Peter Buller in Rosenort in 1875 for the purchase of a cow. Buller repaid this loan later the same year. Peter Buller was one of the many Kleine Gemeinde who left Manitoba in 1875 for easier settlement conditions in Kansas and Nebraska. Not all of those who left the harsh Manitoba climate would be able to repay the assistance they had received from their former Kleine Gemeinde brethren. Another account records the payment of \$20.00 to Isaac Loewen of Rosenort in repayment for money advanced to Klaas Brandt for the purchase of a stove in 1875. Another account shows a loan made to Johann Wiebe of Steinbach in the amount of \$53.38 in 1874. A further sum of \$3.06 was disbursed for the purchase of apples in 1875. A disbursement of \$50.00 was made in 1874 to Peter Toews in Steinbach to purchase a cow and to repay some debts.

The point has already been made that the Gemeinde was the sole welfare and support agency for its poor and less capable or handicapped people. Thus 1873 records show the disbursement of \$2.55 on behalf of Elizabeth Wiens (apparently an older spinster) for medicine. Later in 1873 \$1.25 was paid out for shoes. A further \$15.00 was disbursed in 1874 for a deck bed and mattress. Also medical bills of \$3.28. The 1875 disbursements show a payment of \$40.00 to the elder Cornelius F. Friesen (1812-1892) for care provided to Elizabeth Wiens during the journey from Russia to America. This is interesting for it demonstrates that even someone like Friesen who had himself received assistance for emigration nevertheless made all efforts to be of assistance and to help others where he could. The year also shows a payment to Jakob Barkman of \$41.33 in reimbursement for monies which he had advanced for the travel costs of Elizabeth Wiens. In 1877 a similar reimbursement was made to Peter Toews for clothing provided to Elizabeth Wiens. The **Gemeinde Account Book** also records monies and aid advanced to Peter Unger, Blumenhof and David Thiessen of Blumenort, among others, for apples and flour. The 1874 records also show that \$100.00 was advanced to delegate Cornelius Toews to reimburse him for the travel expenses of his mother-in-law.

The total turnover in the Gemeinde accounts for 1875 consisted of \$1653.55 which was received from donations and loans. These funds were used to make loans to various families as well as to extend aid to those in need. This included the sum of \$1.80 to school teacher Abraham Friesen for apples. A similar amount for apples was also disbursed to Klaas Friesen of Steinbach. Records for 1876 also show a loan extended to the Gemeinde by Peter Wiebe for \$25.00. In the same year Blumenort farmer Peter Penner (1813-1884) also extended a loan to the Gemeinde for \$80.00.

The journal sheet for Peter Penner also shows an interesting series of advances paid to Penner from the Gemeinde treasury. This included some \$40.00 paid to Penner over the years for various articles of clothing and upkeep for Margaretha Harder who was living with the Penner family in Blumenort. It seems that Margaretha Harder was a sister-in-law to Penner who had been cheated and robbed of her sizeable inheritance by her brother who had remained in Russia. Later, when this brother had come to a premature end under mysterious circumstances, this inheritance was eventually forwarded to Margaretha Harder. In fairness to Margaretha Harder it must also be noted that she left her quarter section of land in the Blumenort village plan to the Penner family in 1883.<sup>32a</sup> This demonstrates a caring and loving Gemeinde which was concerned that individuals such as Margaretha Harder who were otherwise completely alone and destitute would not be left without a home and shelter no matter how serious and bleak the situation might appear to be.

The Gemeinde also assisted those from other areas. The 1874 Gemeinde accounts show an advance of \$100.00 to Jakob Friesen in Blumenfeld for an ox, a cow and potatoes. The 1883 records also show loans outstanding to non-members and former members as follows: Jacob Defehr, Reinfeld, Pembina—\$39.08; the widow Bernhard Bergen, Pembina—\$25.75; Martin Klassen, Kansas—\$2.92;

Jacob Harms, Kansas—old debt from Russia (1867-1868)—25 Ruble silver; Johan Klassen, Heuboden, 17 Ruble, 50 Kopeken and 3 mirke Rye (1834). It has already been mentioned that the sum of \$600.00 was advanced to the relief committee for the purchase of flour for the Berthaler in 1874. A further disbursement of \$50 for the needy was made in 1875. It might also be mentioned here that the **Gemeinde Account records** of deacon Peter Wiebe show that the Kleinen Gemeinde in turn borrowed money from the Support Committee in Ontario through Jakob Schantz in the amount of \$588 for the East Reserve Gemeinde and \$335 for the Scratching River Gemeinde. According to these records this debt had been reduced to \$559 by 1882.

The **Gemeinde Account Book** contains record of additional cases of assistance extended to the needy over the years. However, the foregoing are the more noteworthy instances from the first and most desperate pioneer years. In reviewing these records it should be remembered that these are probably only partial records and that likely another similar account book was maintained for the Gruenfeld church district as well as for the Scratching River Gemeinde. Nevertheless the above will illustrate that to the Kleinen Gemeinde the evangelical teaching of "many kernels and one bread" was not merely to be understood in a figurative or poetic manner.

### 18.13 Conclusion.

This concludes this examination of the faith and practice of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in socio-economic matters. A brief quotation from the memoirs of Johan W. Dueck (1865-1932), which he entitled **History and Events of Earlier times**, will serve as a fitting ending. In this quotation Dueck reflects with respect to the fate of one of the families which had left the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia in order to pursue more aggressively the acquisition of a large financial empire, only to lose everything in the end through bankruptcy and an early grave.

"Thus it can happen when one is not contented with little, but rather aspires with all one's might to become rich. It is not without good reason that the Apostle Paul in First Timothy Chapter 6 verse 9 says: 'They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare. . . .' And one has good reason to take to heart and consider the passage from Proverbs 23 verse 4 which states as follows: 'Labour not to become rich, etc.' Accordingly, dear reader, if the Heavenly Father has given sustenance and apparel, be content. For 'To be content is the greatest empire'. Of what gain is it to people who, even though they conquer the whole world thereby incur damage to their soul. We have brought nothing into the world and without question will take nothing with us when we leave.

"If we poor humans could only be more conscious of the fact that we are only visitors and strangers on this earth. We have no continuing city here. Therefore we should in time seek the future City."<sup>33</sup>

These reflections certainly summarize the full gospel message of the **Mirror of Greed** as well as the evangelical socio-economic teaching of the Kleine Gemeinde.

This concludes our study of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia from 1812 to 1849. In his **Sammlung . . . zur Historie der Kleinen Gemeinde der Mennoniten** Aeltester Peter Toews has ended his **First Book** covering a similar period with some poetic reflections which also serve here as a fitting memorial:

Wunder Anfang, Herrlichs Ende!  
 Wo die wunderweisen Haende  
 Gottes fuehren ein und aus;  
 Wunderweislich ist sein Rathen,  
 Wunderherrlich seine Thaten,  
 Und du sprichst: Wo wills hinaus?  
 Gott musz man in allen Sachen,  
 Weil er alles wohl kann machen,  
 End und Anfang geben frei.  
 Er wird, was er angefangen,  
 Lassen so ein End gelangen  
 Das es wunderherrlich sei.  
 Denke doch es musz so gehen,  
 Was Gott weiszlich heiszt, geschehen,  
 Ihm, und dir zur Herrlichkeit:  
 Ob der Anfang seltsam scheint,  
 Ist das End dock gut gemeinet,  
 Frieden folget nach dem Streit.<sup>34</sup>

AMEN

## FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER EIGHTEEN. SOCIO-ECONOMIC POLICY

1. Peter Peters, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, op.cit., 139.
2. Emphasis by the author.
3. Peter Peters op.cit., 161-166.
- 3a. See James Urry, op.cit., 537-538, for a discussion of the effect which the respective Pietist and Anabaptist-Mennonite teachings had on the socio-economic life of the individual.
4. John Hoffer, *The History of the Hutterites* (The Hutterian Educational Committee, Manitoba, 1983), 56.
5. Aeltester Peter Toews *Sammlung*, op.cit., 303-305.
6. Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Milton Toews, Neilburg, Sask.
7. Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920*, op.cit., at page 169 quotes Dr. David G. Rempel.
8. Peter M. Friesen, op.cit., 865.
9. *Ibid*, 876. If one assumes five persons per family in a Mennonite population of 100,000, the ratio of full farmers would be less than 20 percent.
10. Aeltester Peter Toews, op.cit., 366.
11. *Ibid*, 369.
12. *History and Events*, op.cit., 39.
13. Aeltester Peter Toews, op.cit., 369.
14. Telephone conversation between the author and William Schroeder, Winnipeg, Manitoba, in 1983.
15. Courtesy of Roy Loewen, Blumenort, Manitoba and Prairie Rose E.M. Church, Landmark, Manitoba.
16. Peter Toews, *1872-1878 Diary*, op.cit., 58.
17. John C. Reimer, *Reimer Familienregister*, op.cit., 19.
18. *Ibid*.
19. Peter M. Friesen, op.cit., 993.
20. *Ibid*, pages 979 and 1017.
21. John W. Dueck, *History and Events*, op.cit., 86-87.
23. Peter Toews op.cit., 451; and *History and Events*, op.cit., 51-52.
24. Martin B. Fast, *Mitteilungen*, (Reedley, California, 1935), 59.
- 24a. Peter Peters, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, (Elkhart, Indiana, 1901), 169-170.
25. Aeltester Peter Toews, *Sammlung*, op.cit., 356.
26. *Ibid*, 364.
27. *Ibid*, 319.
28. *Ibid*, 299-301.
29. *Ibid*, 320.
30. *Ibid*, 324.
31. Aeltester Peter Toews, *History and Events*, op.cit., 66-68.
32. *Gemeinde Account Book*, op.cit., 1.
- 32a. Roy Loewen, op.cit., 279.
33. Johan W. Dueck, *History and Events*, op.cit., 86-87.
34. Aeltester Peter Toews, *Sammlung*, op.cit., 312.

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