

Radical as Luther and Calvin must have appeared to Roman Catholics, there were others caught up in the Reformation tide who regarded them as not nearly radical enough. Considerably left of central Lutheran and Reformed theology, several small but vocal and vigorous Protestant groups sprang up, demanding that what had been rightly begun now be carried to its logical conclusions.

These Radical or Left-Wing Reformers never became united among themselves except in a common impatience with the way things were moving. They wanted a real return to New Testament times, made more feasible through Luther's translation of the Bible, so that the Holy Spirit could rule in the hearts of a true community of the faithful.

In Luther's own Wittenberg, a band of "prophets" from nearby Zwickau maintained that the Spirit spoke to them directly and that therefore the Bible itself was no longer necessary. Even more radical was Thomas Müntzer, who advocated the establishment of the kingdom of God by force. In Switzerland, Grebel and Hübmaier tangled with Zwingli on similar if less militant grounds. And in Moravia and especially in Holland, a quiet but persistent type of spirituality, decrying all outward show of force or entanglements with civil authority, manifested itself.

Sometimes this scattered group went by the derogatory name of Anabaptists (literally "re-baptists"). They believed that there was no Bible warrant for the baptism of infants, and that the church of Jesus Christ should be made up only of those (adults) who had made a public profession of faith. Those of their group who had been baptized as infants were consequently re-baptized, though this was their opponents' way of seeing it since for them infant baptism was no baptism to begin with. (The pejorative accent to such names as Anabaptist, Pietist, Puritan, Methodist, Quaker, all of which had so much in common, is an indication of their minority status.)

Hunted and hounded on all sides, the Radical Reformers were persecuted and scattered. It was said of them that "not many died in their beds." Some fled to Poland, Russia, Paraguay. Many migrated to America. High on the list of reflective thinkers in the group would be the Dutch pastor, Menno Simons.

Born at Witmarsum in Friesland, Menno Simons broke with Roman Catholicism through his reading of the New Testament. He became a teaching elder of the Holland Protestant community and did much to give stability and depth to the group who later became known as "Mennonites." Forced to be on the move, he lived and taught in various cities in Holland and in northern Germany. The last years of his life were saddened by increasing controversy among his own group. Essentially a man of concord, he bequeathed to the Mennonites determination to avoid civil strife and to seek peace.

The passages from Menno Simons' works cited here indicate the Left-Wing Reformation position on infant baptism and the nature of the true church.

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## THE COMMUNITY OF THE FAITHFUL\*

Even as we have briefly set forth the Lord's command, the doctrine and practice of the apostles, and the meaning of baptism, and have shown that it is true baptism and will be that to the end of time, so now by the grace of God we wish as a matter of service to state and refute some of the passages of the learned ones, erroneously drawn by them from Scripture to make void the ordinance of the Lord and place their own in its stead.

In the first place, they teach that we are all the children of wrath and of sinful nature; born of the sinful seed of Adam, and that therefore children must be purified and washed from original sin by baptism.

To this we reply with the Word of the Lord. We also believe and confess that we are all born of unclean seed, that we through the first and earthly Adam became wholly depraved and children of death and of hell: with this understanding, however, that even as we fell and became sinners in Adam, so we also believe and confess that through Christ, the second and heavenly Adam, we are graciously helped to our feet again and

justified. To this end He appeared upon earth that in and through Him we might have life. Through Him alone we boast to have obtained grace, favor, and the forgiveness of our sins with God our Father, and not by baptism, whether we are children or believers. For if pardon and the washing away of original sin took place by means of baptism and not actually by the blood of Christ, then the sweet smelling sacrifice (Eph. 5:2) which is eternally valid would have been in vain and without power—unless there be two remedies for our sins. But ah, no, the Scriptures speak of but one means, Christ and His merits, death, and blood. Therefore he who seeks the remission of his sins through baptism despises the blood of the Lord and makes water his idol. Therefore let every one be careful lest he ascribe the honor and glory due to Christ to ceremonies performed and to creaturely elements.

It is true that Peter says, Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). But this is not to be understood to mean that we receive the

remission of our sins through baptism. Oh, no, for in such a program Christ and His merits are undone. We receive the remission of our sins in baptism as follows: The Lord commanded His Gospel to be preached to every creature so that all who believe and are baptized may be saved. Wherever there is faith, called the gift of God by Paul, there also are the power and fruits of faith. Wherever there is an active, fruitful faith, there is also the promise. But where such a faith does not exist (we speak of adults), there also is no promise. For whoever hears the Word of the Lord and believes it with the heart, manifests it by his fruit and faithfully observes all things the Lord has commanded him. This must be done before the just shall live by faith, as Scriptures teach, and the remission of his sins is announced to him as Peter in this passage teaches and instructs. . . .

They say that Christ has cleansed and sanctified His church with the washing of water by the Word. Children, they say, belong to the church; therefore they must be cleansed with the washing of the water by the Word. To this we reply: Paul does not speak of infants but of those who hear and believe the Word of the Lord, and so faith are sanctified and cleansed in their hearts, for they are cleansed by the washing of water, as the mouth of the Lord has commanded.

Since infants do not have this cleansing, sanctifying faith, nor the means thereto (that is, understanding) and are not commanded in Scripture to be baptized, how then can they be cleansed with the washing of water by the Word, seeing they have no faith in the Word and no washing of water by the Word? Therefore, all Pedobaptists should know that their infant baptism does not only not cleanse and sanctify, but that it is

\*The Complete Writings of Menno Simons, trans. Leonard Verduin (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1956), pp. 130-31, 135, 198, 300.

altogether idolatry, without promise, pernicious, and contrary to the Word of the Lord. . . .

And although infants have neither faith nor baptism, think not that they are therefore damned. Oh, no! they are saved; for they have the Lord's own promise of the kingdom of God; not through any elements, ceremonies, and external rites, but solely by grace through Christ Jesus. And therefore we do truly believe that they are in a state of grace, pleasing to God, pure, holy, heirs of God and of eternal life. Yes, on account of this promise all sincere Christian believers may assuredly rejoice and comfort themselves in the salvation of their children. . . .

I tell you the truth in Christ, the rightly baptized disciples of Christ, note well, they who are baptized inwardly with Spirit and fire, and externally with water, according to the Word of the Lord, have no weapons except patience, hope, silence, and God's Word. The weapons of our warfare, says Paul, are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (II Cor. 10:4, 5).

Our weapons are not weapons with which cities and countries may be destroyed, walls and gates broken down, and human blood shed in torrents like water. But they are weapons with which the spiritual kingdom of the devil is destroyed and the wicked principle in man's soul is broken down, flinty hearts broken, hearts that have never been sprinkled with the heavenly dew of the Holy Word. We have and know no other weapons besides this, the Lord knows, even if we should be torn into a thousand

pieces, and if as many false witnesses rose up against us as there are spears of grass in the fields, and grains of sand upon the seashore.

Once more, Christ is our fortress; patience our weapon of defense; the Word of God our sword; and our victory a courageous, firm, unfeigned faith in Jesus Christ. And iron and metal spears and swords we leave to those who, alas, regard human blood and swine's blood about alike. . . .

They verily are not the true congregation of Christ who merely boast of His name. But they are the true congregation of Christ who are truly converted, who are born from above of God, who are of a regenerate mind by the operation of the Holy Spirit through the hearing of the divine Word, and have become the children of God, have entered into obedience to Him, and live unblamably in His holy commandments, and according to His holy will all their days, or from the moment of their call.

And since the worldly church is no such amiable, obedient bride but one who has left her lawful husband, Christ, and follows after strange lovers, as may be plainly seen, and all this through the blindness, ignorance, and the deceit of their doctrines—therefore I seek to accomplish nothing by my writing and teaching (according to the talent God has pleased to give me) but to reclaim this adulterous bride, the erring church, from her adulterous actions, and return her to her first husband to whom she was so unfaithful, notwithstanding he did her such great service. We point out to all sects, nations, and individuals who desire to read or hear our doctrine, writings, and admonitions, not by glosses and human opinion but by the express Word of God which only avails, that there is no salvation on earth or in heaven other than in Christ Jesus, that is, in His doctrine, faith, sacraments, obedience, and walk.