



Roots and Branches

Periodical of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC

*“What we have heard and known
we will tell the next generation.”*

Psalm 78

The 16th Century Peace Tradition: Anabaptism, Erasmus and the English Vision

By Ron Dart

The name of Erasmus will never perish. - John Colet

*Erasmus has published volumes more full of wisdom
than any which Europe has seen for ages.*

- Thomas More

There is a legitimate tendency when interpreting the sixteenth century to highlight the fact that the Magisterial Reformers (Luther and Calvin), although breaking from the Roman Catholic tradition and initiating the Protestant Reformation, were still deeply Catholic. What do I mean when I say this? The mainstream of the Protestant Reformation held to a “magisterial” notion of the relationship between church and state. The state was the political arms and legs of the church, and when the state had to use violence in war, or repress political or theological dissent, most of the Magisterial Reformers supported state violence. It is significant to note that although the Protestant Reformers held high the authority of the Bible, they were quite selective in how the Bible, and especially the Sermon on the Mount, were interpreted and applied. So whose explication of the Bible should be



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Portrait of Erasmus of
Rotterdam by Hans II
Giovane Holbein

heeded and why? This became, in the 1520s-1530s, the dominant question, and answers went in different directions.

The publication of *The Naked Anabaptist* by Stuart Murray is both a critique of the way many modern Mennonites have assimilated into the mainstream and a call to return to the foundational peace tradition of the Anabaptists. But the problem with *The Naked Anabaptist* is this: first generation Anabaptists were extremely diverse in their beliefs. Whose position should be accepted and why? There can be little doubt that first generation Anabaptists had a unique commitment to the Sermon on the Mount and to peacemaking, but there was no collective agreement on how the Sermon on the Mount should be interpreted and applied in the public realm of society and state. Some Anabaptists took the position that the true church had to be starkly separate from the “compromised church” (which included both the Protestant Magisterial Reformers and the Roman Catholics) and the state, whereas others such as Pilgram Marpeck and Balthasar Hubmaier were less convinced. There can be no doubt, though, that Anabaptists, for a variety of

...continued on page 3.

Upcoming Events

Marlene Epp serves a banquet of 5 loaves and 2 fish:

Mennonites and foodways: a miagrope [soup cauldron] of meaning

Annual MHSBC Fundraising Banquet

Saturday, September 27, 2014 at 6pm

Emmanuel Mennonite Church, 3471 Clearbrook Rd, Abbotsford

Marlene Epp, always an engaging speaker, will give a talk on the relationship between Mennonites and the foods they eat – and love. That’s not all – virtuoso musician Calvin Dyck will provide entertainment. Tickets are \$25 and can be purchased at the MHSBC office at Garden Park Tower, 2825 Clearbrook Road, Abbotsford.



MHSBC Genealogy Workshop

Saturday, November 15, 2014

Azalea Room, Garden Park Tower, 2825 Clearbrook Rd, Abbotsford

Glenn Penner and Tim Janzen will be facilitating. For anyone interested in genealogy, this event is essential. Registration is \$35; payments can be made at the MHSBC office.

MHSBC event: a talk by Dan Unrau

No Place on the Planet/No Home On Earth vs. The Land is Ours

Saturday, November 1, 2014 at 7pm

Bakerview Church, 2285 Clearbrook Rd, Abbotsford

The Mennonite and Jewish people have much in common in their respective histories, including the experience of persecution and diaspora. When trouble came, Mennonites moved to new faith and economic opportunities in places around the world. So did the Jews, and remembering the written words of Scripture that “promised” them a particular place on the globe – a spot at the end of the Mediterranean, west of the Jordan, north of Egypt, south of Lebanon – in 1948 they moved in. In both stories things have gone well; things have not gone well.

A conversation on the parallel troubles and moving in both the physical and faith lives of the Mennonite and Jewish people would be a boost for all of us in understanding ourselves and others better.

Editorial - By Robert Martens

What are Anabaptist-Mennonites? Marlene Epp once remarked at UFV that some of her students, with their stereotyped visions of horses and buggies, find it hard to believe that she is a Mennonite. As to defining what “Mennonite” means, she said she was “comfortable with the ambiguity.”

This issue explores the often ambiguous nature of what being a Mennonite is. Ron Dart, an Anglican, examines the influence of the Roman Catholic scholar Erasmus on early Anabaptists. Andrew Klager looks at some close resemblances between the Orthodox and Anabaptist traditions. Both articles suggest that Anabaptist-Mennonites seem to have been heavily influenced by other political and religious forces.

Following these two scholarly articles, Wayne Northey explains why he feels that he lives on the boundaries of the Mennonite community. In contrast, Erna Suderman Friesen’s book is an account of Mennonite integration into the mainstream community. These are two very different visions.

Perhaps, considering the complexity and changing nature of the Mennonite tradition, it will be impossible to ever explicitly define what “Anabaptist-Mennonite” means. Still, theologically and socially – in faith and in action – this tradition exists and continues to evolve. Baptists like to say that, wherever three Baptists are gathered, there are four different opinions. Might the same be said of Mennonites?



Partial translation: “Here, from a fishing platform in the Limmat River, Felix Manz and five other Anabaptists were drowned between 1527 and 1532. The last Anabaptist executed was Hans Landis, Zurich, 1614.” Photo: Wilf Hein

reasons, turned against the Magisterial Reformers as those who refused to carry the reform of the church to her true end – such an end could be only known by living according to the demanding ethical standards of the Sermon on the Mount.

Erasmus was the elder, “dean,” and most significant theologian of peace of the early sixteenth century, and most leading Anabaptists were children of Erasmus. Erasmus spent a great deal of his middle and later years in Northern Switzerland (Basel) and Southern Germany (Freiburg); many Anabaptists were living in these areas. There has been a historic tendency for some Anabaptist-Mennonite historians to ignore the impact and shaping influence of Erasmus’ peace theology on Anabaptism, but in the last few decades, a closer reading of this period of history is taking shape. I did a Masters of Christian Studies at Regent College between 1979-1981, and one of my advanced seminars, taught by Ian Rennie, was on “The Reformations of the Sixteenth Century.” When we focused on the varied Anabaptist positions, Rennie invited Kenneth Davis to lead the class. Davis had done his doctoral thesis on “Anabaptism and Asceticism: A Study in Intellectual Origins,” and his thesis had been published as a book in 1974. I found both the book and lecture intriguing for the simple reason that Davis had argued that Erasmus had been one of the primary “Agencies of Mediation” to first generation Anabaptists.

This approach was rather cutting edge stuff in the 1970s. Most Mennonites at the time simply assumed their founders had turned to a purer reading of the Bible in opposition to the Magisterial Reformers and the Roman Catholics. The idea that a Roman Catholic might have played a leading role in shaping Anabaptist peace theology and activism did not exist for most Mennonites in the 1970s. Davis succinctly summarized his research with these words: “Erasmus had copious direct and indirect contact with many of the founding leaders of Anabaptism. ... [T]he Anabaptists can best be understood as, apart from their own creativity, a radicali-

zation and Protestantization not of the Magisterial Reformation but of the lay-oriented, ascetic reformation of which Erasmus is the principle mediator” (Davis 292).

In the last few decades, many Mennonites have come to realize that Erasmus stands at the trailhead of many of their unique perspectives. Their interpretation and application of the Bible has been mediated to them through Erasmus. The publication of *Erasmus, the Anabaptists, and the Great Commission* by Abraham Friesen has more than confirmed the insights of Kenneth Davis. Friesen sums up his position poignantly: “It was indeed the impact of Christian humanism in general, and that of Desiderius Erasmus in particular – only partially mediated by Ulrich Zwingli – that gave rise to Anabaptism” (Friesen 19).

There you have it. The strength of Friesen’s more updated missive is that he threads together a vast amount of historic information that Davis did not use, but both men reach the same convincing conclusion.

An important question, however, does need to be asked at this point of the essay. We know that first generation Anabaptists parted paths with the Magisterial Reformers and why they did so. Erasmus never became an Anabaptist, even though he did not publicly criticize them as others did. Erasmus took a more difficult route than did many Roman Catholics and Magisterial Reformers. Why did Erasmus not become an Anabaptist, and how did his views differ on the relationship between church and state, between faith and politics? The answer to this question can be found in the sources to which Erasmus turned.

Erasmus made his first visit to England in 1499, returning in 1505, and then spent five years in England teaching at Cambridge (1509-1514). Erasmus was back in England again, significantly enough, in 1517 when Luther posted his ninety-five theses on the church door at Wittenberg. When in England, Erasmus met many of the leading Catholic activists and peace theologians of the time, such as John Colet and Thomas More, who were part of a

Erasmus never
became an
Anabaptist...

group called the London Reformers. In Colet and More, Erasmus met two men who were committed to reforming the Roman Catholic Church and transforming public life in England at the highest political levels, with peace and justice at the forefront. Erasmus came to appreciate their rich organic vision of church and society, learning and life, and of the integrated vision of what the church could be when the garden was weeded rather than destroyed. The notion that the church should be divided, fragmented and schismatic was anathema to the London Reformers. They thought such a vision was thin and reactionary.

Erasmus' move to the Continent and Switzerland in the 1520s brought him into contact with many of the younger and yet-to-be Anabaptists. He carried with him the peace theology he had learned in England. Erasmus lived in the very area in which some of the most intense conflict was taking place, and he mediated a position on peace that opposed both the Magisterial Reformers and the incoming Tridentine Roman Catholics. The historic roots of Erasmus' peace theology are English. This means, therefore, that it was the English peace tradition that was mediated through Erasmus in Switzerland and Germany and inspired first generation Anabaptists. This point is often overlooked when historic sixteenth century peace dots are connected.

Davis, Kenneth. *Anabaptism and Asceticism*. Scottdale, PA, and Kitchener, ON: Herald Press, 1974.

Friesen, Abraham. *Erasmus, the Anabaptists, and the Great Commission*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998.

Murray, Stuart. *The Naked Anabaptist*. Scottdale, PA, and Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2010.

Ron Dart has taught in the Department of Political Science/Philosophy/Religious Studies at University of the Fraser Valley since 1990. He was on staff with Amnesty International in the 1980s, has published more than 25 books and is completing a book on Erasmus. Ron is on the National Executive of the Thomas Merton Society of Canada and is the Political Science Adviser to the Stephen Leacock Home/Museum in Orillia.

"The Simple Confession" is a hand-written document published by Swiss Anabaptists in 1588. The following is an extract cited in Abraham Friesen's Reformers, radicals, revolutionaries. Nappanee, IN:

Evangel Press, 2012, pp. 131-2. Friesen's book contains some discussion on the relationship between the scholar Erasmus and the Anabaptists (reviewed in the July 2014 issue of Roots and Branches).

Because they have consistently defiled the temple he had built here on earth, set their kings and princes [into it], their thresholds next to his threshold, their posts next to his posts, and brought persons, uncircumcised both in flesh and heart, into his holy of holies, he has desired to establish his temple out of sight of such carnal and earthly humans on a mountain that is higher than all other mountains and elevated above all other hills, as one may learn not only from Isaiah and Micah, but also from other places in the writings of the prophet Ezekiel. ... And they went on to say: For the Christian church is a congregation of saints who constitute the temple of the living God, 1 Cor. 3, 2 Cor. 6. It is to these that the Lord said: Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them.

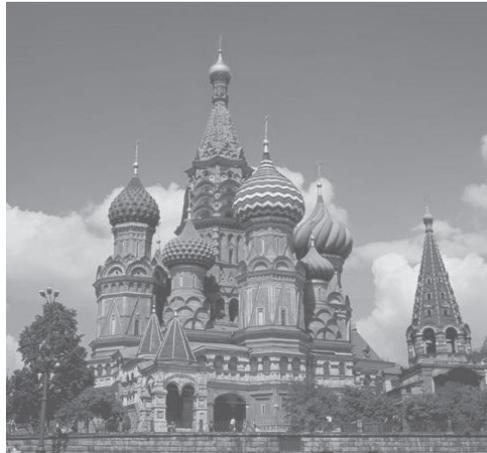
In the same way we, in these last days, have another temple and another high priest, so we also possess another law; for all those who wish to do battle under this king and high priest's standard are no longer under the law given on Mount Sinai, nor do they teach the sword, bow, and spear, or to conquer the Promised Land and destroy its inhabitants; rather, they are under the law and word of the Lord that was issued via Jerusalem and Zion through Christ, the heavenly king and high priest, himself. And this [word and law] teaches the nations peace, breaks the bow of war, suspending the horses, wagons, and weapons of war (Zech. 9, Ps. 45, 75), and forges the swords into hoes, the spears into pruning hooks, sickles and saws (Is. 2, Mic. 4), and [teaches humans] to lead holy lives so that they may be fearless and survive the day of wrath in the presence of God and his angels.

If, now, we had recognized this temple and its location, together with its high priest and customs, as we clearly should have from the scriptures, there would have been much less discord and conflict among all those who wish to be called Christian than has been to date.

Peacemaking in the Anabaptist-Mennonite and Eastern Orthodox Traditions

By Andrew P. Klager

In his epistle addressed to the Christians in Rome, St. Paul exhorts his readers to “live peaceably with all” (Rom. 12:18), but he prefaces this with two qualifiers: “If possible, so far as it depends upon you...” In the same way, the fourth-century bishop of Caesarea, St. Basil, remarked, “Nothing is so characteristically Christian as being a peacemaker”¹ but added the same Pauline qualifier that “without, *as far as rests with me*, peaceableness towards all,” his fidelity to Christ’s teachings is suspect.² These statements reflect an emphasis on *imitation* and *transfiguration* that characterize the peace traditions of both the Anabaptist-Mennonite and Eastern Orthodox faith



communities: the transfiguration of a human being gives him or her the intuitive ability to be peaceable with all, and the imitable behaviour and commandments of Jesus, especially in the Sermon on the Mount, reveal the goal of our transfiguration. That Mennonites place more stress on imitation and Orthodox Christians focus more on transfiguration suggests that each could learn from the other.

The early Anabaptist emphasis on imitation was implied in the expression *Nachfolge Christi*, literally “following after Christ” – the importance of “discipleship” that Harold Bender outlined in his celebrated *Anabaptist Vision*.³ This suggested a sincere participation in the teachings of Jesus to love one’s enemies and therefore avoid any obligations that might compromise this commitment, be they in the military or government. With peacemaking in mind, Timothy George notes that for Anabaptists, “the Christian is called to a more profound *imitatio Christi* than the mere observance of outward conformity allows ... [and] must suffer the cross *in the same way as* Christ suffered the cross.”⁴ In like

manner, Peter Riedemann (1506-56), early leader and “second founder” of the Hutterites, wrote in his *Account of the Faith* on Christ’s command in the Sermon on the Mount to “not resist one who is evil” (Mt. 5:39), “Here it is clearly to be seen that one ought neither to avenge oneself nor to go to war.”⁵

Orthodox Christians must also remember that Jesus’ acquiescence during his arrest and execution was an intentionally nonviolent response, which informs a more thorough understanding of the Eucharist. Indeed, Jesus would not have shed the blood that Orthodox Christians now drink during Holy Communion had he not told Pilate during his trial, “My Kingdom is not of this world; if my Kingdom were of this world, then my servants would fight that I might not be handed over to the Jews” (Jn. 18:36). The prayers of the Orthodox Church hold up a mirror to our failure to imitate Jesus consist-

ently – prodding, examining, and challenging the disposition of our hearts in ways that could never be derived from the same distorted heart. For instance, the following Orthodox “Prayer for Peace” is a challenge to us all:

“Almighty God and Creator, You are the Father of all people on the earth. Guide, I pray, all the nations and their leaders in the ways of justice and peace. Protect us from the evils of injustice, prejudice, exploitation, conflict and war. Help us to put away mistrust, bitterness and hatred. Teach us to cease the storing and using of implements of war. Lead us to find peace, respect and freedom. Unite us in the making and sharing of tools of peace against ignorance, poverty, disease and oppression. Grant that we may grow in harmony and friendship as brothers and sisters created in Your image, to Your honour and praise. Amen.”⁶

Observing the function of such prayers, hymnody, and liturgical resources of the Orthodox Church that encourage peacemaking and nonviolence, Fr. John McGuckin has rightly decried “[t]he

voices that glorify war,” claiming they “are not the illumined ones, and never have been,” further observing that the Eastern Church has “stubbornly clung to a less congratulatory theory of the morality of war ... because it sensed that such a view was more in tune with the principles of the Gospels.”⁷

St. Gregory, a fourth century bishop of Nyssa, recognized how difficult it is to imitate God incarnate in his short missive, “On Perfection,” when he admitted, “We imitate those characteristics [of Jesus] we are able to assume, while we venerate and worship what our nature cannot imitate.”⁸ The way to overcome – at least in proportionate measure – this inevitable inability to *consistently* imitate the nonviolent example of Jesus in both the Anabaptist-Mennonite and Eastern Orthodox traditions is transfiguration, or *theosis* (deification) in Orthodoxy and *Vergöttung* (divinization) in Anabaptism. This transfiguration is what *capacitates* one for peacemaking and allows one to *become* innately and intuitively a peacemaker.

Identifying the violent corollary of human passions, St. James asks, “What causes wars, and what causes fighting among you? Is it not your passions that are at war in your members? You desire and do not have; so you kill. And you covet and cannot obtain; so you fight and wage war” (Js. 4:1-2). In the same way, the early twentieth century Orthodox elder, St. Silouan the Athonite, observes, “Men have attached their souls to the things of this earth and have lost the love of God, and so there is no peace on earth.”⁹ The ascent up the Beatific ladder from “purity of heart” to “peacemaker” (Mt. 5:8-9) reveals the requisite transfiguration needed for embracing nonviolence intuitively through the natural inclination of one’s transformed inner essence rather than the obstinate drudgery of forcing conformity to a stale ideology. For example, St. John Chrysostom, in his *Homilies on Matthew*, describes Christ’s commandment to love our enemies as setting “the highest pinnacle on our good deeds,” which requires the “very summit of virtue” and “a fervent soul, and much earnestness.”¹⁰

Rather than favour “purity of heart” as the precondition for peacemaking, Mennonites have typically preferred Jesus’ meekness in the Beatitudes

(Mt. 5:5) as giving him the ability to confront death nonviolently and forgive his executioners. When the Schleithem Confession (1527) urges obedience to the scriptural prohibition against use of the sword in Article Six, it further claims that “Christ teaches and commands us to learn from Him, for he is meek and lowly of heart and thus we shall find rest for our souls.”¹¹ This meekness, though a property of Jesus’ self-emptying when he became a human, is also paradoxically a property of his divinity in Jesus’ effort to reveal the Father. It is the human participation in Christ’s divinity – as the inverse of the self-emptying incarnation – that early Anabaptists taught as *Vergöttung*. For instance, Menno Simons described the new birth as being “so united and mingled with God that he becomes a partaker of the divine nature,”¹² and Menno’s Dutch co-labourer, Dirk Philips, avowed that Christ’s followers became “participants of the divine nature, yes, and are called gods and children of the Most High.”¹³ Denck emphasized the divine Word who indwelled each Christian “that it might divinize them.”¹⁴ Pilgram Marpeck remarked that we “more fully partake of the divine nature”¹⁵ when we “pattern ourselves after” Christ who “forbade such vengeance and resistance (Lk. 9, 21; Mt. 5), and commanded the children who possessed the Spirit of the New Testament to love, to bless their enemies, persecutors, and opponents, and to overcome them with patience.” (Mt. 5; Lk. 6)¹⁶

Imitation and transfiguration – discipleship and *theosis* or *Vergöttung* – are therefore both needed for a more resilient peace stance. In this way, the Mennonite and Orthodox faith traditions can strive for the imitable goal to “be peaceable with all” by harnessing the ascetical disciplines that make peacemaking, “if possible, so far as it depends upon you,” intuitively possible rather than just ideologically attractive.

Andrew Klager holds a PhD in Religious Studies from the University of Glasgow and teaches Mennonite Studies at the University of the Fraser Valley and the History of Christianity at Trinity Western University. He has authored several book chapters and peer-reviewed articles and has two forthcoming books on interreligious coexistence in Anabaptist origins and the historical seeds of Mennonite peacebuilding approaches.

¹St. Basil of Caesarea, “Letter 114: To Cyriacus, at Tarsus,” *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers II*, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Vol. 8 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 190.

²St. Basil of Caesarea, “Letter 203: To the bishops of the sea coast,” *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers II*, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Vol. 8 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 241.

³Harold S. Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1944), 20-29.

⁴Timothy George, “The Spirituality of the Radical Reformation,” *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, ed. Jill Raitt, World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest, Vol. 17 (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 340.

⁵Peter Riedemann, *Account*, 1542, 108-109, “Concerning Warfare,” In *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources*, ed. Walter Klaassen (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1981), 278.

⁶Fr. Theodore Stylianopoulos, ed., *My Orthodox Prayer Book* (Brookline, MA: Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, 1985), 82.

⁷John Anthony McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to its History, Doctrine, and Spiritual Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 402f.

⁸Gregory of Nyssa, “On Perfection,” trans. Casimir McCambley, *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 29 (Winter 1984): 362.

⁹Archimandrite Sophrony, *St. Silouan the Athonite* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1991), 290.

¹⁰St. John Chrysostom, “Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew,” *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers I*, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Vol. 10 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 126.

¹¹*Schleitheim Confession*, ed. and trans. John Howard Yoder (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1977), 14.

¹²Menno Simons, “The Spiritual Resurrection” (1536), In *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, ed. J.C. Wenger and trans. Leonard Verduin (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956), 58.

¹³Dirk Philips, “Enchiridion,” In *The Writings of Dirk Philips (1504-1568)*, eds. and trans. Cornelius J. Dyck, William E. Keeney, and Alvin J. Beachy, Classics in the Radical Reformation (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992), 145.

¹⁴Hans Denck, “Whether God Is the Cause of Evil,” In *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers: Documents Illustrative of the Radical Reformation*, eds. George H. Williams and Angel M. Mergal, The Library of Christian Classics, Vol. 25 (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1977), 101.

¹⁵Pilgram Marpeck, *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, eds. and trans. William Klassen and Walter Klassen (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1999), 62.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 63.

Why Am I (not) a Mennonite?

By Wayne Northey

Before retirement, I worked in Abbotsford across the hall from the BC Mennonite Historical Society office. My Anglican scholar friend Ron Dart has observed that ethnic Mennonites are perhaps more taken with their history than any other religious group in Canada.

My Mennonite scholar friend Bruce Hiebert acknowledges that ethnic Mennonites are historically immensely self-preoccupied, a characteristic perhaps in part traceable to their having been hounded since the sixteenth century, resulting in various waves of diaspora (the scattering of a people). Such “unwelcomeness” indeed might make one understandably turn a tad defensive, circle the wagons, become, well, somewhat economically, socially, and politically self-absorbed.

At the same time, paradoxically, such ethnocentricity spread its wings outwards into an amazing embrace of neighbour and enemy in worldwide missions such as Mennonite Central Committee, arguably one of the greatest service agencies in North America at both the *charity* and *justice* poles. I was initially drawn (still am) to Mennonites by their peace and justice theology, and by the Mennonite Central Committee.

So *why am I a Mennonite?* I’m not actually.

But I did for twenty years belong to a Mennonite church, Langley Mennonite Fellowship. When we non-ethnic Mennonites first joined while I was on staff with MCC Canada, it was a relief not to experience the marginalization we encountered in previous evangelical churches we had attended, and in the wider North American evangelical context as well. I was actually *affirmed* for believing that following Jesus extended to *taking seriously* the words of Jesus (how novel!) – such as in the Sermon on the Mount: “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.*” (Matthew 5:9) “*For I tell you that unless your [justice] surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.*” (Matthew 5:20)

Although I suggest no alternative, I think sometimes that the healthiest move for Mennonites would be to drop the name “Mennonite” and the designation “Anabaptist” other than as historical tags. One thing is

certain: the Anabaptist-Mennonites, even within the Protestant community, are not the sole bearers of peace and justice theology/practice, nor is the practice, sadly, a distinguishing mark of many contemporary Mennonites and their churches. There is of course a long history of peace and justice teaching/practice in Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy as well.

My reason for dropping the term “Anabaptist/Mennonite” – and I employ here a very long adjective – is *The-Lady-Doth-Protest-Too-Much-Methinks* Syndrome (spoken by Gertrude in *Hamlet*). So what does Queen Gertrude know about Mennonites? A lot, it turns out. I think all Protestant (including Radical Protestant) groups tend to suffer from this syndrome. This is a notion, belief, disease, or perhaps a type of *DNA of schism* (Ron Dart’s term), that somehow entered the Protestant bloodstream in Shakespeare’s day and is, well, just a tad *holier-than-thou*.

But wait! Catholics and Orthodox are not off the hook either! Until Vatican II, one was not even a *Christian* unless Roman Catholic. Official Orthodoxy even today has observer status only at the World Council of Churches. Both can be variants *with Tradition* of *The-Lady-Doth-Protest-Too-Much-Methinks* Syndrome.

So back to *Why Am I (not) a Mennonite?* Because I (try to) reject that “Gertrudesque-opposed” syndrome. Because my most-read authors on *peace* and *justice* and much else for years include Mennonites to be sure, but many non-Mennonites as well. *Because I try to be a generic follower of Jesus* who happened – gratefully, most of the time – to have found a home for two decades in a Mennonite church.

Wayne Northey was Director of Man-to-Man/Woman-to-Woman Restorative Christian Ministries (M2/W2) in British Columbia, Canada from 1998 to 2014, when he retired. He has been active in the criminal justice arena and a keen promoter of Restorative Justice since 1974. He has published widely on peacemaking and justice themes.

Erna Suse Suderman Friesen.
We Live and Move and Have Our Being.
Victoria, Friesen Press, 2012. 259 pp.

Book review by Robert Martens

God was up above the blue sky. That dark night sky with the myriad stars created a mysterious up there that was surely where God was. One could never expect to see him. During cold winter nights, the aurora borealis spanned the night sky with colour that moved, changed and terrified. Majesty was the word that described his infinite qualities. God was so wholly other, no child could grasp his person, but somehow we experienced his presence daily. The conversations of the elders reminded us that God had been available to them in their flight from Russia. God was spoken to daily in morning and evening prayers. Scriptures were part of the morning grace. We stood to say grace at every meal, the proper way to honour God. In every hardship, his presence was an absolute necessity. (24)

So runs Erna Friesen’s poetic description of her childhood experience of God. The sentiments expressed could fit into most first-generation Russian Mennonite memoirs, but Friesen was second-generation, born in Manitoba. *We Live and Move and Have Our Being* is not a memoir of suffering through the Russian Revolution, flight to Canada, and reestablishing a home for family and community. That story has already been written and many of the people who lived through those events are no longer with us. Friesen’s memoir begins with her birth to Russian Mennonite refugees, but goes on to explore her professional career and “assimilation” – or integration – into mainstream Canadian culture. It is charmingly written.

Erna Friesen’s early life was spent on a Manitoba farm. She rode horseback to a little red schoolhouse and found education exciting in every possible way. The family moved to Clearbrook in 1941 – the trip nearly ended in disaster when



their car's tires began to smoke on the mountainous descent from the Rockies – where she fell in love with the MEI. Rural life, of course, continued: Friesen is rather proud of her role as “child labourer.” But in 1951 she left home for teacher training at Normal School in Vancouver. Here began her adaptation to the urban life; in her Physical Education class, she even learned how to dance.

Friesen, however, wanted more: a university education. In 1956 she started attending UBC, and achieved a degree a few years later. Erna went on to marry John Friesen, and then to raise a family. As much as she loved her children, though, Erna found motherhood intellectually unchallenging, and she longed for the interaction that a career could give. “In the seventies, with all the children in school, I began to experience a feeling of restlessness. I was always busy but not entirely satisfied with where I was in my life. The women’s liberation movement was gaining steam and books and the press carried a

constant stream of material on the issues facing women. Birth control was now an option to limit families. Women had the same opportunity to become educated as men” (115). She decided to study law and enter the professional world.

After graduation Friesen practised family law, finding it both stressful and stimulating. She subsequently used her organizational skills to help create UBC’s Menno Simons Centre, which functioned as a dormitory and social gathering place for Mennonite students. This occurred at a time when “there was still a certain suspicion and fear among church leaders that a university education would take young people away from their traditions and particularly away from their faith” (140). In the following years, she helped establish Point Grey Fellowship, then sat on the board of Regent College at UBC.

“In the seventies, with all the children in school, I began to experience a feeling of restlessness.”

The latter pages of the memoir are devoted mostly to family affairs, and might be more interesting to people who know the Friesens. But older age is described as poetically as the energetic days of her youth, and Erna’s interest in the present-day world never flags: “It is easier to learn to understand contemporary culture through the eyes of a child than through the media or other options, and the best way is to ‘hang out’ with the grandkids” (161). Hers is a story that is ongoing.

The book contains several appendices of eyewitness accounts and of genealogical research.

Erna Friesen’s memoir is available from Friesen Printers; or from Erna herself, who will mail copies to buyers for \$15/no mailing costs. Her email is friesen.erna@gmail.com

The Danzig Connection

By Helen Rose Pauls

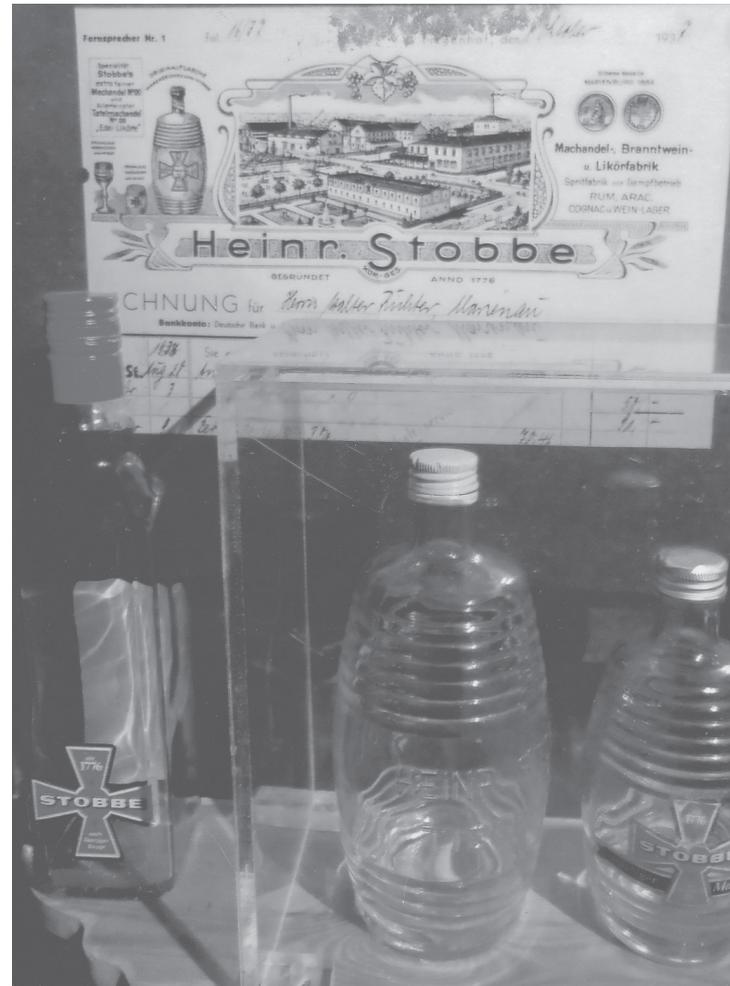
The trip to Danzig came highly recommended, and so in spite of wondering if the Danzig connection would feel too tenuous after our past Mennonite history trip to Ukraine, off we went. It was October, with autumn leaves at their best, harvested beets in huge piles by the roadside, and most of the tourists gone from the big cities.

Identified in Mennonite memory as West and East Prussia are the lands on opposite sides of the Vistula River: swamplands leased to Dutch Mennonites starting in 1530, during the trials of the Reformation, in the hope that the newcomers would drain them and turn them into arable land. Bringing advanced Dutch hydro technology with them, they not only drained the swamps and marshland, but flourished there, as technical skill met economic need. They were granted exemption from military service in return for monetary payments, but Mennonite weavers and spinners were forbidden from entering the guilds. Anabaptists were considered heretics.

A few early homes of square timbered log constructions remain, as do large wooden arcaded houses with carvings on the supporting posts. And there are many examples of Mennonite giant brick barns behind giant brick houses, some of them with pot-bellied front porches that were “grain attics”; and handsome red brick churches, some still in use by



Helen Pauls visits Mennonite cemetery. Photo: Ernie Pauls



East Prussia Museum, Heinrichs Stobbe Brewing Company
Photo: Helen Rose Pauls

Roman Catholics, on the wonderful rolling rich farmland between river and hill. Unlike in Ukraine, farm families lived, not in centralized villages, but spread out on their land.

It was uncanny how much the environment reminded us of the Fraser Valley, including the smells, native trees, and flowers – only this area must be at least ten times as big. There were yarrow plants growing near ditches; alder and pine in the woods; and cabbages, strawberries and raspberries in kitchen gardens. We learned of Ratzlaff, a Swedish soldier who joined the Mennonites after a war; and of Sawatsky, a local government administrator involved in resettling Mennonite farmers, who fell in love with one of their daughters and had to reinvent his existence. Unkempt cemetery tablets were engraved with the names of Hamm, Goertzen, Funk, Ratzlaff, Harder, Franz, Quiring, Ediger, and Martens. A stained glass window in a former Mennonite

church had “Bartel” etched into a corner. We heard of Schellenberg who went over to the Catholics, and Frau Gretke Pauls, who had a distillery for whisky. We learned that the Flemish Mennonites were “clothing proud,” and the Frisians, “house proud.” At the Polish sponsored Mennonite museum in Tiegenhof, we learned that 22,000 of our people once lived in the area.

The city of Danzig (now Gdansk), at the outflow of the Vistula River which was the main vehicle of commerce, was the seat of trade and power for the Polish/Prussian nation in times gone by. The city gates were designed in Renaissance style by Van den Blokken (aka van den Block) of Mennonite heritage. His three famous sons, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, continued his legacy. Our tour guide treated us to dinner at the five-star Lux Restaurant begun by a Mennonite centuries ago and in continuous operation up to the present, albeit under different hands.

In 1772, the Danzig suburbs and the Vistula Delta were absorbed into the Kingdom of Prussia, and the city of Danzig followed them in 1793. Mennonites who refused to serve in the military were not permitted to buy land, and were subject to additional taxes. Tsarina Catherine the Great’s invitation for settlement in Russia, along with the promise of freedom from military obligations, came as a great relief to many Mennonites, and some subsequently planned to migrate. Danzig officials drew up laws to prevent large scale emigration, but over the following decades, over 6,000 Mennonites would leave to find new homes in South Russia.

Mennonites who remained on these fertile plains experienced a rich life until 1945, when they fled to Germany ahead of

the advancing Soviet army. Some were resettled in West Germany; others, captured by the Soviets and banished to the Gulag. Most of those who emigrated found new homes in Canada and Uruguay.

Numerous immigrants were sponsored by Fraser Valley Mennonites who had arrived in Canada earlier. I remember so well, as a child in Arnold, when the Schroeders, Heiers, Kliewers, Schmidts, Ratzlaffs, and Bartels joined the church – in fact Gustav Ratzlaff became our beloved minister.

Our visit to Danzig filled in the gap between our tour of Mennonite highlights in the Netherlands and our trip to view the former glories in Ukraine, and put our past in perspective. I recommend it.

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Danzig city gates. Photo: Helen Rose Pauls

Return to Heinrichswalde: thoughts related to a voluntary visit to the home- land sixty-five years after leaving involuntarily

By Reimar Goetzke

In the summer of 2013, my brother Bodo and his wife Sharon invited Beverly and me to accompany them on a trip to the former East Prussia where our family originated and where I was born. We joined our bus tour in Berlin, and travelled east through Poland into the Kaliningrad Oblast, now a separated province – a Russian “exclave” that may or may not be under Russia’s full legal control – that gives Russia access to that part of the Baltic Sea. The southern part of East Prussia has become Polish territory. The general area had been German for about seven centuries. It was fascinating seeing the towns, the fields, the forests, and the rivers where our family lived for many generations.

The anticipated highlight of the trip was the town we knew as Heinrichswalde (founded 1686), now renamed Slavsk. We visited the hospital where I first saw the light of day. This is a 150-bed hospital erected in 1891 by the German administration. It appears well-kept, clean and functional, and, according to my mother who saw the photographs, looks much the same as it did then.



Bodo and Reimar Goetzke. Photo: Reimar Goetzke

Before the Second World War, the town had been prosperous. Now, some houses have collapsed, and some new attempts at construction, abandoned. Our tour group attended a worship service in a plainly decorated Lutheran church. To accommodate us visitors, the service was conducted in both German and Russian. Our tour company had encouraged us to bring gifts for the church’s children, now third-generation Russians.

At the Bunker Museum we saw collections of recent artifacts from both Germany and Russia, including side-by-side displays of German and Russian guns, helmets, and other equipment. I was uncertain whether the juxtaposition of the two was a local attempt at reconciliation or an acceptance of reality.

My brother had done research in order to find the area where our maternal and paternal families had lived and worked. Using maps our father had acquired, and with the aid of a somewhat knowledgeable but also inventive taxi driver, we came within a few hundred metres of the locations of both farms. Nothing remained but large flat fields. (By comparison the Fraser Valley is crowded.) Soviet collectivization had removed all traces of individual family farms. Ironically, with the abandonment of collectivization, some German companies are moving in to farm the land. The German family farm that became a Russian collective is in some cases becoming part of a German corporation!

Before 1945 my extended family had been a part of local social and economic activities and had occupied church and business leadership positions. After the war, they were engaged to work for the Russians. Some were busied removing roofing tiles to reuse in other construction sites; others were forced to dig up graves to salvage jewellery or gold teeth.

In this unpleasant and oppressive climate, my extended family members became inventive and secretive. For example, they kept a pig upstairs in the house as a source

of protein. To survive, they learned to make ethical compromises.

*

Upon returning home, my explorations continued. After reading *German Mennonite Soldiers* by Mark Jantzen, I gained a better understanding of the connection between German and Russian Mennonites. The Prussian Mennonites to some extent were granted military exemption; however, that was coupled with severe restrictions in property and other rights. For example, there were restrictions on intermarriage, and where this did occur, the children were not to be raised as Mennonites. Attitudes towards Mennonites and Jews were somewhat similar. During a centuries-long struggle as pacifists in a land where the Kaiser considered service in the military as a duty, many Mennonites compromised their pacifist values in order to gain rights and to be able to provide for their families. When my grandfather became a pastor, non-participation in the army was no longer expected by the Church. He advised young men that they needed to decide the military issue for themselves. In the late eighteenth century, for many other Mennonites, their choice had been to abandon or to sell their possessions at low prices and emigrate to the Ukraine and Russia in order to maintain their pacifist ideals.

Our “uncommon Mennonite family name,” Goetzke, was a traditional East Prussian Mennonite name. Since the name doesn’t appear among Russian Mennonites, none of our relatives likely emigrated to Russia. But Russia did come our way after the Second World War.

Showing some of my photos to my mother and her brother elicited more memories and stories from them, and questions from me: for example, why did my family choose to stay in 1945 when the families of most of those in our tour group fled before the Russian advance? According to my uncle, some expected the Russians to return home, as they had done after World War I. Others expected that Hitler would back down instead of fighting to the end – in



The hospital where Reimar Goetzke was born. Photo: Reimar Goetzke

that case, the Russians would not take this province. Both views turned out to be wrong. My family finally left in 1948 in accordance with the Potsdam Agreement: the “orderly and humane” expulsion of Germans beyond the new eastern borders.

After our tour, I saw my mother in a new light. She had broken her hip just weeks before we left, and was now physically diminished but nonetheless alert and very determined. This was the person who as a three-year-old had climbed into a row boat, untied it and happily drifted down the Gilge River (now called Matrossovka). This was the child who did well in school academically, but was not above playing tricks on her teachers. And this was the young woman whose way of life was interrupted and violated. Since her family had been stripped of their possessions, she was taken to and from the hospital where I was born in a hand-drawn wagon, accompanied by her sister and future stepmother. As a foreigner in her own land, she was mostly ignored in the hospital until it was time to give birth.

I marvelled at the differences in geography and culture between East Prussia – the land of her birth and young adulthood – and Canada, the country where she worked and raised her family: a difference so dramatic, no one could have dreamed it. She was now in rehab after hip replacement, accepting of the fact, but still determined to get better. Not everything along life’s way had been her choice, but she had survived and thrived.

From Danzig to Russia

By Louise Bergen Price

The following is an excerpt from a book which the author is currently writing.

In August 1786, Peter Hildebrandt, a tenant farmer in Bohnsack in the Vistula delta, first heard of Empress Catherine's wish to recruit Mennonite settlers to Russia. The news came as a "ray of light" to his soul. Peter was thirty-two years old, owned neither house nor land and had no expectation of ownership in the future. Immediately he brought the news to Jakob Hoepfner; Hoepfner replied that if ten families would sign up to go, he'd be the eleventh.

Several days later, the Russian envoy, German-born Georg Trappe, arrived at Peter Hildebrandt's home. Hildebrandt welcomed Trappe and his companions, and when his landlord returned they served their guests a meal of wild duck, fish and parsnips. Now discussions about the proposed migration began. Trappe explained the details of the Empress Catherine's Immigration Manifest of 1763 and excitement began to build.

Catherine's terms for prospective groups of settlers included: free transportation to the place of settlement; the right to settle wherever they wished;

loans for buildings, homes, barns, factory equipment; exemption from taxation for a period of time; free religious practice; the right to proselytize among the Moslem population; the right to local self-government; the right to import family belongings duty free; the right to buy serfs and peasants. Further, foreigners wishing to settle had the right to negotiate their own terms with Russian officials, either by contacting representatives abroad, or by sending delegates to Russia.

Sending delegates seemed a good idea, but who would be willing to go? Trappe, impressed with Hoepfner's intelligence and capabilities, suggested that he would be a suitable candidate. Two other men were then elected: Johann Bartsch and Jacob von Kampen. Von Kampen's parents protested: their son was not yet married! The community decided two delegates would suffice.

Now events gathered momentum. Empress Catherine II would be visiting the Crimea the following spring; the delegates could meet with her en route and discuss settlement terms. In order to do that, they would have to leave immediately to view the area of proposed settlement. The Russian government would pay all travel expenses and assist them on the way.

And so it was that towards the end of September, scarcely a month after Trappe's visit, Hoepfner and Bartsch had organized their affairs, and were

ready to leave. Accompanied by a large group of friends and relatives, they travelled to Danzig where they boarded a ship bound for Riga.

With their husbands gone, Sara Dück Hoepfner and Susanna Lämmert Bartsch were responsible not only for their children, but for each family's business. Here Susanna had the advantage, since the Bartsch family owned a small dairy farm. Each day, milk was picked up and delivered to city markets.

Sara Hoepfner's position was more difficult. In addition to a large garden and two cows, she was now in



Former Mennonite church (now Catholic) in East Prussia. Photo: Helen Rose Pauls

Roots and Branches

is a publication of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC and is mailed four times per year to those who donate \$25.00 or more per year.

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charge of a general store, bakery, and inn. Fellow Mennonites, anxious to emigrate, assured her that things would be fine, that God would care for her. Sara was still worried, but no longer shared her concerns with others.

Upon arrival in Riga, Bartsch sent a letter to Susanna with the assurance that both he and Hoepfner were healthy and were on their way to Dubrovna. At Dubrovna they were able to send another letter home, but it would be their last correspondence with family until August of the following year.

In the meantime, family and friends of the men waited and worried. Shortly before the feast of St. Martin (November 11) a stage coach heralded by bugles entered the city of Danzig. It was a Saturday, Peter Hildebrandt tells us, and many villagers from Bohnsack were buying and selling goods at the market. Those who had cast doubt on the men's success now had to eat their words as they watched the Russian Consul-General greet Bartsch and Hoepfner amid great fanfare.

Only now did family and friends hear of the delegates' trip south, of finding the perfect settlement area in Berislav. Of meeting Catherine the Great and Potemkin and accompanying them on a royal tour of the Crimea. Of spending several months in opulent St. Petersburg and meeting the Crown Prince, and being kissed on the cheek by him. And finally, of royal signatures on the cherished Document of Privileges, enshrining Mennonite rights "forever."

Word that the deputies had returned spread quickly from house to house, and with the news, wondrous tales. There was land available, fertile, uninhabited steppeland! Money from the Russian government to assist in settlement! And religious freedom and no military conscription to boot!

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Hänschen and the Stork

Translated by Louise Bergen Price

Storks were welcomed to Mennonite villages, for, according to folklore, they brought good luck and protection from fire. For children, the arrival of the stork was important for another reason, as told in this story by Arnold Dyck.

Hänschen and the Stork.

And Lord Adebar*, the stork. He isn't in any great hurry either, even though all the little boys of the village – and some of the not-so-little ones – are awaiting his arrival with great impatience. For it is he who opens the bathing season. When he arrives, one can swim in the cattle pond, and Mother and Father have nothing to say about it anymore. If they forbid it, their children might become confused about the natural world order. For how could a being who brings babies into the world be wrong about the season?

No, no. The stork and bathing go together in the same way as the stork and the tiny screaming bundle that arrives in one's home quite suddenly. And it's because of the anticipated joy of swimming, that the little boys are the first to see the stork when he circles the village...

Hänschen would have been only too happy if the stork pair had made a home on his own barn roof. But there's nothing he can do about that. Long before he was born, the storks had built a nest at Wiebes, and that's where they stayed. The nest was high, but one could see it quite clearly from the



Storks in Danzig. Photo: Reimar Goetzke

street and so observe the family life of the largest and most honoured birds of the village. Yes, and everywhere one could hear the clattering of their bills. Even when one sat in one's home at *Faspa***.

From Arnold Dyck's novel, *Verloren in der Steppe* (Lost on the Steppe). Steinbach: Echo Verlag, 1944. 54-55.

*

My mother remembers that when children saw the stork, they would chant in Low German:

| | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Oatboa, Oatboa jreene,</i> | Stork, green stork, |
| <i>Bring me doch ne Leena,</i> | Bring me a "Lena," |
| <i>Oatboa, Oatboa roode,</i> | Stork, red stork, |
| <i>Bring me doch en Brooda.</i> | Bring me a brother. |

**Adebar* is "stork" in the North German dialect.

***Faspa* is an afternoon snack.