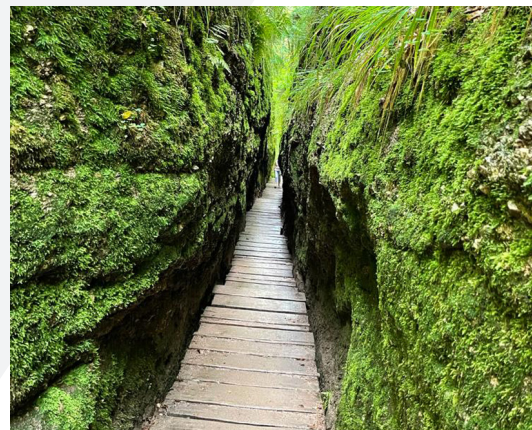


Theme Year

22

daring! **living consistently**



**This text version is a shortened translation of the German theme booklet.**

**The original printed version can be ordered from:**

**Blessings 4 you GmbH**

Motorstraße 36  
70499 Stuttgart  
Tel.: 0711-83000-0  
kundenservice@blessings4you.de  
www.blessings4you.de

**Prices (staggered):**

from 1 copie: 4,10 € / Expl.  
from 5 copies: 3,70 € / Expl.  
from 10 copies: 3,30 € / Expl.  
from 20 copies: 3,10 € / Expl.  
from 50 copies: 2,90 € / Expl.

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Mennonitische Weltkonferenz

**Imprint**

**Publisher**

Verein 500 Jahre Täuferbewegung 2025 e.V.  
c/o Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen  
Ludolfusstr. 2-4 · D-60487 Frankfurt/Main  
info@taeuferebewegung2025.de  
IBAN: DE18 5009 2100 0001 7351 01  
www.taeuferebewegung2025.de  
**gedruckt auf Natur-/Umweltpapier**  
© 2022

**Cover photo centre:**

Burning Anna Hendriks at the stake, in Amsterdam 1571  
(from the Mennonite Book of Martyrs, page 91f.)

**Cover design, typesetting and layout:**

webdesign-mediengestaltung.de · Matthias P. Bartel

**Translation:**

Christopher Bentley

**Oncken Verlag** / Blessings 4 you GmbH, Kassel  
ISBN 978-3-87939-411-1

## daring! consistent living

We can now present the third issue in the preparations for the anniversary of the Anabaptists in 2025. The motto for 2022 is Daring! Living Consistently. The key words are: orientation on Jesus – nonconformity – confession – martyrdom. They demonstrate the entire range of this year's theme with the challenges it presents. Consistent living that leads to martyrdom? The word martyr has now become problematic because of its connection to Islamic terrorism. Nonconformity – what does it mean for a society which is increasingly drifting apart and polarising? In the past consistent orientation on Jesus was sometimes confused with an inner withdrawal from the world. That led to social marginalisation and even isolation.

If discipleship directs us today towards political responsibility and resistance we need to agree on ethical guidelines. A central framework for these is found in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. This is a common thread throughout this issue.

Consistent living – that was a driving force for the Anabaptist movement right from the beginning. This issue aims to demonstrate how in church and society a wholehearted orientation on Jesus in our day and age should be understood and put into practice. Once again men and women of differing denominational backgrounds have been asked to evaluate this subject critically. Our readers can themselves judge how successful we have been. The issue also offers a source of subject matter for various aspects of church work.

One point we feel to be of special importance: This issue demonstrates once again how Christians of various confessions work together in an ecumenical context. In our single world there can only be one church of Jesus Christ.

*On behalf of the Steering Group*

*Reinhard Assmann, Bernd Densky, Andreas Liese, Astrid von Schlachta*

## Contents

<b>Greetings</b>	
Bodo Ramelow, Minister President of the Free State of Thuringia and President of the Federal Council of Germany in 2022 .....	7
Mario Fischer, Generalsekretär der Gemeinschaft Evangelischer Kirchen in Europa .....	8
Anthony Peck, General Secretary of the European Baptist Federation (until 2021) .....	9
José Arrais, Mennonite World Conference Europe Coordinator .....	10
<b>Consistent Jesus Orientation</b>	
„Radikale Normalität“ Jesu – eine katholische Perspektive · <i>Hermann Glettler</i> .....	11
Jesus Christus: exemplum and sacramentum – Thomas à Kempis` The Imitation of Christ · <i>Martin Hailer</i> .....	12
Werke und Gnade – ein spannungsreiches Verhältnis aus lutherischer Sicht · <i>Michael Martin</i> .....	14
Jesus-Frömmigkeit im mystischen Protestantismus und Pietismus · <i>Astrid von Schlachta</i> .....	16
Consistent Orientation towards Jesus among the Anabaptists · <i>John D. Roth</i> .....	20
How Mennonites Orientate Themselves Today on Jesus · <i>Bernhard Ott</i> .....	22
Faithful Discipleship – A Baptist Perspective · <i>Simon Werner</i> .....	24
Heiligung – konsequente Jesusnachfolge aus methodistischer Sicht · <i>Ulrike Schuler</i> .....	26
Das Christus-Lamm als Kirchensymbol der Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine · <i>Peter Vogt</i> .....	28
Leben mit Christus – ein orthodoxer Zugang · <i>Marina Kiroudi</i> .....	30
Reclaiming Jesus – A Confession of Faith in a Time of Crisis .....	32
<b>But I Say Unto You – Consistent Dicipleship Ethics of the Sermon on the Mount</b>	
The Sermon on the Mount from the Point of View of Baptists and Mennonites · <i>Carsten Claußen und Fernando Enns</i> .....	34
Nachfolge und Sexualität · <i>Andreas Bochmann</i> .....	44
Talking Oath · <i>Lew N. Tolstoj</i> .....	46
Eidesverweigerung – ein Lebensbericht · <i>Volker Haury</i> .....	48
Civil Disobedience · <i>Erich Geldbach</i> .....	50
Discipleship Today – Conscientious Objection · <i>Bernhard Ott</i> .....	52
Social Welfare Work as an Expression of a Life of Integrity · <i>Corinna Schmidt</i> .....	54
Die soziale Bedeutung des Vaterunsers · <i>Walter Rauschenbusch</i> .....	56
Vaterunser – Gebet, Nachfolge und Jesusfrömmigkeit heute · <i>Elsie Rempel</i> .....	58
Konsequent leben – Fasten und Lebensstil in der Nachfolge Jesu · <i>Jens-Oliver Mohr</i> .....	60
Konsequent leben – im Umgang mit Geld und Eigentum · <i>Sebastian Mann</i> .....	62
<b>The Broad Path and the Narrow Gate</b>	
The Devotional Picture „The Broad and the Narrow Path“ .....	64
The Value of Standards in Anabaptist History · <i>Astrid von Schlachta</i> .....	68
Departing from Evil - Separation in the Teaching of the Brethren Movement · <i>Andreas Liese</i> .....	70
Russlanddeutsche – Tradition und Identitätsbewahrung · <i>Heinrich Wiens</i> .....	72
<b>Salt and Light – Consitent Commitment in the Ministry of Service an Mission</b>	
100 Jahre Mennonitisches Hilfswerk – konsequentes Zeugnis für Jesus · <i>Christoph Landes</i> .....	74
Zum Profil freikirchlicher Diakonie · <i>Astrid Giebel</i> .....	76
Konsequentes Bekenntnis und Mission – die Bibelschule Wiedenest · <i>Hartwig Schnurr</i> .....	78
Living with Integrity in the German Democratic Republic – Baptists and Mission · <i>Reinhard Assmann</i> .....	80
Als mennonitischer Missionar in Kirgisistan · <i>Heinrich Rempel</i> .....	82
Mission Today – Learning from the Anabaptists · <i>Johannes Reimer</i> .....	84
<b>Persecuted for the Sake of Justice – Even to Martyrdom</b>	
Märtyrer – Geschichte eines Begriffs im christlichen und islamischen Verständnis · <i>Esther Schirmacher</i> .....	88
The Importance of the Mennonite Book of Martyrs · <i>Klaas-Dieter Voß</i> .....	90
John Bunyan (1628–1688) and his Pilgrim’s Progress · <i>Gyburg Beschnidt</i> .....	92
Erinnerung an täuferische Märtyrer in der Sowjetunion · <i>Johannes Dyck</i> .....	94
„Christus ist mein Leben, Sterben mein Gewinn“ – Verfolgung in Nigeria · <i>Theresa Bechtle und Lukas Buchner</i> ...	96
„Sei getreu bis in den Tod“ – Ein Ausstellungsprojekt · <i>Johannes Paulsen</i> .....	98
Gewagt! Christen in Zeiten der Friedlichen Revolution in der DDR · <i>Marie Anne Subklew-Jeutner</i> .....	100
<b>Consistent discipleship Today – Models of Alternative Lifestyles</b>	
Edna Ruth Byler and Fair Trade · <i>Gyburg Beschnidt</i> .....	102
Living a Life with Integrity – The Basisgemeinde Wulfshagenerhütten and Berlin · <i>Clemens Weber</i> .....	104
Eintreten für Gerechtigkeit – Das Netzwerk gegen Menschenhandel e.V. · <i>Christina Döring</i> .....	105
Eine Oase im Gefängnis – Iglesia Libertad, Asunción in Paraguay · <i>Leonard Janz</i> .....	106
To live consistently – in Hong Kong · <i>Jeremia Choi</i> .....	108
Konsequente Nachfolge heute – Arbeit mit geflüchteten Menschen auf Lesbos · <i>James Jakob Fehr</i> .....	109
Die Amischen und COVID-19 · <i>Gyburg Beschnidt</i> .....	110
<b>Konsequent leben – Material für die Praxis in Gemeinde und Schule</b>	
gewagt! konsequent leben – orientiert an Jesus – Bibelarbeit zu Mt 5, 1–12 · <i>Timo A. Doetsch</i> .....	112
Leben mit und für Gott in dieser Welt – Bibelarbeit zu Röm 12, 1–2 · <i>Sebastian Noss</i> .....	116
gewagt! konsequent leben – Gottesdienst-Bausteine zu Mt 5, 13–16 · <i>Nicole Witzemann</i> .....	118
Konsequent leben!? – Jugendstunden-Entwurf · <i>Volkmar Hamp</i> .....	122
Für die Schule: „Wenn der Türke kommt ...“ – Michael Sattler, Reformator und Märtyrer · <i>Ulrike Arnold</i> .....	124
Für die Schule: Was kann ein Mensch schon bewirken? – Die Geschichte von Telemachus · <i>Daniela Gäbel</i> .....	130
Konsequent singen – Lieder zur Nachfolge Jesu · <i>Dennis Thielmann</i> .....	132
Lied: Zeichen der Liebe · <i>Diethelm Strauch</i> .....	135
<b>Traces of the Anabaptists</b>	
Auf den Spuren der Täufer – in Speyer · <i>Astrid von Schlachta</i> .....	136
Auf Täufers Spuren in Bayern – Eindrücke aus lutherischer Perspektive · <i>Matthias Binder</i> .....	138
Auf den Spuren der Täufer – in Südtirol · <i>Robert Hochgruber</i> .....	140
Baptisten auf der ostfriesischen Halbinsel · <i>Gregor Helms</i> .....	142
Auf den Spuren der Märtyrer – ein Radpilgerweg in Thüringen · <i>Ulrike Arnold</i> .....	144
<b>Literaturtipps</b>	
Hartmut Wahl (Hg.): Erinnerungen von Johannes Warns · <i>Andreas Liese</i> .....	146
Klaus-Jürgen Jähn: Walter Rauschenbusch · <i>Reinhard Assmann</i> .....	147
Robert Friedmann: Design for Living · <i>Astrid von Schlachta</i> .....	148
Luther Blisset: Q. Roman · <i>Bernd Densky</i> .....	149
James A. Cates: Serpent in the Garden · <i>Astrid von Schlachta</i> .....	150
Fernando Enns (Hg.): Die Taufe und die Eingliederung in die Kirche .....	152
<b>In eigener Sache</b>	
Veranstaltungen 2022 .....	154

## Minister President of the Free State of Thuringia and President of the Federal Council of Germany in 2022

### **Bodo Ramelow**

*No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bowl; instead he puts it on the lampstand . (Matthew 5,15) As we celebrate 500 years of the Anabaptist movement this verse from the Sermon on the Mount points to Anabaptist activity in the past and present and offers it to the public at large.*

The motto for 2022 ‘Daring! Living Consistently’ stresses a characteristic aspect of Anabaptist identity. The consistent advocacy of Anabaptist positions in the 16th century was most certainly perilous. All over Europe Anabaptist churches suffered persecution and repression and thousands of adherents paid for their convictions with their life. In Germany today churches in this tradition enjoy as a matter of course freedom of religion and conscience and are protected by the state. These freedoms are firmly anchored in the present-day religious diversity in the Federal Republic.

Thuringia is one of the main areas where the Reformation took root, but it also plays a part in the history of the Anabaptists for good or ill. Six Anabaptists from Zella-Mehlis died at the stake at the monastery of Reinhardsbrunn near Gotha. This was the first time that Lutheran authorities, with the support of certain reformers, carried out the death penalty against members of this group.

Today this place is both a memorial and an expression of the reconciliation between the denominations. In the so-called ‘Luther Decade’ as preparation for the celebrations of 500 years since the Reformation a monument was set up to recall the events at that time. Every year since then on the anniversary date the victims are remembered and a permanent exhibition sheds light on the historical background. This is one of the steps on the path which led in 2010 to a first act of reconciliation between the Mennonite World Conference and the Lutheran World Federation.

This series of publications points to the current diversity of relationships between churches in the Anabaptist tradition, acknowledging also the other churches and religious groups in this context. The contributions encourage the readers to re-examine the historical legacy, by finding common ground without denying the matters that divide. Thus new possibilities emerge to enhance the interconfessional appreciation of the testimony to the Christian faith.





## General Secretary of the European Baptist Federation (until 2021)

### **Anthony Peck**

I feel honoured, on behalf of the European Baptist Federation that brings together Baptists in Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East, to greet this Celebration of the Anabaptist Movement since its beginnings in Zurich in 1525.

It continues to be a matter of scholarly debate as to just how much the Baptist movement that began in England in the early 17th century owes to the continental Anabaptists. But as one Baptist scholar put it, 'ideas have legs', and there is no doubt that Anabaptist convictions about baptism, the nature of the church as 'gathered believers', the importance of active discipleship, and the commitment to religious freedom for all in society, were taken up and developed by Baptists. In these ways Baptists can view Anabaptists as among their fore-fathers and mothers in Christ.



The early Baptists diverged from Anabaptist views on such questions as their relationship to the State, but Anabaptist commitments to non-violence and to being a 'peace church' have inspired some Baptists right up to the present time. And, indeed, in recent years many Baptists have been part of Anabaptist 'Study Groups' in different countries, seeking to interpret historic Anabaptist convictions for the contemporary context.

Turning to the theme of 'Daring to Live Consistently', we cannot help but being impressed and inspired by the 'nonconformist' convictions about the truth of the Gospel and the nature of the Church, and the refusal to compromise their beliefs, that led so many Anabaptists to be persecuted, imprisoned, and martyred for their faith. It presents all of us who seek to follow Jesus as his disciples with the challenge to live consistently according to his teaching, whatever the consequences might be. There are Baptists around the world seeking to practice this 'radical discipleship' that faces these same questions in the context of a society or government that is hostile to them.

Anabaptists have sometimes been seen as those who refuse to participate in society in terms of seeking to be part of the exercise of power to influence for good. But in post-Christendom societies, we are all being reminded of the importance of the witness of a consistent commitment to whole-life Christianity, and with it a desire to build grass-roots communities committed to change and transformation in society.

In other words, perhaps the Anabaptist way is showing us again, as it did the early church, the potency and power of speaking effectively from the margins, rather than the centre. And so we seek to be the light and salt, the agents of transformation of which Jesus spoke.

## Mennonite World Conference Europe Coordinator

### **José Arrias**



**Dear Sisters and Brothers,**

since the first quarter of 2020 our society, our lives, our churches, our Conferences, became to understand a very hard reality. We needed to adapt to new procedures and that have been along until now. But we need to thank God that after all these moments we start to see hope and opportunities around us. My prayer is that 2022 will be the year for a fresh new start for all of us.

We don't want to think about the „old days“, our expectation is for New Days! May God bless you during 2022.

Martin Hailer

## Jesus Christ: *exemplum and sacramentum* – Thomas à Kempis` *De Imitatio Christi* (*The Imitation of Christ*)



*Whoever does what my Father in heaven wants him to do is my brother, my sister, and my mother.* (Matthew 12,50) This was Jesus` reaction to the request from his mother and his brothers who wanted to speak with him. Discipleship (or imitation of Christ), doing God`s will, is of central importance. Every other matter, including one`s own family is secondary.

Such statements by Jesus formed the basis for an important movement whose core belief was that Jesus called men and women to drop everything and to follow him. He taught a new and radical ethic of discipleship, in which possessions and position were of no importance, but instead brotherhood and non-violence were paramount and men and women lived in the certainty that in Jesus God was truly present on earth. Examples for this ethic are numerous. Christian monasticism in the ancient church arose from this motive. Anthony the Great (died 356), the `Father of all Monks` as he was called, left civilization behind to withdraw into the desert, in order to enjoy uninterrupted fellowship with God. Centuries later Francis of Assisi (died 1226) broke away from the conventions of his aristocratic background, so that together with kindred spirits he could pursue his desire to become a true disciple of Christ. In this way he departed from mainstream society. Later Francis and his followers realised where their commitment was required - in prayer, in social responsibility and, what was considered scandalous at that time, in dialogue with Muslims.

But it was another person who focused attention on discipleship: Thomas à Kempis (died 1471). His best-known book was *De imitatio Christi* = *The Imitation of Christ*. Published in 1420 this book went around the world, with about 3000 issues in many languages. Indeed, it seems reasonable to suppose that *De imitatio Christi* is one of the most widely read Christian books after the Bible.

What is the theme of this world-famous book? Thomas engages an unknown person in dialogue and there are also dialogues between the `Lord` and the `servant`. We can assume that the unknown person and the `servant` can be identified as the reader and Thomas himself. Most of the dialogue is an introduction to discipleship and its consequences. First, it considers everyday matters, although sometimes these present a challenge themselves, for example renouncing vanity, by keeping silent, so as to avoid superfluous talk. In this way a peaceful attitude is attained and rash judgement on others is avoided.

Prof. Dr. Martin Hailer

Ev.-luth. Pfarrer; Professor für Systematische Theologie an der Pädagogischen Hochschule Heidelberg

But these aspects are not particularly `everyday`. Thomas describes them, in order to help his readers embrace discipleship and the imitation of Christ, which bears the promise of uninterrupted closeness to Christ. For this reason preparation for one`s own death belongs to the imitation of Christ. "Learn now to die to the world, so that you begin to live with Christ. Learn now to despise everything, so that one day you come to Christ in complete freedom."

The path to discipleship and imitation of Christ means to depart automatically from the customary practice of normality - for Thomas this always includes the `normal` Christian life. The seriousness and radicality of a disciple`s life are obvious. It is a process over a long period of time, it cannot be learned in a day. There is also a second path regarding discipleship, from external matters to the inner life. The second part of the book deals with *Exhortations to an inner life*. One example states: "So make room for Christ and forbid entry to everything else." This inward path also means one must be prepared to suffer and endure deprivation. A world which concentrates on outward matters will turn away, shaking its head in disapproval, and it is true to say that those who follow Thomas` teaching can most probably

expect suffering. But that is good - in the minor suffering of small people (the reader, Thomas himself) is reflected nothing less than Christ`s suffering. That is the imitation spoken of in *De Imitatio Christi*. The disciple of Christ is himself or herself a demonstration of Christ`s life.

Is that all? No! And this No! is important. For Thomas à Kempis writes in great detail about the beneficial presence of Christ. This enables Christ`s people to walk the path of discipleship. For the Augustinian monk this presence is experienced in the celebration of the Eucharist, the communion with Christ`s body. He describes this in much detail. Readers who are not Roman Catholics may indeed learn from these words. And even if they cannot quite accept his high esteem of the Eucharist, Christ as Thomas` example (*exemplum*) for the disciple`s life is important. Without His true presence (*sacramentum*) that cannot be achieved

Verwendete Ausgabe:

Thomas von Kempis: *Von der Nachfolge Christi*, übersetzt von Albert Plag, Stuttgart 101989, 49, 57.

### Nachfolge Christi

Nachfolge Christi ist das vergessene Thema der Reformation. Der lutherische Protestantismus überließ die Nachfolgeethik den täuferischen Gemeinden, um sich mit Confessio Augustana 16 auf eine Ordnungsethik zu beschränken. Man muss aber wissen, dass Confessio Augustana 16 nur eine Antwort auf den Artikel 6 des Schleithheimer Bekenntnisses der Täufer von 1527 ist, um das volle Spektrum der reformatorischen Diskussion in den Fragen von Nachfolge, Kriegs- und Friedensdienst zu erkennen.

Jürgen Moltmann (1981)

aus: Jürgen Moltmann (Hg.): *Nachfolge und Bergpredigt*, München 1981, 8f.



John D. Roth

## Consistent Orientation towards Jesus among the Anabaptists



Sometime in 1546, as the Schmalkalden War was raging in the Swabian territories around Augsburg, Pilgram Marpeck wrote a letter, addressed to an unknown recipient, that he titled “Von der Liebe Gottes und vom Kreuz Christi”. In this brief letter Marpeck beautifully and succinctly described the centrality of Christ within the emerging Anabaptist tradition.

On the one hand, the argument that unfolded in the missive was a critique of the interminable violence of war, especially the willingness of Europe’s Christian princes to kill each other in the name of Christ.

But most of the letter communicated a more positive

message: if humans are to know the character of God, he argued, we must look to the person of Jesus. And what we find in Jesus is love.

“Jesus Christ, our healer, is the complete, whole, eternal love of the Father,” Marpeck wrote. “In Christ love is complete.” “No creature has been found to express, teach and witness with power what love is, along with its virtues and powers, except the man Jesus, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. [...] With love he declares himself to be the true Son of God [...] and has achieved the fullest, greatest, and most exalted love in that he gives his life for his friends.”

In Jesus, Marpeck continued, humans encounter God’s desire that all of humanity be reconciled with God and, equally important, that humans be fully reconciled with each other, treating friends and enemies alike with the same love that God, through Jesus, has extended to us.

In this text, as in virtually all of Marpeck’s writing, the key to Christian faith is to be found in the mystery and the power of the Incarnation – Jesus as “the Word made flesh” (John 1:1).

Because Jesus is both fully God and fully human, followers who have been transformed by his Spirit can share Christ’s love with others in active, generous – even self-sacrificial – acts of compassion. When Anabaptists read the gospels, they saw in Jesus a reconciler and a healer. In every encounter, Jesus sought to heal that which was divided or broken or hurting. The most obvious instances were the miraculous acts of physical healing. But there are also numerous examples of Jesus healing broken minds and spirit, offering new life to those who were spiritually dead, bringing together people who were at odds with each other, restoring dignity to those living in shame or at the margins of respectable society.

Because Jesus is both fully God and fully human – the fullest revelation of God to humanity – the Anabaptists taught that all of Scripture must be interpreted through the lens of his life and teaching. Wherever a passage in the Bible seemed unclear, followers of Christ should ask “what did Jesus teach?” Thus, for example, Christ’s command to love our enemies by turning the other cheek or to repay evil with goodness or to “go the second mile” was more authoritative for Christians than texts in the Old Testament that seemed to contradict these teachings.

Finally, because Jesus is both fully God and fully human, the church that gathers in Christ’s name is more than just a social institution. Jesus promised his followers that “where two or three come together in my name, I am with you” (Matthew 18:20). The apostles and the early church went even further to speak of the church as the living Body of Christ. Christ is no longer physically present on earth, of course, but he lives on in the tangible, visible form of the gathered community that bears his name.

Marpeck once described the church as the “prolongation of the incarnation”. By this he meant that the incarnation is not an “event” that happened only once long ago. Rather, the resurrected Jesus remains alive in the world today in the regenerated lives of faithful believers.

Clearly, the presence of the Holy Spirit was essential to the church if it was to be the body of Christ. The church depended on the inward active movement of the Spirit, transforming the hearts and minds of believers. This meant that the church could not be reduced to a list of programs, a set of prescribed behaviors, or even carefully formulated doctrines. At the same time, Marpeck and other Anabaptists rejected the arguments of the Spiritualists of their day who described Jesus in abstract language as “glorified” and “transfigured”, departed to a distant heaven. No, they claimed, the Body of Christ has a visible form still today.

As in the time of Jesus, we are still called to be his disciples – to relax our grip on our resources of time, money, or our own talents, and to put loyalty to Christ above all other allegiances, including the state, the market, and even our families.

The sixteenth century world of the Anabaptists, like our own, was filled with broken, lonely, and alienated people, as well as the violence of organized war. The good news of the gospel – today as in the sixteenth century – is that Jesus has come to break down the walls of division and hostility.

In Jesus, God became one with humanity. The mission of the church is to testify to the Incarnation by inviting all those who are broken, lonely, and alienated – and to challenge nations at war with each other – into the joy of new life, nourished by the Spirit of Christ and bearing the fruit of God’s reconciliation and peace.

**Prof. Dr. John D. Roth**  
*Mennonitische Theologe; Direktor des  
 Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism  
 am Goshen College, Indiana, USA*



Bernhard Ott

## How Mennonites Orientate Themselves Today on Jesus

"If the Anabaptists had been able to express their opinion on deciding which days should be religious holidays, then we would not just have Christmas, Good Friday, Easter and Whitsun, but there would also be a Life-of-Jesus-Holiday." I once heard a Mennonite theologian say this and he summed up in a nutshell what Anabaptist tradition had always stressed: central to the Christian faith is the life of Jesus and living one's life as his disciple. Mennonites desire to live by consistently following Jesus just as the Anabaptist Hans Denck (1500–1527) said: "Nobody really knows Christ unless he lives as his disciple."

For mainstream Mennonite theology in the 20th century the so-called Mennonite vision was decisive. This was a summary of Anabaptist convictions, which were presented in 1943 by the American historian Harold S. Bender. He formulated an Anabaptist mission statement with three salient points – Discipleship, Experiential Fellowship and an Ethic of Love and Non-violence. This gave following generations of Mennonites a vision that contributed fundamentally to their sense of identity.

Although this representation of the Anabaptist legacy was later criticised as too idealistic and one-sided it has left its mark and continues to have an impact through certain texts written in the 21st century. In the Mennonite World Conference (2006) the second point in the Confession that was adopted reads as follows:

"Jesus is the Son of God. Through His life and teaching, His death on the cross and His resurrection, He shows us how we can truly be His faithful disciples. He has redeemed the world and promised eternal life."

Jesus' life and teaching are of primary importance here and point to faithful discipleship.

Stuart Murray in his book *Naked Anabaptist* makes the statement pointedly: "The Anabaptist movement is absolutely centred on Jesus and is closely connected with the call to be His disciple." Stuart Murray is part of the British Anabaptist Network. This network confirms the core conviction:

"Jesus is our example, teacher, friend, redeemer and Lord. He is the source of our life, the central point of reference for our faith and our way of life, for how we view the church and for how we are involved in society. We are determined to follow Jesus and to worship Him."

**Bernhard Ott**

*Theologe und Missionswissenschaftler;  
Dozent und zeitweise Leiter der Bibelschule  
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Closely related to this determined unswerving orientation on Jesus, the Anabaptist tradition concentrates especially on the Sermon on the Mount, which offers the ethical guidelines for discipleship within the fellowship. The virtues outlined in the Beatitudes, the radical rejection of revenge and loving one's enemies (Matthew 5) and the inner peace founded on a deep trust in God (Matthew 6) ultimately point to discipleship as a Christian lifestyle. (Matthew 7)

Possible one-sidedness and endangerment through this consequent orientation on Jesus have often been recognised and admonished both within and outside the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. Here are some examples: to focus on a way of life that merely concentrates on Jesus' life and teaching can lead to an incomplete understanding of Jesus' work of redemption. Consequent orientation on Jesus' revolutionary death and resurrection to save humanity is reduced to an ethical programme, when he is only viewed as a teacher and a role model.

In this context Steve Dintamann spoke critically about the 'spiritual poverty' of this Anabaptist principle. This comprehension of discipleship focused on ethics lacks spiritual roots that enable men and women to reshape their lives. At this juncture the question arises if the 'Jesus-programme' has replaced the 'Jesus-relationship' as the main issue. In other words is not the Sermon on the Mount being taught to a certain extent without reference to the 'Preacher on the Mount'?

In my own preaching and teaching I attempt to place this consequential orientation on Jesus in the larger context of the Biblical account. One of my examples is to connect the Sermon on the Mount with Jesus' final words in Matthew 28, 16–20. I do not wish to reduce the consequential orientation on Jesus just to the life and words of Jesus before Easter. Through the fellowship of Jesus' disciples after Easter one comes to understand how life can be reshaped by getting to know the risen Lord. Faithful orientation on Jesus starts for that very reason with a personal relationship to Jesus and by joining the fellowship of his disciples by baptism. In this fellowship everything revolves around "keeping everything that Jesus taught". Those who live faithfully as they follow Jesus, are guaranteed the promise of his presence. (Matthew 28, 16–20)

Perhaps it would not be a bad idea to plan a 'Life-of-Jesus-Holiday' into the liturgical church year. Even better would be to celebrate every Sunday as a 'Life-of-Jesus-Day', which would deepen and strengthen our relationship to him as we listen to his words and worship him. The orientation on Jesus in the church services can challenge and empower us to live our lives as true disciples of Jesus.

Simon Werner

## Faithful Discipleship – A Baptist Perspective



Not very long ago young Christians wore a bracelet with the four letters WWJD – What Would Jesus Do? Through this bracelet close to the hand the question was asked in a way that was visible to all: what are the consequences of the Christian faith for practical daily living?

Let us ask the question more fundamentally and not just individualised. How should the faith of the Christian church be realistically demonstrated in proclaiming the Gospel of encouragement and its requirements?

As in the tradition of the revivalist movement discipleship is a characteristic distinguishing feature of Baptists. The more seriously one takes and the better one understands discipleship, the more it corresponds to the invitation and the task appointed by the Master.

Bible movement, church movement, holiness movement, missionary movement – this is how Edwin Brandt in his article *Baptistische Identität* sees the basic characteristics of the German Baptists. Discipleship can be divided into four categories: 1. Discipleship as a conscious seeking after God addressing us in his word. 2. Discipleship as an active part of a committed community. 3. Discipleship as an ethical challenge for one's own life. 4. Discipleship as a personal witness to the world.

### 1. Discipleship as a Conscious Seeking after God Addressing us in His Word

'The Bible is God's Word spoken by people' – that is how the German Baptist Statement of Faith (also valid for other German-speaking countries) describes the function of the Bible. Baptists expect God to speak through Jesus Christ, who himself is 'God's word to us personally', and who, through 'the preaching of the Gospel by men and women for men and women' makes the word of God 'His Word for us'.

Our congregationalist structure of believers as a fellowship with each other automatically challenges us to seek together the true content of our faith and the direction in which the church should be moving. Neither aim relies on ordained ministries, as discipleship is first and foremost the desire to hear God speaking through his word.

**Simon Werner**  
Pastor; Bildungsreferent im  
Gemeindejugendwerk des BEFG

### 2. Discipleship as an Active Part of a Committed Community

As the fellowship of a Church Federation and churches Baptists hear the word of God and are fully aware that its interpretation and proper comprehension requires discussion from the believers. In this way the fellowship can be defined as a fellowship of hearers together seeking understanding.

But it is also a living community. Here, people experience acceptance and empowerment for their daily life as well as inspiration and a perspective to develop their own lives, which they personally orient on Jesus.

### 3. Discipleship as an Ethical Challenge for One's Own Life

A life which is orientated on Jesus must be prepared to be judged by Jesus' preaching and action as they are related to a person's individual situation. This makes ethically sound decisions indispensable.

One major example in this area of discipleship from the Baptist tradition is the insistence on freedom of religion for everybody, including for those of other religions. This demand arose in various situations as one sought to orientate on Christ. Julius Köbner's Declaration in 1848 is the prime example of this approach in the German tradition.

### 4. Discipleship as a Personal Witness to the World

Living and acting with integrity is one form of witness and thus makes discipleship a form of proclamation of the Gospel. As disciples show their reliance on Jesus, this leads them to certain ethical consequences and in this way they can help others to gain some insight into the Kingdom of God. This kind of witness is possibly the sort of Christian preaching that is closest to real life.

### Discipleship Today and the Challenges it Presents

Discipleship, both in form and content, is expected of Christians. How Biblical texts are read, coupled with close Christian fellowship, has led to the emergence of definite patterns over the course of time; these are being increasingly called into question. Certain forms of personal spirituality no longer appear appropriate, but also traditional forms of church services and other aspects of fellowship are being queried. Creativity from the church itself is necessary to avoid form without content and to enable new and creative expressions of discipleship to be experienced.

It seems that a positive relationship between the Biblical message and the questions society is asking today is becoming increasingly difficult and ultimately a church standing up for justice as Jesus' taught, faces the accusation of bowing to the 'mainstream'. One surmises that the traditional attitude to justice, as many Biblical texts were originally understood, has since been lost as a benchmark. Discipleship based on a serious understanding and reception of the Biblical texts and a readiness to read them honestly, in conjunction with a genuine openness to the questions society is asking nowadays, must be an absolute priority.

<sup>1</sup> Edwin Brandt: *Baptistische Identität. Überlegungen zum Weg und Auftrag der Gemeinden im Bund Evangelisch-Freikirchlicher Gemeinden in Deutschland, Theologisches Gespräch 1* (1989), 20–25.

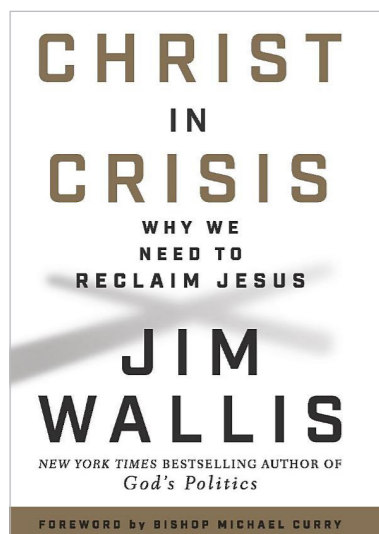
<sup>2</sup> *Rechenschaft vom Glauben*, hg. vom Bund Evangelisch-Freikirchlicher Gemeinden in Deutschland 1977/78, Neufassung 2019, Teil 1.6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ebd.*

<sup>4</sup> Julius Köbners Forderung nach Religionsfreiheit für alle Menschen in seinem Manifest des freien Urchristentums an das deutsche Volk (1848), in: *Religionsfreiheit. Festschrift zum 200. Geburtstag von Julius Köbner*, Berlin 2006, 135.



## Reclaiming Jesus – A Confession of Faith in a Time of Crisis



*Leaders from various US churches released this joint video message in May 2018. In the style of a creed, they opposed a dangerous nationalist ideology and encouraged conversion to follow Jesus. In 2020 they renewed their commitment with a call to prayer, fasting and repentance. Signatories include Bishop Michael B. Curry (Episcopal Church), Pastor Amos C. Brown (Baptist civil rights activist) and the authors Richard Rohr, Ron Sider and Jim Wallis, who are also well-known in Germany.*

We are living through perilous and polarizing times as a nation, with a dangerous crisis of moral and political leadership at the highest levels of our government and in our churches. We believe the soul of the nation and the integrity of faith are now at stake.

It is time to be followers of Jesus before anything else – nationality, political party, race, ethnicity, gender, geography. Our identity in Christ precedes every other identity.

When politics undermines our theology, we must examine that politics. The church's role is to change the world through the life and love of Jesus Christ. The government's role is to serve the common good by protecting justice and peace. When that role is undermined by political leadership, faith leaders must stand up and speak out. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state." We do so here with humility, prayer, and a deep dependency on the grace and Holy Spirit of God.

Jesus is Lord. That is our foundational confession. If Jesus is Lord, then Caesar was not – nor any other political ruler since. Jesus Christ, and the kingdom of God he announced, is the Christian's first loyalty. We pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). Our faith is personal but never private, meant not only for heaven but for this earth.

What does our loyalty to Christ, as disciples, require at this moment in our history? We believe it is time to renew our theology of public discipleship and witness. We pray that we, as followers of Jesus, will find the depth of faith to match the danger of our political crisis.

The present crisis calls us to go deeper – deeper into our relationship to God; into our relationships with each other, especially across racial, ethnic, and national lines; and into our relationships with the most vulnerable, who are at greatest risk.

Shortened version –  
full statement and resources available at  
[www.ReclaimingJesus.org](http://www.ReclaimingJesus.org)

### Buchhinweis:

► Jim Wallis: *Christ in Crisis. Why We Need to Reclaim Jesus*, San Francisco 2019  
ISBN: 9780062914767

We need to recover the power of confessing our faith. Lament, repent, and then repair. If Jesus is Lord, there is always space for grace. We believe it is time to speak and to act in faith and conscience, not because of politics, but because

we are disciples of Jesus Christ. He is the light in our darkness.

**I. WE BELIEVE** each human being is made in God's image and likeness. Racial bigotry is a brutal denial of the image of God in some of the children of God.

**THEREFORE, WE REJECT** the resurgence of white nationalism and racism in our nation. Any doctrines or political strategies that use racist resentments, fears, or language must be named as public sin. Racial bigotry must be antithetical for those belonging to the body of Christ.

**II. WE BELIEVE** we are one body. In Christ, there is to be no oppression based on race, gender, identity, or class. Otherwise we have failed in our vocation to the world – to proclaim and live the reconciling gospel of Christ.

**THEREFORE, WE REJECT** misogyny, the mistreatment, violent abuse, sexual harassment, and assault of women being further revealed in our culture and politics, including in our churches, and the oppression of any other child of God.

**III. WE BELIEVE** how we treat the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the stranger, the sick, and the prisoner is how we treat Christ himself. If our gospel is not "good news to the poor," it is not the gospel of Jesus Christ (Luke 4:18).

**THEREFORE, WE REJECT** the language and policies of political leaders who would debase and abandon the most vulnerable children of God. We strongly deplore the growing attacks on immigrants and refugees; we won't accept the neglect of the well-being of low-income families and children.

**IV. WE BELIEVE** that truth is morally central to our personal and public lives. Jesus promises, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).

**THEREFORE, WE REJECT** the practice and pattern of lying that is invading our political and civil life. The normalization of lying presents a profound moral danger to the fabric of society. In the face of lies that bring darkness, Jesus is our truth and our light.

**V. WE BELIEVE** that Christ's way of leadership is servanthood, not domination. We support democracy, not because we believe in human perfection, but because we do not.

**THEREFORE, WE REJECT** any moves toward autocratic political leadership and authoritarian rule. We believe authoritarian political leadership is a theological danger threatening democracy and the common good – and we will resist it.

**VI. WE BELIEVE** Jesus when he tells us to go into all nations making disciples. Our churches and our nations are part of an international community whose interests always surpass national boundaries. We in turn should love and serve the world and all its inhabitants rather than to seek first narrow nationalistic prerogatives.

**THEREFORE, WE REJECT** "America first" as a theological heresy for followers of Christ. While we share a patriotic love for our country, we reject xenophobic or ethnic nationalism that places one nation over others as a political goal.

Astrid von Schlachta  
in discussion with Carsten Claussen and Fernando Enns  
**The Sermon on the Mount from the Point of View  
of Baptists and Mennonites**



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**A:** On a scale of one to ten, from irrelevant to very important, where would you put the Sermon on the Mount?

**C:** Ten! Clearly! It is one of the central aspects of the Christian message. And probably the most important and best-known text in the New Testament. It has had an impact beyond Christian circles.

**F:** I say of course eleven! In our tradition it belongs to the most important texts and not just of those in the New Testament, but in general. It is the hermeneutical key to what we find in the Hebrew Bible. It is also a major guideline for the ethics of discipleship. It gives us the basis to confess with our lives that we are dealing as Christians with a truth that belongs deep in our lives and in our fellowship together. It also demonstrates how we encounter nature itself, more than any doctrines, theological statements or traditional creeds could do.

**A:** What aspects of the Sermon on the Mount are of special importance to Baptists?

**C:** When Baptists talk about the Sermon on the Mount they point very quickly to Martin Luther King. He taught and practised non-violence, peaceful resistance and loving one's enemy. He claimed he learned this from the Sermon on the Mount, although not all Baptists share this opinion. His voice is an important element in our Baptist history, past and present. When I enter the building of the theological seminary in Elstal, I see texts and pictures of Martin Luther King. He is a genuine part of our Baptist identity.

**C:** What does the Sermon on the Mount mean for Mennonites today?

**F:** Martin Luther King should really have been a Mennonite! Like the Baptists, I think he was very important. He lived out the Biblical message in an impressive way and died for that. Mennonites refer directly to the Sermon on the Mount when their identity as a church of peace is the issue, because the ethos of non-violence is essential to us. I prefer to speak of 'freedom from violence' rather than 'non-violence', since that means being free from the rationality of a spiral of violence. Freedom from violence is much more than refusing military service or refusing to go to war. It means being actively involved and committed to righteousness. Righteousness is a central term in the Sermon on the Mount: Unless your righteousness exceeds... It remains a challenge for us Mennonites. We cannot say we have always understood and practised this. [...]



**A:** Your opinion as a Baptist?

**C:** Righteousness is important to us as well. The Sermon on the Mount is important for Jesus' ethical teaching, but not the only source. Another aspect is found with St Paul - justification. It is not always easy to accept grace personally. So we struggle with the Sermon's radicality and tend to say, "That's the way it should be", when we hear the word 'grace', and add, "It does not really depend on us. It is ultimately a gift of Christ." Otherwise we can scarcely bear the Sermon on the Mount. We fail too. So righteousness also involves being prepared to accept the radical words of the Sermon on the Mount and facing our own failings honestly. This is why Christ died.

**A:** To linger with the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount. What do we do with the other things in it - adultery, not laying up for ourselves treasure on earth, serving God or mammon...? Is that no longer relevant today, because the world we live in is different?

**C:** The issues of adultery and murder are essentially questions of righteousness. If loving one's enemy is valid, then killing somebody is always wrong. Regarding swearing, the implication is: "My words are not uttered independently from God, but He is the standard that my words are judged by." And the question of forgiveness is at least as important as loving my enemy. The Sermon is indeed much more. In the middle is a prayer, that Christians in the whole world pray - the Lord's Prayer. They ask Him to bring His Kingdom to fulfilment and therefore reject the statement: "I can do it myself." So they confess that God's Kingdom is His gift. We do what we can for His Kingdom, we welcome it, but it is and remains a gift.

**A:** A direct question - What do Baptists say to the refusal of Mennonites to swear oaths?

**C:** In some situations, like in a court of justice, Baptists sometimes use alternative forms allowed by the legislators, but it is not an essential aspect of our confession.

**A:** How do the Mennonites approach those ethical matters that do not seem so appropriate nowadays?

**F:** The demands in the Sermon on the Mount regarding swearing oaths and adultery demonstrate that it is a matter of ethics and not of moralising and dogmatic statements. Jesus does not present us with a catalogue of laws, but says: Blessed are you... That is an incredible promise, rooted in Christ of course. When Jesus says: Do not commit adultery, or swear, he breaks traditional stereotypes. He desires a better, a different quality of righteousness. We Mennonites are looking for a new understanding of righteousness, that poses the question, "What do you need to be made



Astrid von Schlachta

in discussion with Carsten Claussen and Fernando Enns

## The Sermon on the Mount from the Point of View of Baptists and Mennonites

whole?" If justification or grace is the source of my being, then what Jesus says follows automatically. The question remains; what is righteous here and now and what do I need to be made whole? Similarly with divorce. He exaggerates and radicalises the demands of the law to the extreme and so he can point people in that situation to the question, what is necessary for them to be made whole? There may be cases where separation is best for the couple, if that gives them the chance to be made whole again. We try to accept fully the radical words of Jesus, but not to read them legalistically.

**C:** In the verses following the Beatitudes we read: You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. We are not told we must become that, but it is imputed to us, it is what we are. For that reason I add the concept of freedom to that of righteousness. For freedom Christ has made us free is the conclusion of St Paul in Galatians 5, 1. Freedom is where my personal activity is no longer needed in many respects. Ernst Lange once called the Ten Commandments 'The ten great freedoms'. That is spot on.

In a Musical I once took part in, words from the Sermon on the Mount were quoted: 'You do not need to lie, to kill, to steal. You can remain married and you do not need to be jealous.' That is freedom. I do not have to envy others, because I receive enough myself. There is enough there, so I can share with others. That means for me freedom through righteousness, based on grace.

**A:** When I consider our world and our churches as well, I cannot avoid asking if we as people are not per se in opposition to this high standard of the Sermon on the Mount, embedded in grace and unmerited righteousness. What does a Mennonite say to this?

**F:** We're simply human beings. The Sermon on the Mount has received many different interpretations in the attempt to understand this tension. So-called interim ethics believes that humanity at that time had the impression that the end of the world was near. There was also the theory that the Sermon was meant for an elite group, such as monks or priests. All these theories are attempts to bridge the 'horrible divide' between the highest standards and the life of simple, sinful people. This divide does exist but we must not allow it to mitigate the radical teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is not blind. He is fully aware of the wickedness, the jealousy and the selfishness of the human race. Is he then just an unrealistic dreamer? Not at all! The Sermon on the Mount does not begin with demands, but with You are... Jesus does refer to our selfishness and jealousy and says we should consider the lilies of the field in all their beauty. The Sermon on the Mount has no intention of crushing us with moral demands. On the contrary, even the person in the

church who gets on my nerves is loved by God and lives from his grace. So it comforts us in conflicts and gives us orientation. It is more promise than claim.

**A:** And how do Baptists view the 'horrible divide' between claim and reality?

**C:** I refuse to devalue the radical thinking in the Sermon on the Mount. Otherwise I would misunderstand its claim to freedom and righteousness. Of course it is primarily grace, gospel, enabling us to do things or leave them alone. But what are the alternatives? Certainly not to preach jealousy or death, nor to wage war. The past decades have proved that war does not create peace, as Afghanistan and Iraq sadly demonstrate. Surely there were alternatives that would set people free, even in small steps: we only recognise this when we grasp the radical teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. Martin Luther King said: "We must begin to turn mankind away from the long and desolate night of violence. May it not be the case that the new man the world needs is the non-violent man?" The Sermon wants to make us uneasy by asking us personally its critical questions.

**A:** Another question. Can the Sermon on the Mount be used for politics? And besides; how can one explain to a modern, secularised person that it is important for him or her, too?

**F:** What my colleague says is important. Whatever problems one might have with the Sermon on the Mount it is essential to consider the alternatives. What we call 'political realism' we see every evening on the news. And suddenly there are people who do things completely differently. They live according to a different ethos and quickly receive the label 'crazy'! But they offer orientation for politics, too, when they try to live according to the Sermon on the Mount. That changes the world.

We can no longer afford to fabricate pictures of enemies. That leads to a blinkered outlook on the world. We end up in a cul-de-sac when we do not take the Sermon on the Mount seriously, which itself is the strongest argument for the Sermon. We must analyse the



political situation with head and heart and then examine the Sermon on the Mount through these spectacles. What does that mean for Afghanistan or for Mali? Or for the world we share? After the climate summit in Glasgow the younger generation screamed: "What you promise is not enough at all!" I hear the Sermon on the Mount here: Let what you say be Yes, Yes, No, No!". Such people live according to the ethic of the Sermon, although they would probably not realise that. They understand that lies cannot help us further, but instead lead to more violence; first of all violence against nature, and eventually it will cause our demise too.

Besides; the Sermon on the Mount is not just for believers, but for our world, too. So it is irrelevant whether it is applicable to politics. It is politics and nothing else. None of it is independent of politics. When a person believes in Jesus Christ the matter is clear, because the Sermon is the model for a new reality.

Astrid von Schlachta

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## The Sermon on the Mount from the Point of View of Baptists and Mennonites

**A:** The question remains. Is not all of this merely a beautiful utopia that can never be attained in our world?

**F:** It is indeed utopian. I do not wish to be ruled by people who themselves no longer have any utopia and are governed by only a single point of view and whose aim is profit. The Sermon on the Mount is quite different. Its purpose is life. If one does not realise what God has already done, then endless violence and injustice will ensue. That is a 'ticket to hell', as we have observed in Afghanistan.

**A:** And the Baptist perspective on utopia and its political viability?

**C:** My counter-question: Should politics take place apart from the Sermon on the Mount? My clear reply: No! Is there any hope that the world can have a good future without the Gospel, without Jesus Christ? I find that unimaginable. Baptists have always stressed missionary activity. The heart of the matter is that the world needs Jesus Christ. It needs the Gospel. It needs the Sermon on the Mount. It needs grace, freedom, justice. The world has gone completely off the rails. It is no longer difficult to convince people nowadays that the world will perish. The climate change is a prime example. Now is the time for us to say, there is something that points beyond our world. God is there and holds the world in his hands and he will not let it just explode. This hope motivates us and is something I want to further as well. Politics with the Sermon on the Mount? Of course. And with the whole Gospel.

**F:** Baptists were always more involved and highly motivated regarding mission. Mennonites were more cautious. They tried to put into practice the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount, because they were convinced; By their fruits you shall know them. We must witness to the Gospel with our lives, so that people ask us why rather than going everywhere and preaching with many words. That is the difference. We can unite in saying that people, the world, the universe need Jesus Christ. Without him we are lost. But when I speak with believers of another religion, I confess this is my ethic and am clear this is the way I talk in matters of faith.

I do not need to tell the young people demonstrating in Glasgow they need to accept Jesus Christ and learn my faith-language. On the contrary, I recognise in their actions what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. They are a thorn in the flesh, a voice that admonishes, a loud cry for justice – they are not content with apparent inevitabilities. I wish others, who are not Christians, would say: 'That is what we are hoping for and what we dream of!'

**C:** As a Baptist I would contend that we read all of Matthew's Gospel up to the end, that is, we must include Matthew 28 and the Great Commission. Perhaps we can nevertheless agree that even those who believe in the Gospel can fail and this is where grace is so important. More and more we live in a world without grace, where people define themselves according to their achievements, or even worse, according to what they have not achieved. We have to tell people that they are not just their achievements or failures, but that they are beloved children of God. This is what leads Baptists to the Great Commission. In this way the Sermon on the Mount is not set aside.

**F:** Looking critically at missionary history I hesitate to give my assent to your words. Through my studies in post-colonial history I have learnt that, when the European powers divided up the world and colonised it, the Great Commission immediately became more important. Up till then it had played no role in western European exegesis. For us Mennonites, living the Gospel is of greater significance. This does involve high moral standards of course, and has to do with the Yes! Yes! No! No! of the Sermon on the Mount. Yes, it is possible that you can live like this and you also practice it among yourselves in your communities.

You don't have to travel all over the world and preach extensively. Ultimately, people will look at you and state: "Yes, that is a city on a hill, the light of the world." Or they will say nothing.

**A:** But mission is living authentically and pointing others to those things that are important to me.

**F:** Mennonites must not be arrogant towards Baptists. Historically we emerged from the Anabaptists. They were brutally persecuted. This led to them living as the Quiet Ones in the Country (Die Stillen im Lande). They were the friends of Gerhard Tersteegen (1697–1769) who wanted to live a life of quiet seclusion, worship, meditation and contemplation. This group was not permitted to appear in public in the 17th and 18th

centuries. They retreated into inner emigration. They thought it better to keep still and keep their mouths shut, if they wanted to be tolerated. They were grateful for that, so they avoided mission work. They did not enter the missionary movement until much later. The main reasons for this fact are therefore historical not theological.

**C:** Please do not misunderstand me. I am not claiming as a Baptist that I really love my enemies and everybody else should do the same. Loving my enemies is an enormous challenge to me and I often fail. But



there is no alternative and I want to invite others to join me on this path.

At this point I wish to reflect critically on the history of missions. Obviously mission must never be a form of neocolonialism. Although I do fall short of the freedom offered by the Sermon on the Mount, that does not mean that I infer I must be silent and be resigned to the fact that it does not work for me and so I can forget it. That would be to devalue the Sermon on the Mount. [...]



Astrid von Schlachta  
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**The Sermon on the Mount from the Point of View  
of Baptists and Mennonites**

**F:** A further thought. The Sermon on the Mount contains the words; Do not judge, so you are not judged. We spoke a moment ago about final judgement. Are we making the matter too simple, when we say, everything has been done for you, so now you are justified? Now you can live in freedom. Is that really the better righteousness? We must include healed relationships in the final judgement, that means righteousness that has been restored. What do we really need ultimately? I can well imagine that the demands to love one's enemies and to renounce violence belong to the final judgement. Through this restored righteousness God can heal those things that we consider incurable.

**C:** I regard the command to refrain from judging as a warning against the common tendency to paint pictures of hostile enemies. When I judge a person, I declare them in the worst case to be my enemy and make myself their enemy. I do not want to fall into this trap.

**A:** Right. That is the intention of the Sermon on the Mount and our message to the world. Where are Baptists the light of the world and salt of the earth?

**C:** That is a message for me and I want to hear it; "Yes, you are the salt of the earth." With others I want to put some salt in the soup, not oversalt it, nor create a salt desert, but introduce the voice of the Sermon on the Mount into the conversations around me. I hope to be salt and light here.

**A:** And Mennonites – where are they light of the world and salt of the earth?

**F:** When this question is put to me I always direct attention to Mennonite work for peace and reconciliation. Recently I wrote a review of a book by Michael Sharp. He worked for the German Mennonite Peace Committee, then went to the Democratic Republic of Congo to aid the UNO reconciliation work there. He attempted to mediate between the different groups. When he was

34 years old he was abducted and murdered. He lived his life dedicated to the conviction that the Sermon on the Mount is true. That was something precious, but made him vulnerable. Not an easy life, but one lived in integrity and sincerity, combined with his deep trust in the work for peace. He put the words of the Sermon on the Mount to the test. Even when we take risks, just like the Baptist Martin Luther King, the fact is that ultimately this truth is victorious beyond death itself. Mennonites will not cease searching for alternative paths – how can peace win through and beyond that, how can our lives as human beings and in harmony with nature be successful? How does the Christian faith guide and direct us in this quest? It impresses me that, although our church is small, Mennonites can work effectively here.

**A:** One final question: Why haven't the Baptists joined the Mennonites in the course of history? One may surmise it is because of the Sermon on the Mount.

**F:** Ask the question the other way round. Why have the Mennonites not joined the Baptists, as in fact happened in parts of Russia? Two free churches, both with a congregational form of church government and believers' baptism; where are the differences? There are some. Baptists think the theory of a just war can occasionally be called upon, but Mennonites reject that and appeal to the Sermon on the Mount. But such an answer is an over-simplification. In the dialogue between the Baptist World Alliance and the Mennonite World Conference in the '80s the differences named were cited as the questions of violence and mission.

**C:** Historically speaking Baptists did not pursue peace with enough zeal. And the relationship between mission and peace was not properly understood. Those are genuine differences in our history and we Baptists can learn from Mennonites there. I have met Mennonites that make me think that they have learned over generations the true nature of peace. I would love our churches to increasingly discover that. But in our differences we can complement and enrich each other.



### Glaube und Werke

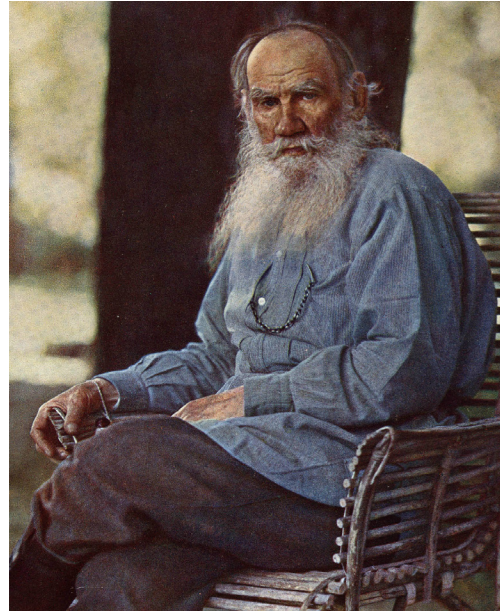
„Denn der rechte, wahrhaftige Glaube, der vor Gott gilt, kann nicht müßig stehen; er muss seine Früchte bringen und seine Art beweisen. Er wirkt beständig in der Liebe; er tritt freiwillig in die Gerechtigkeit; er tötet Fleisch und Blut; er kreuzigt Lüste und Begierden; erfreut sich am Kreuz Christi; erneuert und führt zur Wiedergeburt, macht lebendig, freimütig, friedlich in Jesus Christus.“

Menno Simons (1539)  
Werke, 263

(shortened version of the German original)

Lew N. Tolstoi

## Talking Oath



Leo Tolstoj in Jasnaja Poljana, 1908, das erste Farbfotoporträt in Russland (Ausschnitt) (Sergej Prokudin-Gorski)

*Jesus said: But I say to you, do not swear at all. (Matthew 5:34)*

Longing to find some explanation of a precept that puzzled me by its simplicity, I consulted the commentaries on the gospel. This once they helped me.

Commentators say [...] that this precept given to us by Christ is not always obligatory, and that in no case does it refer to the oath of allegiance to the existing powers, which every citizen is obliged to take. They choose out texts from Holy Scripture, not with the purpose of confirming the direct meaning of Christ's precept, but in order to prove that it is possible and even necessary to leave it unfulfilled. [...]

And when I saw the meaning and the true object of the interpretation, it grew clear to me that Christ's law against swearing was not as insignificant and easy of fulfillment as I had thought before I had come to regard the 'oath of allegiance' as one of those that are forbidden by Christ.

And I said to myself, 'Doesn't it mean that the oath, which is so carefully fenced round by the Church commentaries, is also forbidden? Don't Christ's words oppose the very oath without which the division of men into separate governments would be an impossibility – the oath without which a military class would be impossible?' Soldiers are those who act by violence and they call themselves 'sworn men' (присяга). Had I asked the grenadier I mentioned in a preceding chapter how he solved the problem of the inconsistency between the gospel and the military code, he would have answered that he had taken an oath, i.e., sworn upon the gospel. All the military men I ever asked answered thus. Oaths are so essential in upholding the awful evils brought about by war and violence that in France, where Christ's doctrine is entirely set aside, the oath of allegiance remains in full force. Indeed, had Christ not said, 'Do not swear at all,' He ought to have said so. He came to destroy evil, and how great is the evil brought about in the world by the taking of oaths! [...]

He says, 'I say to you, do not swear at all.' The saying is as clear, as simple, and as indubitable as the words, 'do not judge, do not condemn,' and it gives as little scope for false interpretation, the less so because the words 'Let your communication be yes, yes, or no, no; for whatever is more than these comes from evil,' are added.

Lew Nikolajewitsch Tolstoj (1828–1910)  
Russischer Schriftsteller

*Tolstoj: What I Believe, translated by Constantine Popoff (1886)*



Erich Geldbach

## Civil Disobedience

When the Baptist World Alliance was founded in London in 1905 the delegates elected the English Baptist pastor Dr John Clifford (1823–1923) as president. He was the decisive influence in setting up The National Free Church Council and was involved in the public opposition to the draft for a new Education Act. It was proposed to finance the Anglican and Catholic private schools entirely from taxes and only clergymen of these churches would be permitted to teach religion in state schools. Clifford called the first proposal clericalization and ‘the death of democratic control in education’, and the second proposal ‘state endorsement of church affairs’. Because no church may be privileged or disadvantaged, protest was necessary, even after the draft had become law in 1902.

Clifford was outraged because free church teachers were not allowed to hold any senior position in state schools. To hold such a position the requirement was that the teacher had to be an Anglican. He felt that this was ‘bribery’ to induce teachers from the free churches to join the Church of England. In 1903 the ‘National Movement for Passive Resistance’ was founded under Clifford’s leadership. The protest was in the form of a partial boycott of the taxes intended for the schooling sector. The authorities reacted by sending some protesters to prison or by seizing their assets.

Clifford trained young men in his church in London to become pastors. His ‘Clifford boys’, as they proudly called themselves, were active all over the world. Joseph J. Doke (1861–1913) was one of them and became the minister of the Central Baptist Church in Johannesburg. Soon after arriving there he visited Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948). The lawyer Gandhi had been sent to South Africa by his Indian firm in 1893 to carry out some legal work. There he recognised that the Indians who were unskilled labourers on the plantations in South Africa were being brutally exploited. He remained in South Africa to fight against this exploitation. Doke recognised in Gandhi’s involvement a parallel to Clifford’s concept of ‘passive resistance’. He understood the common bond between religion and politics and as a Christian felt called to help the Indian in his fight.

Originally Gandhi also used the term ‘passive resistance’ for his own actions but the word ‘passive’ troubled him, because resistance is something intensely active. So he coined the new word ‘satyagraha’. His explanation: ‘*Truth (satya) includes love; and steadfastness (agraha) generates strength, so is a synonym for that. Non-violence is therefore born of truth and love. Truth, love, steadfastness, strength and non-violence characterise this principle of resistance.*’ The struggle lasted until 1914, when a law was passed that brought freedom from unjust regulations to the Indian resistance fighters.

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Gandhi was able to leave South Africa soon afterwards and continue the struggle against the colonial powers in India. He was successful through *Satyagraha*. Clifford would never have imagined that his concept of ‘passive resistance’ would be one contribution to the history of the world, and that Martin Luther King (1929–1968) would also take up this line of thought in his non-violent action against the segregation laws in the USA.

Doke was Gandhi’s first biographer. He called him a ‘dreamer’, which reveals a striking parallel to MLK. They both dreamt of a more just world and equality for all men and women without discrimination and also advocated non-violence to achieve this. They both lost their lives through violence from their enemies. MLK desired that Afro-Americans should enjoy the same rights as all other American citizens, as proclaimed in the Constitution. Unjust laws, treating white and black citizens differently because of the colour of their skin, needed to be repealed. Civil disobedience seeks to demonstrate that people are being punished due to unjust laws, and therefore to expose the absurdity of unjust laws.

### A Summary: Civil Disobedience ...

1. ... is a conscious, non-violent and public infringement of laws that are considered unjust.
2. ... is an action by a group of like-minded people, in order to effect changes.
3. ... is willing to accept ‘legal’ penalties for the sake of the intended changes.
4. ... presupposes a scientific analysis of society and the current legal standards.
5. ... pursues the objective of changing laws and/or legal standards in ways that will improve society and thus life in general in society.
6. ... presupposes a pluralistic, free society, which permits the formation of civil associations and pressure groups.
7. ... must be understood as an expression of moral and ethical principles, corresponding to the politics of a government.
8. ... represents the desire and the possibility to change or modify the consensus to date and pave the way for a new approach.
9. ... points society to new possibilities, that so far have not been considered, or have been propagated by interest groups to their own advantage, but which disadvantage society as a whole.
10. ... has achieved its aim when a new consensus is reached, which is manifested in new laws.
11. ... targets the ‘informed conscience’ (James Luther Adams) and is for that reason indispensable for society’s progress, serving as it does both peace and justice.
12. ... can result from reasoning and objectives, that are derived from religious traditions.

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Bernhard Ott

## Discipleship Today – Conscientious Objection

Strasbourg 1984. At the 11th Assembly of the Mennonite World Conference Ronald Sider gave a lecture, which was later called 'prophetic'.

He stated:

*All too often have we drifted into complacent pacifism that simply ignores injustice and war, as long as 'our lads' don't have to fight themselves.*

He criticised conscientious objection, which merely tries to *protect our purity and safety and refuses to act in a responsible fashion when confronted with violence and war.*

And he asks the provocative question:

*Are we courageous enough to leave the back benches of a complacent pacifism, in order to join the front lines of a non-violent politics of peace?*

This lecture is in my opinion a milestone in the discussion about conscientious objection with a Christian motivation. In the centuries before, conscientious objection was a subject that was controversially debated in Anabaptist-Mennonite circles. For many it was something like a test for authentic Christian discipleship and a kind of trademark of genuine Mennonites. For others this opinion was a hypocritical alibi, so that one could evade responsibility in society and in politics.

Sider gave the discussion a new direction. His thesis – that all conscientious objectors must be prepared for Jesus' sake to share risks as great as those faced by soldiers when they go to war – forced Mennonites to sit up and take notice. Conscientious objectors could no longer claim withdrawal from the world meant living on an internal church 'island'. We were challenged to understand that the call for peace as taught by Jesus was more comprehensive than had been realised until then and demanded its price. The *Christian Peacemaker Teams* were the direct result of Sider's lecture.

Ron Sider was not against conscientious objection on principle, but he destroyed the myth that to object was the litmus test for true discipleship and of genuine Mennonite faith. After his lecture one could no longer claim that to walk in Jesus' footsteps could be reduced to a single act (by men), despite the fact that conscientious objection would not lose its basic meaning as a symbolic and prophetic act.

Perhaps it could be put this way: loving one's enemy and witnessing for peace cannot be achieved by conscientious objection alone, but conscientious objection belongs on the agenda of a peace movement that is orientated on Jesus. Working for peace must be rooted primarily in saying Yes! to righteousness and thus to peace itself. That includes acting non-violently in every area of life. Conscientious objection in itself also implies that saying No! is not rejected out of hand but is still a possibility.



### The "Thomashöfer Resolution" (1949)

The Mennonites from all over Germany who gathered on the Thomashof from 17th to 19th July 1949 grappled in earnest discussion with the principle of non-resistance as promulgated in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and in Anabaptist and Mennonite tradition.

Their awareness of the magnitude of the heritage of their fathers grew through this assembly as well as the recognition that testifying to the biblical truth of non-resistance also meant renewing their commitment to this principle.

Besides, having in mind the indescribable suffering and demonic effects of the last wars they viewed the evaluation of peace and its practical implementation in every life-situation as a special task of Mennonites, that should be promoted and

campaigns for in every area of life – in private, in church and in the state.

They see it as the duty of the fellowship to help members who refuse to serve with weapons and give them every possible assistance to enable them to fulfil their responsibility without using weapons.

The final decision must be made by the person involved as he or she follows their conscience according to the word of God.

We present this declaration as information for the churches and ask them in Christian solidarity to give their opinion on it.

**Bernhard Ott**

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Bienenberg*

*Ron(ald) J. Sider (Jg. 1939), mennonitischer  
Theologe und Sozialaktivist in den USA, gilt  
als führender Vertreter der links-evangelikalen  
Bewegung*



Corinna Schmidt

## Social Welfare Work as an Expression of a Life of Integrity

### Christ the Servant - A Role Model , Not Just in What He Did

Christ presents Himself as a servant in the Gospels: *The Son of Man is come to serve.* (Mark 10, 45) Jesus repeatedly affirms he is there to serve people (Luke 22, 27; John 13, 4–5): He exhorts his disciples: *If any of you desires to be great, let him serve others.* (Greek; *diakonein*) *And whoever wants to be first, must be the servant of all.* (Mark 10, 43–44) When I read the Gospels with the eyes of a deacon I can understand that the word ‘serve’ in the Gospels relates in truth to a history of service. Jesus serves people by his teaching and praying, by listening and healing. As a Jew the basis of his works is the Torah, the Halacha (the juridical side of Jewish tradition) and his relationship to God. Jesus often withdraws for prayer. To listen to God’s word and to act correspondingly are in Jewish thought essentially the same thing. To listen to God’s word for the present to make it relevant to daily life.

### What Does Living a Life of Integrity Really Mean?

The Samaritan man (Luke 10, 29–37) is willing to bear the consequences, that is to say he acts consistently, when he takes care of the wounded man and provides for him afterwards. He reacts in three steps: taking a closer look, touching him and taking action. His fundamental inner ethical attitude is to view every person as his neighbour. It may appear simple and logical, but that does not happen as a matter of course. The parable teaches that clearly, because beforehand two religious men walk past the injured person. In other words, every situation demands a decision to act and also to ask myself how much pain and suffering can I endure? What are my personal limitations? Where am I taking things too lightly, because I think I am merely a small cog in the big wheel of world-history and therefore cannot change anything anyway? Such questions can also find answers in open discussion with others, like my fellow-Christians in a house-meeting, colleagues and friends. For me it is also important to expect God to be at work in every challenge and exigency. There is also the service of prayer. Prayer humbly draws me closer to God, teaching me to trust that God is at work. When I stay close to God my life maintains a healthy balance, because my actions are embodied in God’s actions. Even if I feel the burden is too great for me to bear, I can nevertheless maintain a fundamental attitude of empathy. To live with integrity means I must accept my own limitations, live in fellowship with my fellow-Christians and trust in God’s activity.

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### Reaching One`s Aims – Taking Responsibility

Social work varies widely; for example drug addiction, homelessness, violence and sexual abuse. In a course on social work organised by the Federation of Evangelical Free Churches (German: Vereinigung Evangelischer Freikirchen) all the topics had the same sub-title: *Reaching one`s Aims*. Every personal and social hardship is considered and participants are encouraged to take responsibility and act accordingly. That happens for example when we house refugees. Not only our humanity prescribes that but also the recognition that we also are not innocent, because of our continuing supply of weapons that enables wars to carry on – Syria is just one example among others.

In the Biblical story about ‘ruling and serving’ Jesus’ words are spoken in a social context. According to Mark’s gospel proper listening to the word of God means never tiring of supporting marginalised people, despite the pressure exerted by the Roman authorities. When Jesus asks the critical question; ‘How will you ever understand these parables?’, he is not doubting the comprehension of his disciples, but rather their strength and courage to listen to God’s word and to live their life according to God’s will. The fact is that men and women in Mark’s gospel have to battle hard to hear God’s word and to put it into practice. At the same time it is comforting that those who stumble could become mothers and fathers in the faith.

Thank heavens we do not live under pressure and persecution in our country. In the last two years I have learnt what it means in a pandemic to serve others, to be active in social issues. In the present situation of our society, in this kairós, we belong side by side with those who were isolated in the pandemic, those who were in retirement homes, those with mental disorders or those who suffer from the aftermath of the pandemic. In the Immanuel and Albertine clinics the managing staff from the various sections met weekly to discuss how best to support staff and patients. From the start the person responsible for ethical questions also took part. Those whose responsibility is counselling and in co-operation with psychiatric expertise suggested offering therapeutic assistance to the staff. We still consider how it is possible to make suitable decisions for each individual, when they need protection but are also isolated. In one case I encouraged the relations to request ethical help: the relations, nursing staff, managerial staff and counsellors discussed together, how to find the right way to prevent the person becoming even more isolated.

It is imperative for us to serve those who need our prayer, our compassion and our voice. Let us consider how Jesus Christ viewed his service. His life shows how we can serve our fellow men and women.

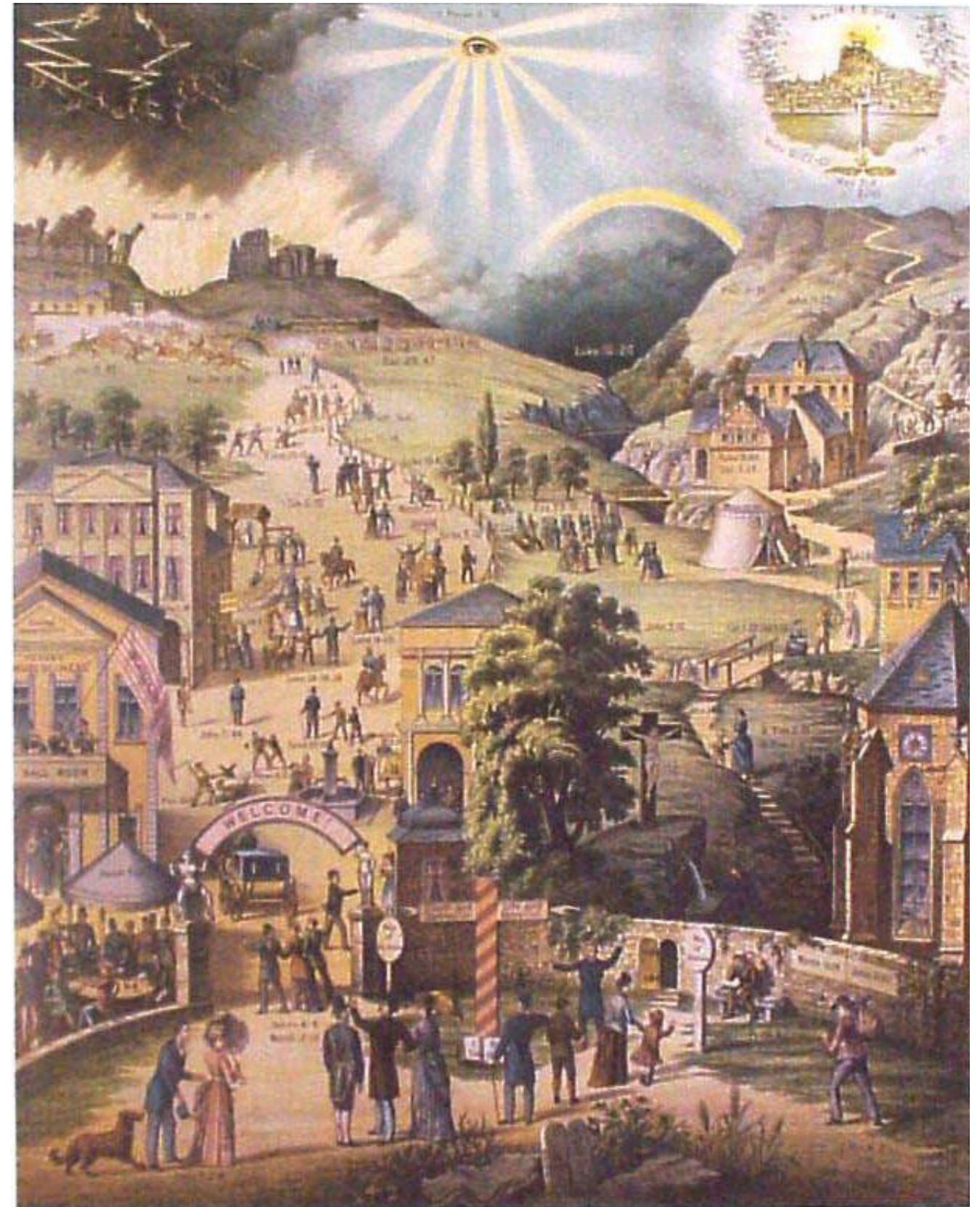
<sup>1</sup> Brad H. Young: *The Parables. Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation*, Peabody, Mass. 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Siehe: „Vom Hören und Tun der Tora“, in: Luise Schottroff: *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, Gütersloh 2005, 89–105.



## The Devotional Picture „The Broad and the Narrow Path“

*The lithograph was designed by Charlotte Reihlen (1805–1868). She had a Pietist background and was the wife of a manufacturer in Stuttgart. The reasons for the picture were her close brush with death during the Austro-Prussian War and her husband's stroke. The lithographer Conrad Schacher (1831–1870) formed the image according to her ideas. It was published in 1867. It was also given an important place in a number of Baptist and Mennonite homes and meeting-places. The Baptist magazine DIE GEMEINDE 09/2021 asked its readers to send in personal memories of this picture. The German version of this publication contains excerpts from some of the testimonies.*



Zusammenstellung: Bernd Densky

*Der breite und der schmale Weg, 1866, von Charlotte Reihlen (Idee) und Paul Beckmann (Ausführung), nach Matthäus 7, 13 (Fassung 2008)*



Astrid von Schlachta

## ... regarding the form and the opportunity of the period. The Value of Standards in Anabaptist History

Innsbruck 1545: The tanner Michael Zeller and his wife were accused of sheltering harbouring Anabaptists and of having much sympathy with the Anabaptist faith. Under interrogation they denied this vehemently, but with superficially audacious explanations. She claimed she scolded and cursed and her husband was drunk with wine. Anabaptists do none of this, so they could not be Anabaptists – sadly of no avail. One of their servants confirmed they really had harboured Anabaptists, so they both landed in prison.

The case of the Zellers sheds light on how Anabaptists were viewed. Although her excuse appears to be foolhardy, it seems to be all the more legitimate when considered more closely, for clearly the Anabaptists really did stand out through their conduct. Three Hutterite missionaries who found shelter in the inn called ‘Hasenhaus’ in the Kärntnerstrasse in Vienna had a similar experience. When they refused to take part in the drinking game ‘Zuprosten’, they faced the hostility of all the intoxicated people present. One thing the early Anabaptists stressed: *You cannot find God in a hostelry, nor in a dance-hall or gaming-place, in ‘arrogance’, in usury, in scolding or cursing, in blasphemy and unbelief.*

So now we know what Anabaptists were like! But ... were they really like that? Who can decide? Church regulations, confession of faith, letters and accountability of faith together deliver standards, demonstrating what an Anabaptist should be like. Values that should make churches identifiable and helped them to be recognised as such; that made them different from those with ‘fleshly vices, false teaching, disorderly life-styles and similar sins, whether in words or deeds’. These words are found in the church Constitution of Leonhard Scharnschlager from 1542. Understanding ‘Anabaptist existence’ in this way demands strict church discipline or ‘brotherly sanctions’ as the sources reveal. These included excommunication, as found in Matthew 18, 15–18, for those who did not live in correspondence with these standards.

The Christian-Anabaptist church often had phases in the past, when it viewed itself as saints ‘having neither blemish nor wrinkle’, clearly distinguishable from the world. What were the criteria applied? They had to be ‘Biblical’. But that still leaves some amount of scope. Standards are in continual flux and never reach 100% certainty. ‘Criminality is normal’, say sociologists. And the aforementioned Leonard Scharnschlager stated in the church Constitution of 1540 quoted above: ‘Everything subsists through its ordinances’ but ‘there are changes in its form and circumstances’ as time goes by, yet always ‘for the better’. So what is ‘right’ and what is ‘wrong’? How are general lamentations in daily church life about ‘sinfulness’ and ‘false beliefs’ shown to be valid at different times and under differing conditions?

Let us jump over 300 years. At an assembly of the Palatinate Mennonites in Friedelsheim in 1826 the Mennonite preachers spoke realistically: *‘We have decided to reconsider the guiding principles of Christian-Mennonite life, because in the last decade church discipline has no longer been practised in some churches and only inadequately in others, and since things change and take on new forms in the course of time, logically leading to new insights here and there, this also includes such matters as church sanctions.’* Especially the question of marriage between partners from different confessions led to differences of opinion by the preachers as well as ‘taking part in public festivity’ because that lowers moral standards. This included ‘games like playing cards and similar activities’. Failing to take part in services for no ‘compelling reason’ was also on the list of things deserving sanction. Things continued to change. In 1867 a gathering of Mennonite-Amish preachers in Offenthal (near Frankfurt) agreed to accept marriages between partners of different confessions.

But the Anabaptist life had another side to it – how it was perceived by outsiders. The sources report that Anabaptists lived ‘with integrity and were authentic’. Some authorities came under intense pressure, when they recognised that it was this very authenticity that won them many supporters. An assessment by expert scholars and theologians from some Swiss Cantons in the 1580s demanded that the real causes for the existence of the Anabaptists should be tackled and not the symptoms: the increasing immorality and profligacy in every stratum of society and this included the clergy. They recommended stricter disciplining of the clergy, in order to enhance the authenticity of their (Reformed) Church.

So what can be learned from reflecting on church discipline as practised by Mennonites? Firstly, by regulating most aspects of life, churches emerged that were recognisable and identifiable and whose ‘system’ was clearly distinguishable from the ‘world’. Secondly, history shows that it is normal that norms change. Churches adapt continually to new prevailing circumstances, whether they want to or not. Norms are never valid indefinitely. Thirdly, church discipline brings the question of power into the open. Who defines norms and decides what is allowed and what is forbidden? And what motives and motivation lead to the practice of church discipline? Such questions are just as relevant today.



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Andreas Liese

## Departing from Evil - Separation in the Teaching of the Brethren Movement

When the former Catholic Edward Cronin moved to Dublin he wanted to take part in the service of Holy Communion in a congregational church without being a member there; but this was refused. Because he considered himself to be part of the body of Christ, he rejected denominational barriers. He also spoke against the 'one-man-preacher-system'. A while later he celebrated holy communion in his house with other similarly-minded Christians. Further groups grew up which had similar convictions and in 1830 these joined together and shared communion together.

Around 1832 Christians from various denominational backgrounds started similar meetings in Plymouth too. 'True Christians' were enjoined to leave all existing religious groups – including the Church of England and Christian fellowships like the Baptists – and simply be members of the body of Christ and partake together in the Lord's Supper. Outsiders referred to these Christians as *Plymouth Brethren*. But from the very start there was a great dilemma: on the one hand, there was the desire to live out the unity of the body of Christ irrespective of the denominational background of the individual Christians – clearly an ecumenical point of view – but on the other hand, there was the principle of separation from all religious organisations, because such organisations destroyed the unity of the Church. Such was the thinking of the *Brethren*. Right from the beginning these two ideals were in conflict with each other. Whereas one of the initiators of the nascent Brethren movement, A.N. Groves, wrote that he would 'rather show forbearance with all their false ideas than separate himself from the good in their approach', J.N. Darby published a book with the title *Separation from Evil, God's Principle of Unity*. In this work 'Evil' means the various churches with their own specific rules and regulations. These different positions continued to play a role even after the Brethren movement split up between the 'Open' and 'Exclusive' Brethren. The Exclusive Brethren in England became increasingly radical and as a fellowship also rejected every other Brethren group. The Open Brethren stressed more strongly the ecumenical aspect and allowed other 'true' Christians to share in the Lord's Supper, without regard to their denominational background.

These new ecclesiological insights led to a changed attitude towards the world. Because the church was understood to be a 'heavenly factor', it was deemed necessary to live according to 'heavenly principles' in this world, which was seen as the opposite of God's will. In Plymouth especially, the new fellowship had many affluent and well-educated adherents. These people began, for example, to sell their jewellery and to furnish their houses in a spartan fashion. They also gave up visiting the theatre. This tendency



to separatism increased especially within the Exclusive Brethren in Great Britain. They were transformed into a completely isolated and introverted fellowship.

Around 1850 groups were founded in many places in Germany. These also shared the concept of 'separation from human systems'. Although the Exclusive Brethren (for example Carl Brockhaus) stressed and still stress that all true Christians belong to the one body of Christ and so this unity does exist, Christians from other Christian fellowships are rarely allowed to take part in the Lord's Supper, since they are associated with 'church evils' (women pastors, no church discipline etc.). If these people were allowed to take part one would identify oneself with evil. For this reason co-operation with other churches is rejected. The Open Brethren in Germany (now called *Free Assemblies*; German; *Freie Brüderkreise*) saw and still see the matter in a different way.

As 'citizens of heaven' the Exclusive Brethren held strictly to certain principles of behaviour. Notably, participation in cultural activities was spurned, whereas economic success was well-regarded. Today, the Exclusive Brethren still strive for a way of life that stands apart. Involvement in politics, in contrast to a career in business, is not approved of, neither are social contacts with non-Christians.

Strict church discipline is in general still practised. For example, widows and widowers over the age of retirement who cohabit, though unmarried, are excluded from the Lord's Supper.

The concept of separation is of course nothing new. It was practised by the Anabaptists in the 16th

century. The principle of 'the two worlds' was formulated thus: Christians live in the middle of a sinful world, so must separate themselves from it. The Schleithem Confession made this clear. Not only must a Christian be separated from the sinful activities in the world, but a rigorous church discipline was also imperative. And one departed from the corrupt church'. At a later period the Mennonites isolated themselves from the world around them. This stance can also be observed here in Germany among some Russian-German Mennonite Brethren. Here particularly, outer appearance plays an important role. For example the insistence that females wear dresses not trousers and cover their heads.

Behind all these concepts of separation is the intention, as expressed in Romans 12, 2, that Christians must not be *conformed to the world*; they also point to the fact that Christianity no longer corresponds to the situation in the early Christian community. This demonstrates how the church has degenerated in the course of time. For this reason it is necessary to leave the church (II Corinthians 6, 17). Pursuing these ideas often leads to legalism and to an anti-ecumenical stance.

Nevertheless, the early Brethren movement poses the significant question of how to reconcile the objective of obtaining Christian unity and the search for the proper structure in the universal church.

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Reinhard Assmann

## Living with Integrity in the German Democratic Republic – Baptists and Mission

17th June 1953. In Bitterfeld, which was a centre of the national uprising in the GDR, many people were arrested. Two young men from the Baptist church were also imprisoned, but not because of their political opposition. They had distributed evangelistic leaflets that had been printed in the west.

For Baptists in the GDR, the key to understanding their conduct in the Socialist society is mission. 150 years ago the founding father Johann Gerhard Oncken coined the buzz phrase: 'Every Baptist a missionary!' And in the Third Reich, and even during the war itself, the Baptists confirmed: 'We continue to be missionaries.' In October 1945 the first resolution of the leadership of the Baptist Federation (East) was to call a missionary for refugees and during the first National Conference (East) in 1963 – after the construction of the wall – the director Herbert Weist stated: 'The essential feature of all we do and in our service must be mission and evangelising.'

After the end of the GDR Hans-Günther Sachse, who was responsible for mission during the 1980s, summed up the activity of the Federation of Evangelical Free Churches (Baptist, Brethren and Elim churches, abbreviated BEFG) in the GDR as follows: 'The church that took on the missionary task with the greatest zeal.'

Baptists understood Jesus' words about salt and light as a call to mission – being sent to the world, that means evangelising. Only the gospel changes lives and in that way it changes the social and political environment. As long as the state does not restrict the freedom to practise mission, Baptists show the loyalty required. *Being a Jew to the Jews* – conformity, in order to win some (1 Corinthians 9, 20ff.), mission instead of politics. The clearly stated No! of the church of Christ towards the state and its political leadership only then becomes an issue, when it is forbidden to preach the gospel: this was the defence offered by the Federation director Paul Schmidt in 1946 in explaining the 'non-political' stance of the Baptist Federation in the National-Socialist period.

The early years of the GDR were characterised by conflicts between the Socialist state and the church. The 'young church' was especially under observation from the ruling party, the SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany). In those years numerous youth groups of the BEFG cycled through the GDR and evangelised in the churches. For the most part these young Baptists were not harassed.

Although many churches were internally strait-laced and conservative at that time, they were exceptionally open and creative in developing new ideas for mission: Team-mission, Motorcycle-mission, Tent-mission, Buttonhole-mission, New-Territory-mission, Media-mission and later GDR-

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International Youth Gathering for Peace in Potsdam (1983). Young people from the Oranienburg Baptist Church mingle with many members of the Free German Youth in their blue shirts.

wide mission programmes, seminars for missionary work, guest conferences. Young people got involved in missionary house-groups, tea rooms, missionary youth retreats. They even instigated missionary activities at the large FDJ-festivals (Freie Deutsche Jugend, the youth organisation of the SED).

It is amazing that this disparate missionary activity in the GDR scarcely provoked governmental repression. There were a few prison sentences: the evangelist Helmut Samjeske was imprisoned at the beginning of the 1950s and died in prison. In his sermons, however, he had spoken forthrightly against the current politics. In 1961 the young people of the church in Brandenburg had been involved in an illegal hijacking of a ship while on a retreat, but only received a suspended sentence because it could not be proved that they had acted in hostility to the Republic. But such incidents remained exceptions.

Even the Stasi (State Security Department) had only little interest in Baptist missionary work. There was a centralised operative procedure for observing smuggling of literature and Bibles from the west, but Hans-Günther Sachse's many church conferences received very little attention, although they often spoke about political matters in plain text, and the missionary youth weeks, which included street-evangelisation, even led to the conversion of SED-comrades and to them leaving the Party.

To the increasing secularisation in society and to the growing opposition of the SED towards the churches, Baptists reacted with mission. They did not turn to political opposition nor did they defend their privileges. Despite their critical attitude towards the ruling ideology they did not challenge the system as such. That their success was very limited in the course of time is shown by the decrease in membership numbers in Baptist churches. Not just Baptists were affected, but other churches as well. Among Baptists, this was less the result of state interference but had more to do with inner-church discord, which tied up too many resources.

The first attempts to extend the understanding of mission materialised in the 1970s. The new confession of faith (German: *Rechenschaft vom Glauben*) was based on the theology of the Kingdom of God and positioned the church in and for the world. The geopolitical developments that escalated in the 1980s, the increasingly closer ecumenical relationships, the Conciliar Process, which culminated in international ecumenical conferences, all this broadened appreciably the thinking in the BEFG: it was realised that, as well as mission, our task in the world also involves our responsibility for the world. This responsibility belongs inseparably to the task, because the Gospel has a further dimension beyond that of reaching individual people.

After the GDR had ceased to exist the Federation leadership formulated as follows:

*We have always stressed that the heart of Jesus' message was that each individual should turn to God in personal repentance. This characterised our faith and our witness. But we are nevertheless painfully aware that in practising our faith we scarcely had any effect on changing and reforming the structures of our world. The Biblical concepts of repentance, peace and covenant did not receive the importance they deserved.*

*[...] We are grateful to hear the unambiguous call to repent. It speaks to us as individuals, to our churches and to our Church Federation. We recognise it as a prophetic word of God to us.*

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Johannes Reimer

## Mission Today – Learning from the Anabaptists

The Anabaptists at the beginning viewed the life of a Christian in every respect as discipleship, that is following Christ. Hans Denck's words ring in our ears: nobody can follow Christ, unless his whole life is dedicated to Him. A disciple is always a missionary and evangelist at the same time. Mission is discipleship which transforms thinking and living. That, no less, is what the worldwide church is discovering today. Ecumenical and evangelical churches both refer to discipleship which transforms in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the essence of Christian mission.

### What do we mean by that?

**Firstly:** Mission as an aspect of discipleship sees Christ as the true benchmark: as the New Testament states and as the risen Jesus sends out His disciples into the world in these words: As the father has sent me, so I send you. (John 20, 21) This verse contains both the content and the structure of mission. Jesus Christ lived his life as a life of mission, and in this way He becomes the model for Christian mission and its guiding principle.

**Secondly:** The orientation on Jesus defines the very heart of Christian mission. He was sent to reconcile the world to God (II Corinthians, 5, 18). He brought people peace (Ephesians 2, 14). The consequence is that His disciples are his messengers of reconciliation (II Corinthians 5, 19f.). They are called to be peacemakers (Matthew 5, 9). For these reasons Christian mission must be understood as a mission of peace and a mission of reconciliation. This includes peace with God, peace among men and women and peace with the creation.

**Thirdly:** To lay stress on discipleship as mission means that Christian mission is intensely for the here and now. Mission is proclamation that touches our lifestyle and our very existence. The message has to be experienced before it can be brought to others. So it always remains quite down to earth. The Gospel can be studied by observing Christians, just as it was seen in Jesus (John 1, 1.14). Christians are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5, 13–15), that we might become the righteousness of God (II Corinthians 5, 21). When this direct relationship to life is missing, then Christian mission loses its significance.

**Fourthly:** Discipleship indicates a holistic approach in this context. When not a single area of life can be removed from discipleship then each and every one of them belongs to Christian mission. Social involvement and welfare work belong to Christian mission in the same way as evangelistic preaching. To pit one sphere of Christian service against another is no longer possible. Ultimately, a life moulded by the Gospel, loving one's neighbour and caring for those in need is just as much proclamation as verbally preaching the Gospel.

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**Fifthly:** Mission in the context of discipleship is ever a specific call to follow Christ and has its justification in building up the fellowship of believers, that is, the church.

Christian mission today is orientated on Jesus, works for peace and reconciliation exemplifies the Gospel, preaches the message in word and deed, gathers the disciples together into a new people – the fellowship of believers – that has been called out of the world in order to bear responsibility for the world (Matthew 16, 18).

### What does that mean for our missionary practice?

It gives us cause to ask these questions:

- ▶ Our specific mission must be prepared to ask if what we do really corresponds to Jesus' example. Would Jesus do what we do, if he were living among us now? Is this how He would think, live and say?
- ▶ Our specific mission must be tested according to the measure in which it promotes peace and reconciliation. Do those whom our mission work reaches find the way to God, to each other and to a new responsibility to creation? Are our churches places where people learn reconciliation? Do people come to us, when they seek outside help in their lives and relationships?
- ▶ Our specific mission must be judged according to the way we live. Does our life correspond to the claim of the Gospel? Is our life lived in devotion to God and in purity? Is it honest? Can our fellow human-beings discern in us the values of the Gospel? And which values?
- ▶ Our specific mission must be holistic if it claims to correspond to mission in Jesus' sense. Is it that? Is the Gospel our life? And do we live it out? Do we preach the Gospel in word and deed? And at what points is that visible?



- ▶ Our specific mission will inevitably call men and women to discipleship and bring them to follow Jesus. Can we ascertain that people come to faith in Jesus through our missionary work? Does this direct people to God, those who are near us and who we serve and to whom we bring the Gospel. Does the church of Jesus grow through our mission?

Such questions and similar ones are meant to help us to view mission as viewed and practised by the best of our Anabaptist predecessors. Indeed, many of them paid for their mission with their own lives. They were 'martyrs' (witnesses), exactly how Jesus promised His disciples before Pentecost (Acts 1, 8). Is Christian mission that important to us?

<sup>1</sup> Hans Denck: Schriften, Bd. 2, 45, Gütersloh 1955

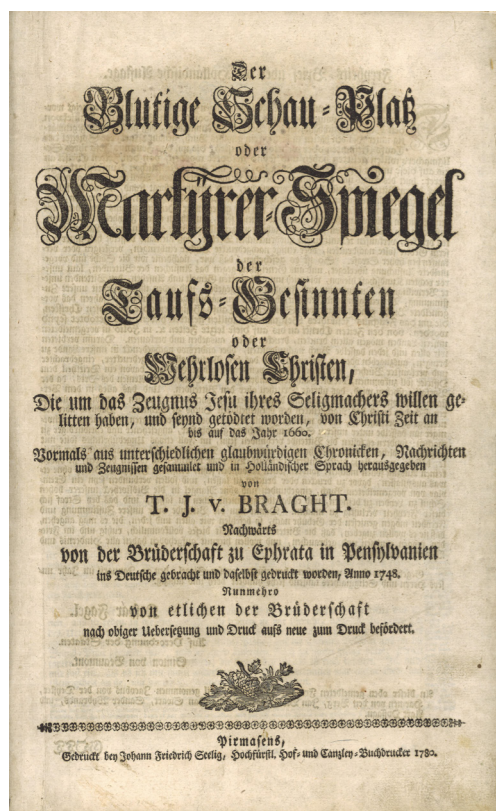


Klaas-Dieter Voß

## The Importance of the Mennonite Book of Martyrs

Antje Brons, née Cremer ten Doornkaat (1810-1902), later became well-known for her work on the church history of the Anabaptists. While she was at school she was ridiculed by her classmates because of her Mennonite background; but she defended herself with short quotes from the Bible and so made a stand for her faith. Soon afterwards she discovered in the bookcase of her foster uncle Sicco Doeden Cremer (1776-1864) a brown leather tome with numerous copperplate engravings depicting gruesome tortures and executions: men and women who had committed no crimes were being tortured and killed simply because of their faith. Antje Brons was able to identify with what she saw, as she viewed herself as the victim of religious persecution.

This book was written by Thieleman Jansz (1625-1664) and its second edition appeared posthumously in 1685: *Het bloedig toneel, of Martelaars Spiegel der Doops-Gesinde of Weerlose Christenen* (= *The Bloody Scene or Book of Martyrs of the Anabaptists, those Peaceful Christians*). The copperplate engravings were made by the Dutch illustrator Jan Luyken (1649-1712). He conjured up scenes from the texts of violence and human suffering, but also from the daily plight of believers in their unsympathetic society. This turned those viewing the pictures into eyewitnesses of the events. In the first part of the book martyrs of early Christianity up to 1500 are dealt with, whereas in the second part the names of 803 Anabaptists and Mennonites who were martyred in the 16th and 17th centuries are identified. These were victims of persecution initiated by Christian authorities. This was the fate of the Augustinian monk Johannes van der Esschen (c. 1485-1523), who was burnt at the stake in Brussels. Hendrik Vos (died 1523) was also burnt at the stake. Luther was deeply shocked by these events and as a reaction wrote the hymn *Ein neues Lied wir heben an ...* (*We raise a new song to God ...*). He put the martyrdom of the two monks into a larger context and interpreted it as the beginning of a new age. They were by no means the only martyrs. The books of martyrs compiled by the Lutheran Ludwig Rabus (1523-1592) and the Calvinists John Foxe (1517-1587) and Jean Crispin (about 1520-1572) report on other martyrs who died for their faith.



Märtyrerspiegel

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The main sufferers from the persecution were the Anabaptists in the Netherlands. Between 1531 and 1597 about 1500 of them were martyred. At the start of the 1560s a small book, which was probably printed in Emden, was published. The title was *Offer der Heeren* and it dealt with 22 individual martyrs. In 1563 the *Liedtboecxken ..* was appended, which recalled a further 131 martyrs in its 72 pages. The original text did not talk about



other people, as is usual in books of martyrs, but the martyrs themselves speak through their testimonies, like letters, wills, confessions of faith, or by the records of their interrogations and disputations, all of which are quoted word for word. The content of faith is in the foreground; individual circumstances and details of the persons involved are consciously avoided. What was written had to steer clear of endangering anyone in a time of persecution. Putting it at its simplest, the basic principles of Mennonite Anabaptists are formulated as a confession of faith. The intended readership is first and foremost people from outside the church. It aims to demonstrate the injustice of persecution. But it also speaks to persecuted Mennonites, who should recognise their suffering in persecution as a sign of discipleship and so be comforted.

*Het Offer des Heeren* served as the basis for Hans de Ries' (1553-1638) *Groot Offerboek* or *Historie der Martelaren ofte waerachtighe Getuygen Jesus Christi*, which was first published in 1615. The execution of his friend Hans Bret in 1577 in Antwerp may well have been one of the reasons why de Ries collected reports of the suffering of martyrs and published them together with the contents of the older text. When the Mennonite preacher Thieleman Jansz from Dordrecht wanted to publish the second edition of *Groot Offerboek* unchanged in 1631,

he decided to revise it anew and added numerous stories of martyrs that he knew of. However, his approach was not strictly scholarly, because the book was intended to edify. Nevertheless, Professor Samuel Cramer (1842-1913) of Amsterdam was later able to demonstrate the reliability of the reports. Both the first edition of 1660 and the posthumously published edition were printed in folio format and had a certain representative character due to their cover designs. It was mostly Mennonites who bought these books, as they had their roots in Dutch society and possessed the financial means to purchase such expensive publications. The book of martyrs was the second most important book after the Bible for generations of Mennonites, who considered it to be a continuation of the Acts of the Apostles.



Gyburg Beschnidt

## John Bunyan (1628–1688) and his Pilgrim's Progress



John Bunyan (C.R.L. Fletcher)

In her first Christmas Message on TV in 1957 Queen Elizabeth II quoted John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. As Head of the Anglican Church she could have quoted a verse from the Bible. But possibly that might have offended people from the Commonwealth who follow a different religion. So instead she used a classic work of English literature. In 1938, 250 years after Bunyan's death, it had already been printed in 1,300 editions and could be found in many English-speaking households and had been translated into about 200 languages.

Even in German there are expressions that come from this book: Valley of the Shadow of Death (*Tal des Todes*), Vanity Fair (*Markt der Eitelkeiten*), Celestial City (*die Himmlische Stadt*). Bunyan enriched his own language with words and expressions, as did Martin Luther for the German language. He also exercised great influence over the development of English literature, since his book formed a bridge between allegories and romances in the Middle Ages and the modern English novel. Bunyan uses ideas from the Bible, as can be observed in his use of words. He uses them in his adventure and coming-of-age novel, which even today is able to enthral children and young people, though this in general involves some modernisation of the language. The story of the lives of Christian and his wife (in the second volume) grip the reader, who is able to recognise in them his own questions and problems. After all, who is truly unable to see in *Obstinate*, *Hypocrite* and *Timorous* people he or she himself or herself has met. And who would not like to be a friend of *Faithful*, *Charity* or *Grace* (who appears in part 2)?

The places and people in the book came to life in his mind while Bunyan was imprisoned in Bedford. The book (Part 1) appeared in February 1678 to help his family, but also as an encouragement for his church, which he still led from the prison cell. Bunyan's crime was that he did not obey the law which was from the time of Queen Elizabeth I. This only allowed ministers of the Anglican Church to preach. He was not willing to deny his calling and for that reason he was forced to remain in prison for twelve years and later for a further few months. Nobody could have imagined that a bestseller would emerge which later became the most-read book after the Bible – until Joanne K. Rowling appeared! But Bunyan's vivid descriptions of the countryside and the encounters depicted clearly demonstrate that he meticulously observed the world around him and could tell stories in a beguiling manner.

Bunyan was a tinker (a person who repairs pots and pans). He went from village to village and repaired nearly everything that could be reused. He only had two or three years at school and most of what he had learned there had been forgotten by the time he got married. The young couple possessed

very little, but his wife had two devotional books that she had inherited from her father and she read them to him. When he took up contact with a Baptist church his whole life changed. He became enthusiastic about learning to read himself. He had time in prison to read the Bible and Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* (Protestant martyrs!) over and over again. Such was his literary education. However, in Bedford, a town situated quite a distance between the university cities of Oxford and Cambridge, this was of little consequence. It impressed people more that Bunyan never gave up his convictions, even in prison. He tried to make a living to support his family (by then he had six children) by making bootlaces. A number of people sensed that he had a heavy heart because of his oldest daughter, who was blind. She brought him his food every day. The small church in Bedford also supported his family for that very reason.

Bunyan was very aware of the fact that education is of special importance to a non-conformist church. Among the 58 books he wrote there is also a book for children. He would have been delighted to know that one of his poems became a school hymn, that Anglicans also enjoy singing. At that time it was not usual to sing hymns in services except for Psalms. This poem from *Pilgrim's Progress* inspired the Welsh composer Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958) to make a church hymn out of it.



Bunyan im Gefängnis

*Who would true valour see,  
let him come hither;  
one here will constant be,  
come wind, come weather.  
There's no discouragement  
shall make him once relent  
his first avowed intent  
to be a pilgrim.*

*Whoso beset him round  
with dismal stories,  
do but themselves confound;  
his strength the more is.  
No lion can him fright,  
he'll with a giant fight,  
but he will have a right  
to be a pilgrim.*

*Hobgoblin nor foul fiend  
can daunt his spirit:  
he knows he at the end  
shall life inherit.  
Then fancies fly away,  
he'll fear not what men say,  
he'll labour night and day  
to be a pilgrim.*

John Bunyan

► Fernsehansprache  
Königin Elisabeth II (1957):



Dr. Gyburg Beschnidt  
Pastorin im BEFG



Gyburg Beschmidt

## Edna Ruth Byler and Fair Trade



Edna Ruth Byler

In our daily lives we are familiar with Ethno-Style and Fair Trade. But the name of Edna Ruth Byler is scarcely known. Even Wikipedia has no entry, but her name does appear in articles about Fair Trade.

Edna Ruth Byler (1904–1976) travelled with her husband to Puerto Rico in 1946 and was prepared to face the challenge presented by the poverty of the women there. Due to her Mennonite background she had great respect for the manual labour of such people and her own childhood in Kansas in the USA taught her the beauty of simple and practical objects in our daily lives. Her husband Joseph N. Byler taught at the Mennonite Hesston College and had worked in France during the Second World War for the relief agency of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). She therefore had experience of humanitarian projects.

The path Byler chose differed from the usual ones.

She sought to secure the livelihood of artists and artisans by marketing their products. She put in her car's boot everything she could get in it and sold the items to her family, her friends and in the church. She used every opportunity to inform other areas of the world about the life of the artisans in Puerto Rico. She was aware that she needed a market in North America, because it was there that the articles could be sold at a fair price. She was a businesswoman and an excellent organiser and used her gifts to work for fair trade.

She laboured for 30 years to sell arts and crafts from developing countries in the USA. In this way she ensured that the producers earned money and respect for their work. An organisation was formed, at first called SELFHELP Crafts of the World, which was an official programme of the MCC. In 1996 this spawned the store chain called Ten Thousand Villages, which still today has a close relationship with the MCC. There are about 100 stores in the USA which had a turnover of over 25 million dollars in 2008. Most of the profit goes directly to the craftspeople in 35 countries. It is important that the objects produced are sustainable and the producers receive a fair wage. Among other things produced are gift articles and household items.

Every person deserves respect for his or her work. Edna Ruth Tyler put her faith and convictions into practice. In that way she enabled many people the world over to earn their living for themselves and for their families. Fairness, as a genuine Anabaptist tradition is being carried forward in a world-wide context.

### The City on the Hill

The city on the hill shines for all those who want to see it. But no one could view it unless the sun was shining on it. [...] It is not hidden in a corner. It does not wish to conceal anything. Its light is an all-embracing life force that belongs to everyone. It must be allowed to have its effect on all circumstances of life, in the same way that the sun shines on the just and the unjust alike. God is good to his enemies as he is to his friends. He is there for every person and everything. The task for his salt and his light, as is the task of the city on the hill, can only be demonstrated, when they are there to serve and to exist for each and every person.

#### Eberhard Arnold (1883–1935)

*Salz und Licht, Über die Bergpredigt, Moers 1982, S. 28f.*  
(*Salt and Light, Thoughts on the Sermon on the Mount, Moers, 1982, p. 28f.*)

Clemens Weber

## Living a Life with Integrity – The Basisgemeinde Wulfshagenerhütten and Berlin

Christian fellowship is *communio viatorum* – community as it travels together. For over 50 years we have been journeying as a community.

*The word of God shows us the path, where we can truly await God's guidance, a path of trust. But only when we walk along it do we experience the truth of this path.*

At the beginning of the 1970s the Lutheran pastor Gerhard Weber amongst others sought for reforms in the church and in society. Step by step they were led to form a community on the basis of 'God's social order' as they discovered it in the Sermon on the Mount. They gave up their professions, houses and the security of a safe future, in order to be free for a life committed to a permanent community according to the model of the early church.

On a former estate in Wulfshagenerhütte near Kiel this tiny 'contrast society' became increasingly structured. *All the believers were together and had everything in common. ... They gave to everyone as he or she had need.* (Acts 2, 44f.) In those pioneering years the community grew and drew in people from different denominations and some who were without any church connection.

After the fall of the Wall a new community was founded in 1990 in Prenzlauer Berg, Berlin. In 1995 a group was formed in the Ukraine, but just over a decade later it had to be abandoned again.

At present about 60 people across all generations, both families and singles, live at these two locations. They have more than enough to do; in the carpenters' shop, maintenance department, domestic services, in the garden, in child-care or in caring for guests. The production of wooden toys guarantees the livelihood of the whole community. As they share everything, everyone is provided for, independent of their abilities or qualifications.

The Anabaptist movement and especially the integrity in the lives of the early Hutterites significantly inspired the community in its founding period.

We view ourselves as a part of the world-wide fellowship of Christians of many groups, fellowships and brothers and sisters from every denomination, who follow this path together. They accompany us as fellow-travellers and through their witness of faith encourage us to keep going forward.

*Peace (shalom) in the Bible is that new manner of life, in which men and women live in a right relationship to God, to their fellow human beings and to nature as created by God.*

We press on towards this peace. We have not yet reached the goal.



► [www.basisgemeinde.org](http://www.basisgemeinde.org)

<sup>1</sup> Gerhard Weber: *Worte des Propheten Jesaja. Kurzauslegungen, Wulfshagenerhütten 1983*

<sup>2</sup> Gerhard Weber: *Der christliche Friedensauftrag. Friedenspapier der Basisgemeinde Wulfshagenerhütten 1984*

**Clemens Weber**

Mitglied der Basisgemeinde  
Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg

Jeremiah Choi

## To live consistently – in Hong Kong



To live consistently as a citizen in Hong Kong was so easy because things would happen as expected.

Although Hong Kong returned to China in 1997, it continued to operate under the common law which was established by the British. As an international city, law

and order are essential to the city. However there are big changes before and after the 2019 – Anti-extradition protest.

After 1997, Hong Kong is under “One country and Two system” policy, but there are Basic conflicts between the two systems. China is basically under a communist Government while Hong Kong, although lacking of real democracy structure and elections, embraces many core values which democracy countries hold and practice. The Hong Kong - China relationship changes from time to time. When the trust is there, things go smooth. When Beijing wants to control more and tighten the freedom of Hong Kong, reaction from Hong Kong people is for sure.

On June 4, 2019, more than 180,000 people gathered at Hong Kong’s Victoria Park to commemorate 30 years since Tiananmen Square crackdown. On June 9th, more than 1,000,000 people went out to the streets; they struck, they sang hymns.

It was basically a peaceful protest. However, a day after, There were clashes between police and anti-extradition bill demonstrators. On June 12th, Hong Kong faced more protests against extradition law change. This time many church leaders came out and spoke to the

government. Some brothers and sisters prayed and sang hymns in the spot. Christians being somehow involved and were caring for peace and nonviolence in all the actions. Many people followed the Christians to sing the chorus „Sing Halleluja to the Lord“ on the streets. This time there are more than 2,000,000 people came out to protest for our freedom.

Since then, protest and demonstrations never cease. On July 21, 2019 a gang wearing in white attacked people at the Yuen Long MTR station but the police did not come in time to help. Instead some even reported that the Yuen Long police station closed their doors. Therefore some people suspect that the government has a role to play in this attack.

After two years, it seems clear that Beijing has decided to take over total control of Hong Kong. Life in Hong Kong will not be the same. Some said that “One country - Two system” no longer exists while Beijing and Hong Kong government insist that the policy remain unchanged.

“Total Control” started without notice. Some rules of election were modified. Some teachers were persecuted because they spoke something “wrong” in the Facebook. Some news reporters were persecuted. The “Apple Daily News” was forced to close by “themselves”. Suddenly you found the changes are happening everywhere around you.

Let me draw your attention to “Amnesty International” (17 July 2020, 19:09 UTC): “On 30 June, China’s top legislature unanimously passed a new national security law for Hong Kong that entered into force in the territory the same day, just before midnight. The law is dangerously vague and broad: virtually anything could be deemed a threat to “national security” under its provisions, and it can apply to anyone on the planet.

The Chinese authorities forced the law through without any accountability or transparency: it was passed just weeks after it was first announced, bypassing Hong Kong’s local legislature, and the text was kept secret from the public and allegedly even the Hong Kong government until after it was enacted.”

In the past, Hong Kong was ruled According to Law, you can live consistently in the city. But now? It is ruled By Law. When the government wants to do something they want, they use the law or launch a new law.

To live consistently as a Christian in Hong Kong become very challenging.

Some believe that Beijing plans to achieve total control within five years and it is now halfway through already.

### “Total Control” started with elections and legislature

On July 8 2021, South China Morning Post posted: “more than 70 opposition district councillors have resigned since Wednesday, with Hong Kong authorities deciding on a hardline approach that will unseat any who posted slogans connected to the 2019 anti-government protests on their office walls.

Sources said they believed that under the new rules, nearly 150 opposition district councillors – almost 60 per cent of those remaining – were expected to be disqualified this month.

The move, taken under a new law aimed at removing “unpatriotic” office-holders, will also require those disqualified to return about HK\$1 million (US\$29,000) in salary and other funds received since taking office.”

Some believe the media and education system are now undergoing “Perfection” – a term the Hong Kong government and Beijing used. What’s next? Religion.

In Hong Kong, more than 50% of the schools are run by Christian organizations. That’s why there’s so many people planning to immigrate to other countries and amongst them many are Christians. As a pastor in the church for 30 years, I’ve never seen so many church leaders and youths leaving the church. Some pastors are leaving and planning immigrate to other countries. A friend of mine has just told me that the three-self church leader told him not to go back to China anymore for the religion department of mainland China has already black list him.

### To live consistently as a Mennonite in Hong Kong

My last question is : “Is it possible to live consistently as a Mennonite in Hong Kong?” Is it possible to live consistently if you have decide to tell the truth and to act peacefully at the same time?

It is challenging to react in a peaceful way while others has chosen to be violent. It is challenging to live amongst the two colors (Blue stands for supporting the government, Yellow is against the government). It is challenging to be a peacemaker between the two colors.

It is a time of changing – things in Hong Kong are changing. There is little hope to go back to our normal life before the security law. Individuals and churches need to face our “New Normal”.

It is a time to change – we need to develop new strategies to exist and to live in Hong Kong. Some might go into jail simply because they want to tell the truth. Some might experience opposition simply because they want to be a peacemaker. However, we need to stand firm on the rock – Jesus Christ our Lord. We need to put our faith into practise. In the time of darkness, the True Light is needed.

Jeremiah Choi  
Mennonitischer Pastor in Honkong



### **The Theme Years:**

#### **2020: *daring! living responsibly***

Baptism – Voluntariness – Religious Freedom

#### **2021: *daring! living together***

Equality – Responsibility – Autonomy

#### **2022: *daring! living consistently***

Orientation on Jesus – Nonconformity – Confession of Faith – Martyrdom

#### **2023: *daring! living non-violently***

Church of Peace – Resistance – Reconciliation

#### **2024: *daring! living in hope***

The Kingdom of God – Utopia – Renewal

#### **2025: *Anniversary celebration***

In 2025, commemorative events will take place, jointly organized by various institutions and networks of Anabaptist churches (including Mennonite World Conference, Baptist World Alliance).



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