

Theme Year

24

daring! **Living with Hope**



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- Ulrike Arnold**
Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein

Reinhard Assmann
Historischer Beirat des
Bundes Evangelisch-Freikirchlicher Gemeinden

Gyburg Beschnidt
Bund Evangelisch-Freikirchlicher Gemeinden

Bernd Densky
Gesellschaft für Freikirchliche Theologie und
Publizistik; Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen
in Deutschland (bis 2021)

Johannes Dyck
Museum für russlanddeutsche Kulturgeschichte
in Detmold

Verena Hammes
Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen
in Deutschland

Walter Jakobeit
Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer
Brüdergemeinden Deutschland

Jochen Wagner
Bund Freier evangelischer Gemeinden

- Andreas Liese**
Historischer Beirat des
Bundes Evangelisch-Freikirchlicher Gemeinden;
Verein für Freikirchenforschung

Burkhard Neumann
Johann-Adam-Möhler-Institut Paderborn

Martin Rothkegel
Historischer Beirat des
Bundes Evangelisch-Freikirchlicher Gemeinden

Astrid von Schlachta
Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein;
Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Gemeinden
in Deutschland

Andrea Strübind
Gesellschaft für Freikirchliche Theologie und
Publizistik; Historischer Beirat des
Bundes Evangelisch-Freikirchlicher Gemeinden

Lothar Triebel
Konfessionskundliches Institut Bensheim

Liesa Unger
Mennonitische Weltkonferenz

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Right: Habaner-Keramik aus Winz, Karla Roşca

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Christopher Bentley

**Remembering Anabaptists in 2024 –
„daring! Living with Hope“**

We do not need to be prophets or be specially gifted in interpreting present-day events to understand that *Hope* is a very relevant theme today. *Daring! Living with Hope!* is the motto for this year’s edition. So we are now on the home straights remembering the 500 years of Anabaptist history. At the end of January 2025 we will look back at 500 years of this history which began in Zürich with the first believer’s baptism there. Several events will recall Anabaptist heritage and its importance for today.

Hope is one of the most important subjects at present. The fact that the expression ‘crisis mode’ was the ‘Word of the Year’ in Germany in 2023 is further confirmation of this fact. Wars, waves of immigrants, climate catastrophes, inflation, and other crises increase people’s fears and despair. Where is hope? What hope can sustain us? As Christians we are convinced that the Christian message is capable of inspiring genuine hope and not just empty phrases. It achieves that by meditating on God’s promises and trusting in His acting now and in the future. In this way 500 years of Anabaptist tradition have shown how hope has emerged and brought new impulses time and time again. It has made possible to rethink and reform hardened and accustomed paths and societal structures and to trust a God who lovingly cares for us all.

Hope – a massive playing field. This year’s edition approaches this subject from varying perspectives: there are differing denominational and theological approaches regarding the Kingdom of God, apocalyptic thoughts as well as projects, historical events and biographies, and various cultural contributions – all convey hope. One might almost say: ‘*That is unfortunate*’, when the story of the Anabaptist rule in Münster is always given priority wherever people refer to Anabaptists and apocalyptic ideas. This subject is invariably present when documentaries and films about Anabaptists are broadcast. *Daring 2024* is an invitation to reconsider the events in Münster, but above all to offer and discover wider thoughts, suggestions and impulses for today from the 500-year history of the Anabaptists.

*Gyburg Beschnidt, Bernd Densky, Andreas Liese,
Astrid von Schlachta, Jochen Wagner*

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Mayor of the City of Muenster

Markus Lewe

After winning the council elections in Muenster in February 1534 nothing from the Muenster's past seemed to stand in the way of the Anabaptists as they awaited the imminent return of Christ. Sacred art was destroyed and the city archives, which guaranteed ancient laws, were burnt. Those who did not join the Anabaptists were forced to leave the city and criticism of the new order was ruthlessly punished. When the troops of the prince-bishop conquered the city in June 1535 they were no less violent. Utopia ended in a blood bath. The leaders of the Anabaptist movement were executed in January 1536 and as a deterrent their corpses were hung in iron cages on the tower of St Lamberti church – the citizens' church.

These cages can still be viewed, but receive differing interpretations. However, they still remind those people in Muenster who have an awareness of history that in 1534–1535 all those involved relied on violence to solve religious and political differences.

What makes us even more hopeful is the fact that in the centuries after Muenster there were many people who desired dialogue and sought peace. That is still true in times of global challenges, where people try to tear society apart, aggressive wars are taking place and the climate is changing. One moment offering hope in Muenster's history was the Treaty of Westphalia agreed in 1648. This treaty was globally important as it offers a pluralistic and religiously diverse coexistence. This peace treaty was enthusiastically celebrated by the city of Muenster in 2023 at its 375th anniversary.

An enormous change in perception has taken place: The Peace of Westphalia was long considered to be a painful event for Germany's unity. Only after the Second World War were its positive accents recognised, especially for European unity. A similar change is evident in the assessment of Anabaptist history: for a long time Anabaptists were merely exploited by all political standpoints to add weight in political arguments. Only in the last decades has it been recognised that the Anabaptists should be seen as children of their age.

So my desire is that I this book and the activities of 500 Jahre Täuferbewegung 2025 e.V. (500 years Anabaptist Movement 2025) and the affiliated member associations are received with great interest I add the hope that the knowledge of this rich, common history may encourage us all to share a peaceful coexistence.



General Secretary, World Council of Churches (WCC)

Rev. Prof. Dr. Jerry Pillay



The World Council of Churches joins in the 500th commemoration of the Anabaptist movement with a sense of gratitude to God for the gift of daring, spiritual and prophetic contributions of your movement. We remember and celebrate the rich legacies of a strand of the Christian family and its instructive historic commitment to discipleship, peace-making, recognising the presence of Christ in the gathered community of faith, and the practice adult believer's baptism, interpreting the authority of the Bible through the lens of Jesus' teaching.

Such a legacy of drawing upon tenets of faith cultivated a daring hope in believers that individual believers and churches can have a lasting profound impact on religious culture, politics and society even in the midst of persecution, the way the Anabaptist movement has since the 14th century. The wider Christian family is the richer for the stories of daring hope in the legacy of the Anabaptist tradition.

Conrad Grebel whose impact earned him the title „the Father of Anabaptists“ is an inspiring affirmation of youth leadership. His life-span was less than 30 years, and his Christian ministry lasted only four years and he was an Anabaptist for only one and half of those years of ministry. His life is a model of youth prophetic positioning and catalytic leadership.

This is reminiscent of the WCC 11th Assembly where youth dared the churches with their collective sense of agency, prophetic calling and desire to be catalysts for transformation. Aptly captured in their own words, they declared:

Today, we as young people ask the Church to take the path of healing wounds. This path starts at this Assembly and requires participation in authentic encounters, together with openness for diversity and acceptance of differences.

We, as young people, are gifts to the church and society as part of the Body of Christ. Today, we advocate for the use of these gifts in our churches. We invite all young people and the WCC Assembly as a whole to walk the talk – act now. We urge each other to use our prophetic voices to call out injustices, for all the wounds in the world, especially those in which churches have co-participated. Together, let us walk on the path of using our gifts, healing wounds, and transforming injustices...¹

The daring and living hope in Christ that the youth embody is God's gift to churches and to the world. I hope and pray that the echo from 500 years of daring will resonate with our young people and that many of them will read this booklet as inspiration to cultivation a deep faith, and to be courageous and committed in order to lead our walk on a new path.

At a societal level, the Anabaptist movement dared age-old alliances between churches and monarchs. They declared autonomy from the state, emphasising that the church lives under the authority of the word of God as set forth in the Bible, and thereby gifted Christianity a particular perspective of reckoning with church-state relations that has inspired reform movements starting from the great revival of faith in the 14th century.

Such daring is ever so relevant today when a growing sense of nationalism seeks to co-opt the Christian message as a tool for wars, violence and discrimination. The perspective of the Moravian and historic peace churches - including Mennonites, Brethren and Friends (Quakers) – within the ecumenical movement embodies a unique message that enriches churches. When in 2013, these churches decided to be represented in the WCC governing bodies as one confessional family and gather as such during confessional meetings at WCC events, room was created to reflection from the Anabaptist perspective.

May the social and personal ethics of a life of discipleship in Jesus Christ invite us all to a daring hope to serve humankind and all of creation through action. As the WCC embarks on the Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation and Unity as invitation, direction and methodology for the work ahead, may the Anabaptist movement's legacy of 'Daring! living hope' be evident with its emphasis on Jesus Christ as Lord, Saviour, and model of life, the church as the body of Christ that continues Christ's life and ministry in the world.

¹ Message from the Ecumenical Youth Gathering, World Council of Churches 11th Assembly 31 August to 8 September 2022 Karlsruhe, Germany, p.2.

General Secretary, Baptist World Alliance (BWA)

Rev. Elijah M. Brown, PhD



The Baptist World Alliance, now with 253 Member Partners and 51 million individuals in 130 countries and territories celebrates the publication of this booklet on nonviolence as part of the 500th Anniversary of the Anabaptist Movement.

This important resource helps us draw upon a historic legacy to continue to face the realities of today. Millions of people around the world live in vulnerable situations and face the highest levels of war, persecution, and extreme hunger. The intersection of technology and human rights will likely prove to be one of the most challenging situations facing the world in the twenty-first century. We therefore recall with renewed conviction a 1968 Baptist World Alliance resolution passed in Monrovia, Liberia which states:

Peace is a Christlike characteristic and should be the personal goal of every Christian... As Christians we should quest lastingly for peace at every level as we foster peace among individuals, among citizens of various countries, and advocate for peace among the world's governmental bodies.

In the ongoing threats to human dignity that abound in the world today, we reaffirm that nonviolence and religious freedom for all is fundamental to the teaching of Jesus Christ and necessary for individuals and societies to experience flourishing freedom. Our work is not just for peace but for just peace.

May this recourse – part of the 500th Anniversary of the Anabaptist Movement – be a source of inspiration and challenge as we draw upon our historic commitment in renewed passion to pursue our journey as a people of God in pursuit of holistic peace rooted in Christ. Let us learn together and live together in prophetic, humble, and compassionate witness in the world today. As Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers” (Mt. 5:9).

General Secretary of Mennonite World Conference (MWC)

César Garcia

Being Hope

Pandemic. Oppressive regimes. Rulers fighting for power. Social inequality. Populist leaders exploiting resentments. Violence and war in Europe. Am I speaking about today? It could be. But I could be talking about 1925, the context of the beginnings of the Mennonite World Conference. However, I am describing the environment surrounding the Anabaptist movement’s emergence in 1525.

Times of unbelievable pain and suffering are challenging for people of faith. Where is God in such contexts? Prophets in Ancient Israel tried to respond to that question by pointing out that God is not neutral but actively involved in history.

For example, amid Israel’s exile, Isaiah says that injustice and evil are not the final reality (Cf. Isaiah 40–45). He became a prophet of hope by proclaiming a vision of God’s future and inviting people to live in their present according to it. Hope is not primarily for the future. It’s for now!

Hope is not optimism. Optimism looks at past facts, searches for trends and waits for the best. Hope looks at God’s promises and vision and, based on it, changes facts and trends to make God’s vision a reality here and now. Hope is not just a positive attitude. Hope is an action.

Hope that results from faith may be defined as the ability to see a new reality and to act based on it. It is to long for a different world and behave as if we were already in it. Waiting on God is never passive, never simply a feeling. It is to realize that there is already a new creation – here and now – and that through the power of Christ, we are a part of it.

Anabaptists in the sixteenth century understood this. While many Reformers imagined how a church whose members have chosen it rather than being born into would look (separated from the state, practicing restorative justice and voluntary redistribution of goods), the first Anabaptists believed it was possible by the power of the Spirit and acted accordingly. They established new faith communities that, beyond *having* hope, *became* hope



for the society of their time.

Nowadays, it is easy to lose hope. Polycrisis (the occurrence of several crises simultaneously) is hopeless. Nevertheless, for followers of Christ, believing that tomorrow will be different *gives* us hope. Living according to that tomorrow *makes us an embodiment* of hope in the eyes of others.

I pray that today, while we celebrate the first 500 years of the Anabaptist movement, our global church – just like our ancestors from the sixteenth century – *can be* hope for the world around us.

Lukas Amstutz

Ideas from the Mennonite Perspective of the Kingdom of God



Jan Luyken, *Der Schatz im Acker* (1712)

Repent, for the Kingdom of God is near! The Kingdom of God is not just the central theme in Jesus' sermons, in fact it is closely linked to His person.

For Jesus this Kingdom was by no means abstract. He often described this new reality in pictures. The Kingdom of God is as unspectacular as a mustard seed and is as effective as leaven. It is as precious as a treasure or an especially valuable pearl. It is as full of surprises as a field which turns seeds into a rich harvest. And it is also as comprehensive as a tree that offers protection to all birds, or as a net that catches all sorts of fish, or is like a banquet, to which quite ordinary people are invited. Jesus awakened hope through such pictures.

Hope lived out

Those people who met Jesus sensed this. Wherever Jesus was they did not just hear a good sermon. In His presence there was a new wind of hope! People breathed a sigh of relief and were restored. They experienced the healing and beneficial closeness to God. Sinners were not blamed but heard the message that set them free. Those who had been branded as 'hopeless cases' received a new perspective on life. Jesus was happy to sit at table with those people nobody else would have dreamed of inviting. He ate and drank with them, thus demonstrating *God loves you! In His eyes even you are of immeasurable worth – He believes in you.*

Turned upside down

But Jesus' life-style also irritated and angered many people. He held a mirror in their faces: *Look closely – that's how egoistic you are!* He exposed a religiosity that loves the 'letter' rather than God and other people. He criticised the human greed for power and called people to serve rather than to seek to exercise power. Jesus could really enjoy a party, but nevertheless warned of falling into the trap of desiring money and luxury. And above all He gave an emphatic answer to the fact of evil in this world, which so often destroys all hope. Practise Love! Even for your enemy! When Jesus died on Good Friday it appeared that the hope that was emerging would once again vanish into thin air. Terror would triumph, as so often happens. But on Easter morning God broke through this logic. The powers of death that hold sway over this world had to submit to Him. Hope was reawakened to life, the hope

that God's Kingdom is indeed coming and renewing this world.

Not yet fully Accomplished

Although the Kingdom of God is already present in this world ...

- ▶ people are still being rejected and hurt – both physically and psychologically. Their free will, their integrity, their dignity is being destroyed and although created in the image of God they are being trampled on.
- ▶ the fellowship with others, which God desires, is being denied, injured, destroyed, so genuine relationships are no longer possible.
- ▶ creation is being exploited and wrecked. God gave this precious gift to us, for us to take care of.

A Vision for Life

The Kingdom of God is a call to live a life, which defies the powers in this world that are hostile to life. In all the brokenness of our world God's Kingdom evokes a vision for a fulfilling life. This can be expressed in accordance with Romans 14:17:

- ▶ **A life truly lived is a just life**
Justice can be described as being faithful to others because at its heart is the command to love. To act correctly means to love: to love God, to love our neighbour, to love ourselves, to love creation and even to love our enemy.
- ▶ **A life well-lived is lived for peace**

Peace is the answer to the question what circumstances make a fulfilled life possible. Peace must be understood as pertaining to relationships. The Bible often uses the word *Shalom* to describe complete well-being, comprehensive and just for all of creation.

- ▶ **A life that feels right is full of joy**
When our actions are shaped by justice, our situation defined by peace, then we experience a fulfilled life which gives us the feeling of joy. The cause of this joy is both the presence of God which we experience as creatures in His creation and also the interaction with fellow human beings, because we live together in justice and peace in a flawless creation.
Such involvement relies on faith in all the pain of this world – faith, because in Jesus Christ the Kingdom of God has dawned in this world. The words of Jürgen Moltmann are relevant here:

Faith means living in the presence of the risen Christ and reaching out to the coming Kingdom of God. [...] We wait, we hurry, we hope, we endure, we pray and watch, we are patient and at the same time we are curious. That makes the Christian life enthralling and vibrant. Faith: a different world is possible. That makes Christians able to look confidently in the future.

Marco Hofheinz

„Last Things First“ – How James W. Mc Clendon Sees the Beginning of ‚Dogmatics‘



James W. McClendon

James W. McClendon Jr. (1924–2000) was an American theologian in the Baptist tradition. He called himself a baptist (sic) and his reputation was made by the three volumes of his 'Systematic Theology': Ethics (1986), Doctrine (1994, Witness (2000). The originality in his way of thinking is visible in each of these three volumes.

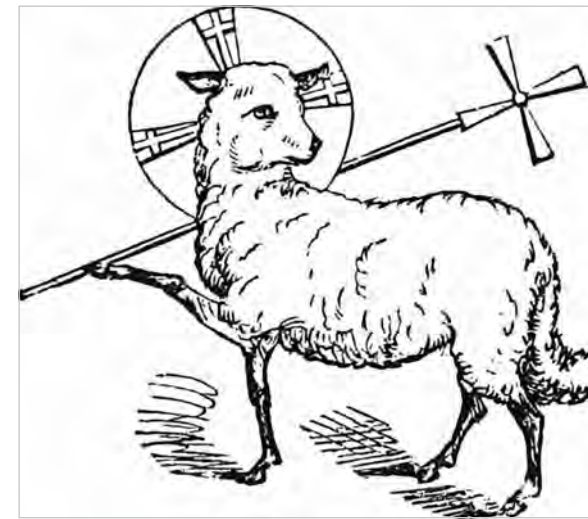
Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount: *Seek first the Kingdom of God ... and all these things will be given to you as well* (Matthew 6:33) may be viewed as his motto. To put that more exactly, this verse is the structural principle of the second volume of his dogmatics, which begins surprisingly with eschatology, the doctrine about the last things. Through this approach he turns the classical order of dogmatics upside-down. *Last things first* is McClendon's comment when putting what is usually considered to be the final chapter right at the start. By beginning with the doctrine of hope, he achieves the proper starting-point for thinking through Christian doctrine, because this is the key to understanding everything else.

The decision to begin with eschatology means McClendon uses 'The Rule of God' as his point of reference. This he sees as the central element in Jesus' message. Jesus added to the future expectations of, for example the prophets, three aspects: Firstly, Jesus' coming is no longer due at some time, but now is near. (Mark 1:15 par), so is accessible now. Secondly, the character of the coming Kingdom will correspond to Jesus' life and have a new order of interactive love, even of enemies (Matthew 5:1–12,43–48). Thirdly, the price paid for the Kingdom is the Cross, made necessary by human resistance. The Cross must be carried by Jesus and all his followers.

McClendon points out that the concept of God's Kingdom is governed by a picture, an 'end picture' – 'end' means both the border of life and also an ultimate aim or purpose. The end is always a purpose that is also experienced in the present, that determines the future course and guides life in Jewish and Christian fellowship. The Biblical picture of God's Kingdom is complemented by other pictures, such as those of Final Judgement, Jesus' Second Coming, the Resurrection and ultimately Death, Hell and Heaven. 'Picture thinking' (Ludwig Wittgenstein) is, according to McClendon, the characteristic path taken by the Bible to the Last Things, which form, or 'picture', the classic subject matter of eschatology.

How should we interpret this abundance of 'end pictures' to make 'doctrine' possible? McClendon points to a hermeneutical double strategy: One strategy is the foreshortened sense (sic!) in Christian proclamation for the future. The time between what is near and the Last Things is compressed, in order to give the final events their due importance. Without such a

Agnus Dei (1875)



foreshortening the last things could be put far into the distant future and so be consigned to insignificance. The other hermeneutical strategy is the prophetic or 'baptist vision'. It teaches us to see the present in the form of the Biblical past, so that the present 'is' this past, but this 'baptist vision' is also perceived in the form of the prophetic future 'then', so that the future is 'now'. According to this 'baptist vision' principle of 'then is now', these pictures of 'then' and 'now' shape the believer's way of thinking. By applying these two hermeneutical tools McClendon puts the eschatological pictures into a communal, human context, because people realise they are 'eschatological people'. Faith in Christ, *who is and who was and is to come, ... the first and the last* (Revelation 22:13) receives in this way, by applying the double strategy, its means of expression.

It is true that McClendon uses a 'formal' approach to eschatological pictures as a material criterion for his choice of pictures. McClendon calls such a criterion 'the picture of the slaughtered lamb' by referring to the 'master picture'. This picture represents 'Jesus' politics' in His intention to establish God's Kingdom. Whereas ideas of God's Kingdom often lead to triumphalism, glorification of violence and imperialism, that is not the case here. The victory of the Lamb is the victory of the slaughtered Lamb (Revelation 5: 12). The Lamb rules the world just as He orders the outcome of history. This means that every act of violence must in principle be viewed as 'anti-historical' and contrary to

the facts in the light of this 'master picture'. McClendon appeals explicitly to the interpretation of Revelation 5 by his Mennonite friend John H. Yoder (1927–1997), who is now a controversial figure due to the sexual abuse he committed. Yoder points to the apocalyptic vision in Revelation 5, which offers a new understanding of history – only the Lamb can open the 'Book of history with its seven seals'. This is the description of the outcome of history, the subject of eschatology.

According to McClendon this outcome is at the same time the means of entry into dogmatics. So one has to begin at the end. This end is the true beginning. McClendon demonstrates with this distinctive approach to his 'doctrine', that the whole path of theology is determined by making eschatology the starting point. So to pursue eschatology in a proper way implies understanding the beginning by starting from the end. The eschatological rationality of theological thinking is decisive due to its priority. McClendon's dogmatics bears witness to this.

Prof. Dr. Marco Hofheinz

Professor für Systematische Theologie an
der Leibniz Universität Hannover, Institut für
Theologie und Religionswissenschaft

„Hoffnung ist wie der Zucker im Tee:
Auch wenn sie klein ist,
versüßt sie alles.“
Aus China

Thomas T. Müller

End Times and Peasants` War. Thomas Müntzer`s
Apocalyptic Ideas in an Emergency

Thomas Müntzer was not the initiator of the Peasants` War in 1525, nor its spiritual leader and by no means its military leader. He joined the revolt because he believed the insurgents were God`s chosen tools in the eschatological separation of humanity into the chosen people and the godless. With this aim in view it was only in the final phase of the revolt, above all in Thuringia and Saxony, that he became the main `spiritual` and `demagogic head` of the uprising, as Thomas Kaufmann, the historian specialising in Reformation History from Göttingen, called him. Müntzer defended the `justifiable indignation` at the `false lords` and in his sermons and talks he actively endeavoured to change the situation. Luther and his colleagues often defamed him in their publications, but he was not seeking his own advantage.

Besides, he was not pandering to his friends. His sole aim was to realise his vision of a future reformation for everyone, although this could only be achieved against the will of those in power. Without hesitation he accepted that this path to a society that pleases God would be arduous for himself and his followers with all possible consequences, which he too would have to bear.

In the past centuries the role Thomas Müntzer played in the Peasants` War has led through speculation and indeed through some fiction to have been cemented in people`s minds: in general this has been contradicted by facts confirmed by the picture the sources actually paint. Originally one was often aware of this but for ideological reasons this was frequently ignored. However, trivial fictions that had been put in writing sometimes became `facts` in the course of time. Such an example is the murder of monks in the monastery of Volkenroda in Thuringia, that purportedly had been ordered by Thomas Müntzer. When the surviving sources were subjected to a thorough examination it could recently be established that when the alleged murders took place neither the alleged `murderer` Müntzer nor his `victims` were anywhere near Volkenroda.

It is of course true that Müntzer intended to separate the elect from the unbelievers in the light of the nearness of the end of the world and in preparation for the Last Judgement. But for Müntzer the rebellion was just the means of fulfilling this divine task. But the brother of Heinrich Pfeiffer, Müntzer`s companion in Mühlhausen, stated during the interrogation in Erfurt on 22nd December 1525 that Müntzer and his brother first wanted to bring together citizens and farmers through their revolt and then would execute the nobility. Nevertheless, this must not be understood in an ahistorical fashion as a proto-communist action aiming to abolish the existing class-system.

Similarly, when Müntzer states that Pfeiffer claimed that one castle in each administrative district is adequate and all the others should be destroyed, that cannot be used as evidence that a complete transformation of political rule was planned.

The real concern of the preachers was to reduce the power of the nobility to a suitable level as they saw it and to enforce regulations for the rulers regarding luxury articles (like a rigid limitation of the number of horses according to the social status of the owner). The most important intention was to subject everyone to the laws of Holy Scripture. The basis for this are the apocalyptic concepts as Müntzer`s texts demonstrate time and time again.

The difference between Müntzer`s apocalyptic ideas and the objectives of the rebels has been aptly summarised by Günter Vogler, the Berlin expert on Müntzer:

Whereas for Müntzer the events in the spring of 1525 had a cosmic dimension, for the rebels the world was much smaller. They were merely interested in their town or the area they lived in. This discrepancy was insuperable, being based on the gulf between vision and reality.

Thomas Müntzer`s ideas were looking for an alternative to the Lutheran reformation, but through their radicality would inevitably lead to failure. The disaster of the battle near Frankenhausen was just as important as the failure of Müntzer`s ideas in the rest of Thuringia, above all in Mühlhausen. In this imperial town his preaching was kept alive in secret for many decades, above all in those circles that were close to the Anabaptists. For Mühlhausen the end of the Peasants` War meant the start of over 20 years of subjugation under princely rule. For many centuries the town had been able to avoid this situation by clever political manoeuvring.



Zeitgenössisches Porträt
des Thomas Müntzer (1489–1525)



Bauernkriegsgedenkstein auf dem Schlachtberg
bei Bad Frankenhausen.
Inscript: FRYHEIT Bauernschlacht unter der Führung von
THOMAS MÜNTZER 15. Mai 1525

Dr. Thomas T. Müller
Direktor und Vorstand der Stiftung
Luthergedenkstätten in Sachsen-Anhalt

¹ Thomas Kaufmann: Geschichte der Reformation.
Frankfurt am Main und Leipzig 2009, S. 496.

Michael Driedger

Stories Told About the Anabaptists in Münster

After nearly 500 years of demonisation it seems almost impossible to see the Anabaptists in Münster in the years 1534–1535 in any other light than as criminals, heretics and fanatics. Dozens, in fact hundreds of sources from past centuries confirm this judgement that the Anabaptist rule in Münster by its very nature was a hideous and abominable regime.

Mennonites feel genuinely unsettled when they are reminded that the Anabaptists in Münster were members of their ‘historical’ family. If in fact the Anabaptists in Münster belong to the family of ‘Baptists’, as is the popular conception, then only as bogus Baptists. Like good Baptists they only baptised adults, but because they were also willing to defend themselves using violence they were seen as ‘Anabaptists’, which meant they were automatically convicted criminals according to imperial law. This is expressed in polemic texts by both Catholic and Protestant clerics. At least from the late 1530s Menno Simons and his followers did everything in their power to deny any connection to Münster. In the late 17th century the Dutch Mennonites celebrated the brave martyrs of early Christendom, the Middle Ages and the first decades of the anti-Roman Catholic reforms, but in their Martyrologies like the famous ‘Martelaers-Spiegel’ (‘Martyrs’ Mirror’), published in 1660 and 1665, no Anabaptist is mentioned that had any contact to the events in Münster. Modern Mennonites stand in this same long tradition of distancing themselves from Münster. In his well-known essay ‘The Anabaptist Vision’ (1944) Harald Bender observes that the tragic rule of the Anabaptists in Münster has muddled the reputation of followers of Jesus Christ with an ‘abominable stigma’. Serious church historians must always differentiate between these false Anabaptists and those who genuinely follow Christ and reject violence.

One important reason for Mennonites to deny any connection with the Anabaptists in Münster is that anti-Anabaptist literature from the 1530s onwards claimed there was a clear link between the people in

Münster and the Mennonites. Because of this link it is argued that there exists no reason whatsoever to trust apparently peaceful and obedient Mennonites. This falsehood was used to justify some trials and executions of peaceful Anabaptists in the 16th century, and in the 17th century still gave legitimation to put them into prison. A Lutheran compendium attacking heretics that was published around 1700 underlines this clearly: *Thomas Müntzer, Johann von Leyden and Knipperdolling are indeed dead, but their spirit and legacy have not been eradicated*. The title of this compendium was *Anabaptisticum et Enthusiasticum Pantheon* and it contained a passage about Mennonites and warned expressly against Quakers.

Even now too many historians just repeat this simplistic representation of the Anabaptists as criminals. One influential source for these historians is Norman Cohn. In *The Pursuit of the Millenium* (1957 and 1970) Cohn warns of the continuing dangers emanating from millennial prophets, because they want to replace God and encourage the poor and the masses of dispossessed people to try to create utopias here and now. Cohn lays most stress on the millennial prophets in the Middle Ages, but the final chapter concentrates on Thomas Müntzer and the Anabaptists in Münster.

In some publications from popular culture the nightmarish reputation of the Anabaptists in Münster bears even comical dimensions. In the late 1980s a German horror author of horror stories surmised that the souls of the Anabaptists return as vampires, that once again threaten the inhabitants of Münster. Similarly, an author of comic books painted a scenario with Anabaptist zombies. The perception of the Anabaptists as seen by some serious historians must be taken much more seriously. They claim that the insane, fanatic, millennialist people in Münster prepared the ground culturally for the murderous regimes of National Socialism and Stalinism in the 20th century. The subtitle of Cohn’s second English edition (1961) emphasises this

point of view: *Revolutionary Messianism in Medieval and Reformation Europe and its Bearing on Modern Totalitarian Movements*.

Cohn makes the claim, which has never been confirmed, that there was a historical connection between Jan van Leiden and Adolf Hitler or Joseph Stalin. The reason for this was what the Anglo-Italian philosopher Alberto Toscano called an ahistorical shortcircuit. Nevertheless Cohn published a book in 1975 under the title *Europe’s Inner Demons*, in which he warns in one long passage against the demonisation of heretics in the Middle Ages. In this book he refrains from mentioning the Anabaptists in Münster or in any other places, although they would offer an excellent example for his thesis. He himself never observed a contradiction or tension between his two books.

Cohn’s exaggerated picture of the Anabaptists in Münster, painting them as villains and madmen, is artistically depicted on the north side of St Paul’s Cathedral in the centre of Münster. In 2004 the cathedral chapter unveiled an ensemble of statues by Bert Gerresheim. This consists of two parts. The main section is a conventional modern representation of three witnesses at the feet of Jesus on the Cross. The less conventional part of the work of art has a statue of the disgraced Jan van Leiden, seated. At his feet is a collection of pictures that are intended to point to his crimes and what followed afterwards: *Broken signs and emblems refer back to dark periods of human history: The broken insignia of Jan’s rule, a torso as a relict of iconoclasts, the swastika and the yellow Jewish Star of the Nazi period, and the hammer and sickle emblem of world Communism*. This is the official description of the crucifixion ensemble and appears on the side of St Paul’s Cathedral. The supposed connection with



Adolph W. Knüppel, Skulptur „Wasser in Münster“ (2000) auf dem Prinzipalmarkt in Münster

the Nazis is nonsense and can only be explained by the centuries-old demonisation of the Anabaptists in Münster.

Is it possible to tell varying stories about Anabaptist Münster? Yes! Carl Adolf Cornelius back in the 19th century had already sought

to offer a scholarly history of this phase in Münster’s history. His presentation took into account the reform movement there in the 1520s and 1530s, which laid the foundation for the later transition to Anabaptist rule and explains this development. And in the 20th century Karl-Heinz Kirchhoff published authoritative studies on the Protestant and Catholic Alliance, which laid siege to Münster in 1534 and 1535. He researched in detail the social structure within the besieged city and the faith of the Anabaptists. More recently, Ernst Laubach and Ralf Klötzer used Kirchhoff’s studies as a basis for their own studies. Katja Schupp, Jan Matthias Hoffrogge and Michael Driedger have analysed how later generations imagined what the Anabaptist period was like and how they depicted that period.

The intention of these more recent stories is not to turn the once-demonised Anabaptists into heroes, but to see them in their human reality and in all their complexity.

Die Quelle für das Zitat über die Statue von Gerresheim ist www.paulusdom.de/gotteshaus/kunstwerke/kunstwerke-des-st-paulus-domes/kreuzigungsgruppe-am-dom

Stefan Höschele

Thinking Backwards from the End. Adventist Eschatological Expectation and Orientation on the Kingdom of God

Experts for issues involving time. That is what one might imagine Adventists are like, when representatives of various denominations offer their opinions. Experts for issues involving time who think backwards from the end. Their basic competence is to reconcile Christian day-to-day life with expectations for the future. These are expectations that dramatically call into question our familiar daily life, but these expectations are not fulfilled as quickly as we had hoped.

Then that is what is typical for the Christian hope. As believers we think way beyond the here and now of our normal lives. When our perspective is God's eternity, the world around us appears as a morning mist, as the labour contractions before the actual birth, as a botched experiment in a lab before the breakthrough of a great synthesis. Typical Adventist perception fluctuates between intense disquiet: *How long?* (Revelation 6:10) and: *The patient endurance of the saints ...* (Revelation 14:12). The nearness of the Kingdom of God that Jesus preached – that is what Christians deeply desire and that it may be completely visible, tangible and present for ever and ever.

In the course of time Adventists have often addressed the question of the end of history. This gave rise to their name: the second *adventus* of Christ, his second coming, is what shaped this church from the very beginning. Less well-known, but equally important, is the elementary scepticism of the first Adventists in 19th century America towards the generally optimistic spirit of the age: Christ will not return when the world has been transformed by an irresistible development to one great kingdom of peace. They were convinced that He would return soon, entering in the present time into an unprepared and unjust age. Thus they saw themselves as people who truly understood the times they lived in and were initiated into God's plans for salvation history. These plans were very close to completion. It is therefore no surprise that even today five of the 28 Adventist religious statements refer to God's future.

Similarly, it is unsurprising that the Adventist conviction that Jesus will return soon sometimes went in a false direction. This began with establishing a certain date for the end of time – October 1844. Correspondingly, attempts to read the current position of the 'world clock' from political events were made – catchphrase: 'understanding the signs of the times'. Or a timetable for the last times was compiled; first of all a certain event had to take place, then the next one, and only after this can Christ return. In this context were scenarios, when the roles of true believers were determined, during the persecution of the last days. Adventists traditionally saw themselves as future victims. Such predictions reflect the experiences of Anabaptists in



William Miller, gemalt von Horace Bundy
(zwischen 1840 und 1843)

past centuries. They allow all sorts of speculation to flourish, because they point to the future and to those things people long for. On the other hand, they hopefully ensure that Adventists can never themselves with a good conscience become persecutors...

This leads us to the question how far Adventist theology, especially eschatology, the doctrine of the coming things, makes this church an offshoot of the Anabaptists. The Seventh-Day-Adventists have never really seen themselves in this way. In their lineage as an organisation they have no Mennonite antecedents. Despite that, Adventists have always viewed themselves as genuine 'Baptists'. The most important 'midwives' of the eschatologically oriented church were the Baptist William Müller and a large number of the *Christian Connection* (like the *Disciples* and other so-called American Restorationists, who want to be more 'Baptist' than the Baptists themselves would like to be). In the 19th century in many US churches there was great interest in the apocalyptic books of the Bible, so that this concentration on intensive expectation of the Kingdom of God had to lead to a new movement sooner or later.

After the young Adventists had founded several churches virtually only one branch remained. (Apart from

the Jehovah's Witnesses, who came much later and who were influenced by another branch of this theological trend.) At the beginning it was a small group, which attempted to apply the temporal expectation of Christ's imminent return to genuine Christian living. By analogy to the end of history these Adventists defined the end of the week in a new way that contradicted the mainstream division of weekday and Sunday. The Sabbath became the sign of the Kingdom of God, of a new identity, of the basic element of Christian understanding of time. So a new and independent tradition developed, which exists up to the present day.

At the same time they set to work on building the expected Kingdom of God: as avowed opponents of slavery, working towards social justice, as opposers of war, by setting up a sort of peace church, as reformers of the health system, promoting vegetarian food and well-being, as champions of education, by planning the largest global school system of a Protestant church. Expectation of His imminent return and commitment to the world are clearly not in contradiction to each other, for a theology that begins with the last things realises that the new earth throws light on the old earth. Nobody knows how long history will continue as at present. For that reason we Christians must make good use of the time which is given to us.

„Wie übel wären wir dran,
wenn unsere Hoffnung
auf Menschen ruhte.“
Adolph Kolping

Roland Fleischer

Fraternal Fellowship and the ‘Führer Principle’ in the Baptist Churches

Right from the beginning churches that baptise adults have been fellowships of sisters and brothers, sharing this fellowship visibly in local churches. They managed their own internal affairs autonomously. A church hierarchy ‘over them’ was foreign to their way of thinking and was not considered to be necessary. Nevertheless, representatives of the churches met in regional meetings or conferences to discuss questions that had relevance to them all and to make decisions on these matters.

The origins of Baptist churches lie in the Puritan revolution in England and they had a clear basic understanding of democracy in practice – especially in their assemblies. This view of democracy is typical for free churches and is designated nowadays as consensus democracy, but not as majoritarian democracy. The basic democratic structure derives from the ecclesiology of Puritanism. Every church member has the Bible, the Holy Spirit and reason. These three form the basis of their fellowship, how they interact and talk with each other. Controversial matters are not decided by majority vote, which overrides the minority, but the greatest possible unity is striven for by prayer, further discussions and careful study of the Bible.

Because they believe in Christ they form His body, which is visible in the local church. He is the real authority. Church leaders receive their position and authority through confirmation by the assembled congregation. (John Smyth – he was a nonconformist minister and is seen as the founder of the Baptist movement). In conflict situations between church leaders, preachers and the congregation the conscience of the individual is respected as a rule and unity in love is sought and safeguarded.

At the start of the ‘Third Reich’ many Baptists shared the enthusiasm for the national revolution. Above all the younger pastors wanted to move with the times and adapt the external appearance of the church to the new state. In this desire to move with the times the decision was made to introduce the ‘Führer Principle’ in the Baptist Union, in the area federations and in the churches. The reason given was as follows: *The democratic and parliamentary principle has been excluded from the new state. Therefore we too should no longer employ the same old methods.* Other reasons given were the *fragmentation of our available forces and resources, as well as the fragmentation of our Union into many small federations and churches.*

It was generally accepted that the national and religious ‘Führer Principle’ cannot be directly applied to the church of Jesus Christ, but nevertheless ‘three brothers as Union elders’ should be given the right to make decisions that must be respected. As words of appeasement it was added that the change was *merely a reorganisation of purely external*

conditions.

Immediately there was protest! Above all from August Rausch, the Regional Court Director from Thuringia, who had been primarily involved in the drafting of the democratic constitution of the Baptist Union in 1924. He was of the opinion that the idea of a ‘Führer’ was indeed congenial, but must not be overemphasised and put onto the same level as in the state. Church members were themselves not used to looking up to the bishop as Catholic Christians do, but *as believing Christians receive their instructions about the way, the objectives and tasks from Holy Scripture. A Baptist church is not a flock of sheep blindly following a ‘Führer’ and switching off their own independent thought-processes, even if only for a short period.* (1933)

Arnold Köster, the Baptist minister in Vienna and editor of the *Täufer-Bote* (Magazine of the Baptists in Austria and the Balkan lands), was not an enthusiastic democrat in church matters, but was an early critic of this attitude demonstrated by the younger ministers: *The church needs leaders, but these must prove themselves to be qualified by the authority and truth of their words. The church must enable spiritual leadership; leaders must enable the widest possible participation, care and joint responsibility of all its members.* (*Täufer-Bote*, October 1932) He aimed at a balance between the ‘Führer-Principle’ and basis democracy.

The indignation of the churches can be deduced from a meeting of a large number of church representatives in Wuppertal-Barmen, that took place in November 1933. It did not just call into question a *rigorous and tightly organised church fellowship, which was divided into an ‘above and below’ organisation, led by a regulatory church department*, in fact it went a step further and said clearly *No!* Administrative pressure would inevitably lead to paralysing the churches and their ultimate death. The participants rejected every form of hierarchy and domination by a church administration. They intended to *form a large fellowship of interlinked*

churches in area federations and in the Union [...], whose sole responsibility is towards God and Christ, His Word and His Spirit. (Ernst Merten, preacher in Barmen, 1934)

This meant that a reorganisation of the Union with the installation of three responsible elders was overruled. The ‘Barmen of the Baptists’ (Andrea Strübind) had prevailed. Strübind is making a reference to the Barmen Theological Declaration by the Protestant Churches in Germany. The Baptist churches had *the courage to stand up to the voice of the times and to confirm the voice of Holy Scripture as a reaction to the ‘Führer Principle’.* (Günter Balders)

In fact, the number of Union elders was extended in 1936 once again. Nevertheless, a powerful Union leadership remained *de facto*, supported by the new director Paul Schmidt (since 1935), who himself was a strong leader.

Arnold Köster (um 1940)



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Roland Fleischer
Pastor i.R. im BEFG

Reinhard Assmann

Hope Learns How to Walk – Ecumenical Impulses for a New Start in the GDR in 1988–1989

On 12th February 1988 I drove to Dresden. My church, the Federation of Evangelical Free Churches (BEFG), had sent me as its delegate to take part in the Ecumenical Conference of the Churches for Justice, Peace and the Preservation of Creation, which was commencing its work at that time. As a pastor in Bitterfeld I had seen the environmental damage directly before my eyes. In general the atmosphere was gloomy. Many small steps taken to improve the situation together with other local people had been unsuccessful. Friends had abandoned hope – some had moved with many others to the West. The glimmer of hope for changes that had originated in the East – Gorbachev, Poland – had been rigorously rejected by the GDR. A few weeks before, protesters in Berlin had been imprisoned. What could one really expect from a church conference?

The next day began with a public event in the Christus-Kirche – but we could not believe our ears: in nine ‘testimonies of concern’ the problems as well as the paralysis in the country were named forthrightly and with critical words. We held our breath, a spirit of candour was moving through the dark church. The criticism referred to the principle of separation and the Berlin Wall as a symbol of unjust exercise of power, to the education system that taught children to foster concepts of enemies, to damaging health through mining uranium, to the dramatic death of forests in the Ore Mountains and to many other things as well. The Conference, it was said, should at last tell the truth about the country, about the people’s distrust of government, about the constrictions and political disenfranchisement and the repression of basic human rights. That was also true for ourselves – the churches and their tactical manoeuvring towards the state.

Those present from the Western media were delighted and of course there were also Stasi (State Security) people there – they scratched their heads in irritation and we delegates drew fresh hope and courage to ask the burning questions.

There had never been an Ecumenical Conference like this in the history of the church. In 1983 the World Council of Churches had already called for a ‘conciliar process’. This was a reaction to a suggestion from the GDR-delegates, who had taken up Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s idea in 1934 to call for a ‘Peace Council’ of all churches. In view of the alarming situation in the world Richard von Weizsäcker had underlined this idea in 1985 with his call Time is running out! The ecumenical group in the city of Dresden suggested in 1986 that this process should begin in their own country. The Association of Christian Churches in the GDR (AgCK) prepared an ecumenical conference at the end of 1987 and passed on the appeal: Hope is learning to walk – walk with it! This was a call to all churches and fellowships to take part and to share their own ideas and suggestions. Within a very few weeks about 10,000 contributions to the themes Justice, Peace and Preserving Creation had been submitted.

And so in February 1988 146 delegates from almost all member churches of the AgCK and those with observation status came together in Dresden, as well as expert advisors and international guests. (Only the Free Evangelical Churches and the so-called Altlutheraner (Independent Lutheran Churches) distanced themselves from this conference.) As equals, leading church council members were sitting next to long-haired environmental freaks from basis-groups. They first had to agree on basic rules for their work together in what was a completely new ecumenical body. It was also new and unusual that the starting-point was no longer inner-church or theologically divisive questions, but the immediate problems of the people and of our world. The often heated debates were frequently interrupted by moments of quiet, prayer and hymn-singing. A continuous prayer-chain had been organised as part of the accompanying programme in the city. The overall intention was to illuminate the themes of the conference in the light of the Gospel and then to deliberate on the

suggestions that were made.

Work-groups were formed. They drafted twelve texts in time for a second conference in the autumn. This took place in Magdeburg in October 1988, when they were discussed, revised and sent on to the churches for further discussion. Hope learns to walk was the expression coined in Magdeburg, the start of a process of learning. There was an almost endless number of meetings, symposia and church groups focused on the subjects of the Conciliar Process. Experts – including some from the secular sector – were asked to give expert advice. There was more than a hint that open dialogue was taking place in theology. This was liberating but also contained the invitation and the empowering to radically change course. Equally clear was the discovery that the Biblical testimony regarding social, ethical and political questions was amazingly up-to-date.

This time there were over 1400 contributions, some of which were very detailed and well-reasoned. Our small Baptist Bible study group considered for example the text ‘More justice in the GDR’ and in its written reply investigated the Biblical-theological background for the hope in us and why we act the way we do. After that we made a list of proposed amendments. This text, officially ‘No. 3’, was the most controversial of all the texts, as it actually verbalised the necessary political changes in the land. The state security tried in vain to persuade as many delegates as possible to vote against these amendments.

In April 1989 the moment arrived: the work-groups presented their texts and the delegates debated further changes. The third plenary session in Dresden adopted by majority the twelve texts in their final form and submitted them to the churches and to the public – Hope is learning to walk. In a message to the churches it was stated that this path we were walking along together had changed us too and we did not dare not stop our progress at this point. Hope is walking on. God will accompany us on this path with His Spirit and His blessing.

Aufruf der AgCK 1987



A few months later the Peaceful Revolution was set in motion. Many of the delegates were founder members of the new movements and parties and much of the contents of the texts formulated in the Ecumenical Conference were repeated in their calls for change. The power of hope emanating from the Conference became de facto a factor in the political transformation in autumn 1989. But the influence from this theological new start was not enough in itself to cause the dynamic development that took place from 1990 onwards. Joachim Garstecki summed up as follows: The Churches and Free Churches wrote the script for changes in the GDR – as it were overnight – but had to look on as others shot the film.

In 1991, during its final meeting before merging with the Baptist Union in Western Germany the leadership of the Baptist Union in the GDR endorsed in an official statement the texts of the Ecumenical Conference and recommended their adoption by the churches. They added that Jesus’ call to repentance must be heard today as well, so that hope can continue learning to walk in an evil world.



Texte der ÖV Dresden 1989

SOURCE

Letter to the Children

(Written by the Ecumenical Conference in April 1989)

Dear Children,,

The earth on which we all live is in great danger. It is our fault, we adults. But some of us have noticed this. That is why a lot of people have met together a third time, so that we can think about this and about what can be done to save the earth. What was special about this meeting? All of us are people who believe in God, but we do it, each in his or her own way. It is called an Ecumenical Conference and we are called delegates. But really we are mothers and fathers, grandparents, brothers and sisters or godparents; in other words, we are people who might be living in your house.

What have we been doing?

We have shared our thoughts, prayed and shared more thoughts about what we can do for the world, which we will leave to you in a quite horrible condition. Then we wrote down our conclusions.

Here is what we feel to be most important.

- We must all make sure that we have trees for a long time yet and that they can grow into a blue sky.
- We must all make sure that nobody kills anyone else in a war.
- We must learn to share, so that nobody goes hungry any more.
- We must work hard to make sure that everybody, small or big, can live in safety and in an environment where both people and nature are protected.

When we become tired then you will take our place. That will not be easy and you must prepare for it. That is why we have tried to tell you a bit about the Ecumenical Conference.

Don´t think we know everything, but believe that we want to do everything.

We send our greetings to you and thank you for listening to us.

Peace be with you – Shalom –

The delegates of the Ecumenical Conference

By the way, we were in Dresden. It rained a lot when we were there and in the conference centre smoking was forbidden.

P. S.
The Ecumenical Conference sent a letter at the same time to the children. It was deeply moving when in 2009, 20 years later, an answer was received that some of you, the parents and grandparents, sent to us, thanking us for our courage, persistence and irrepressible hope. They, too, are prepared to overcome their sense of powerlessness and desire to live passionately for God´s new world. "May we continue to walk together in a spirit of hope and so truly learn how to walk through life in the right way."



Antwort auf den Brief an die Kinder 2009

Wolfgang Krauß

Revolution and Hope.
The Challenge of Hans Hut

Augsburg 2023: since 2020 the ´climate-camp` next to the town hall has been pointing out to the local politicians the climate catastrophe which is threatening the world. Several times courts have confirmed the right to hold a long-term demonstration. Now five years have passed since Greta Thunberg set off the world-wide movement ´Fridays for Future` with her school strike.

Augsburg 1527: in Eichenhof, the prison behind the town hall, Hans Hut died on 6th December from smoke poisoning, caused by a fire. On the following day he was to die at the stake for heresy and sedition. This execution took place as planned, but on his corpse.

What had happened? Hut had been in prison since 15th September 1527. He belonged to the ´Garden Brothers and Sisters`, the Anabaptists. Without permission of the authorities they met in houses and gardens and together, as believers in Jesus, wanted to walk the path of discipleship. Such an autonomous church, that distanced itself from the state´s official idea of church, displeased the city council. Besides that, the council had observed that there had been a wider regional gathering of Anabaptists in Augsburg.

Disappointed Expectations

Who was Hans Hut? He was born about 1490 in Haina (Hesse) and served as sacristan in Bibra (Thuringia). He was banished from there, because he refused to have his new-born baby baptised, so he became a travelling bookseller for publications advocating the Reformation, as Hut saw it. Being a friend of Thomas Müntzer Hut experienced with him the defeat of the peasants in the battle of Frankenhausen in 1525. Thus ceased all hopes of political participation, social justice and religious freedom.

In 1526 Hut came into contact with the Anabaptists in Augsburg and was baptised by Hans Denck. In this fellowship he saw his hopes and ideals put into practice. It is believed that there were about 1000 ´Garden Christians` – a large minority among 30,000 inhabitants there at that time. This was for Hut the beginning of a new society. Augsburg became the point of departure for his travels. They took him as far away as Moravia. He preached everywhere about the coming extraordinary change planned by God and called people to repent and to enter the Kingdom of God. He announced the Day of the Lord. At Whitsun 1528 the decisive moment would take place. Then the Lord would come again, accompanied by the heavenly hosts, and bring justice and peace. Until that happened nonviolent discipleship was necessary. But then Jesus would put a sword in the hands of the Christians and the Turks would support them. In contrast to the Peasants` War Christians should remain passive and wait patiently for the heavenly signal.

Hut never experienced the failure of his timetable. The alderman of Augsburg and his secretary Conrad Peutinger judged Hut`s eschatological vision to be a badly camouflaged plan to initiate a new insurrection. The Peasants` War had only been over two years. Under repeated interrogations and various levels of torture the authorities wanted Hut to betray his plans for the insurrections, but Hut insisted he was merely setting forth the Biblical perspective of the second coming.

In a world of injustice and serfdom he and his followers were longing for justice. After the collapse of the peasants` movement they came to the conclusion that only God could achieve that. But no person could force God`s hand.



Hans Hut,
Stich von Christoffel van Sichem

And today?

How do we approach the apocalyptic scenarios in the Bible, confronted as we are today with climate catastrophes, the death of many species and nuclear threats? Have we become allergic to eschatological expectations? We tend to avoid fleeing into such fantasies. We seem also to have become immune to putting dates on certain eschatological events. But what does the message of the Lord`s imminent return tell us in view of modern crises? How do we view God`s presence amongst us now? And what has that got to do with our daily lives as Christians? Should we still be waiting for the coming Lord? Or are we standing alone?

In a hymn Hut praises God, the Creator, and His creation, and laments the destruction we have caused ourselves. He writes:

*God`s works are wonderful
And always completely in order.
People should experience this
God wants to reveal it to us.
He will take care of all His works.*

500 years ago Hut talked about protecting creation! As a common task for God and man!

But what should this common task really look like in our complex world? Apocalypse means revelation, unveiling, demasking. What does the Book of Revelation reveal, if we do not view it as a timetable but as an analysis of the *Imperium Romanum*, itself a globalised world 2000 years ago?

Does it help us to lay bare modern structures of bondage and injustice?

The path to a new world, a heaven and a new earth! A resource of hope when facing the endangering of our planet?

Hans Hut believed the coming deliverance was imminent and that he knew the date. He was in expectation that Christ would overthrow the unjust authorities with His revolutionary power. This seems odd to us and simply a mistake. Even at that time and at the meeting in Augsburg other Anabaptists disagreed.

But also his teaching that the Gospel was for all of creation was considered to be disconcerting. Preach the Good News to all people is the message in Mark 16:15. The usual interpretation assumes the dative case. To whom? The Gospel must be preached to all people. But Hut understands here the genitive case: Whose Gospel? The Gospel of the people. Their suffering is a sermon of the Gospel for us.

All creatures are suffering under humanity. So that we can eat meat, animals have to be killed and prepared. Bread is made of finely ground grain. We experience this in analogy to the Cross as we follow Jesus. Through suffering God prepares us for His service. That may seem odd, possibly even false. But Hut believes that the suffering and groaning of creation are associated with suffering in discipleship. To many of his contemporaries this made sense, especially when the large numbers of peasants who had been executed after their defeat and the persecution of the Anabaptists was considered.

The ´Last Generation` appears to be in this apocalyptic tradition – even its name implies this. However, it substantiates through sober and objective data its prophetic warning. It tries to prove this by practising civil disobedience.

Many of those who had been baptised by Hut turned to the emerging Anabaptist fellowships after the disappointment of Hut`s death. In these fellowships the hope for change did not vanish. Living in a different way today, expecting God`s future tomorrow – is that not a challenge for us all?

Jesse Hofer

Jakob Hutter – Apostle of Hope and Justice

Jakob Hutter was born around 1500 on the Hueterhof near St. Lorenzen in South Tyrol. The message of the Anabaptists reached Tyrol in 1527, probably through Georg Blaurock. Hutter got to know him in all probability through the goatherd Wölfl in the Sarntal. Hutter bought a New Testament in Bolzano and started to study it while he was training as a hatter in Stegen. His uncle Caspar was his teacher. Shortly afterwards he was baptised and began to preach in the Puster Valley and to establish clandestine churches. In 1529, after Blaurock had been martyred in Klausen, Hutter took over the leadership of the movement at a time when severe measures were being taken against Anabaptists. He contacted the Moravian church in Auspitz and soon afterwards began to lead many groups to the 'Promised Land' in the east and established a basic organisation. Hutter was often requested by the Moravian churches to mediate for them. In 1533 he took over the role of leader after a crisis in the leadership, when a number of those responsible had fallen out of favour. At the end of 1535 he had to flee to Tyrol with Katherina, his pregnant wife. They were taken prisoner in Klausen and a few months later Hutter died at the stake in Innsbruck on 25th February 1536. His wife gave birth to a child in prison and was released, but two years later was again taken prisoner and was later punished by drowning.

Hutter's influence on the early Hutterites was considerable. His leadership in Tyrol during the darkest period of the movement was courageous; he founded an 'Underground Railroad' which enabled hundreds of Anabaptists to flee in safety to the Moravian churches; he imparted a clear spiritual vision; he supported communal property and stability in the middle of the leadership crises during the early 1530s; and he oversaw the organisation of the churches during their first years when they consisted for the most part of hundreds of religious fugitives.

After the debacle in Münster in 1535 Emperor Ferdinand feared another insurrection. He exerted considerable pressure on the landlords in Moravia to expel the Hutterite tenants; the landlords could no longer protect them. Hutter, who was therefore vulnerable and defenceless, penned an emotional but somewhat disrespectful letter to the Moravian governor Jan Kuna von Kunstát, in order to defend his people against the accusation that they intended to instigate a new rebellion. He pointed out the dire human situation of those for whom he was responsible and wrote:

Because you have ordered us to leave immediately, this is our reply: We know of no place to which we can go. [...] There are widows and orphans among us, many who are sick, as well as helpless little children, who cannot even walk yet, let alone travel a long distance? Their fathers and their mothers were murdered by that tyrant Ferdinand, who is an enemy of divine justice. He stole all they possessed. These poor and weak people have been entrusted to us by God Almighty, that we should feed, clothe and shelter them. We must serve them in love in every possible way and may not leave them behind or send them away. May God truly save us from ever doing such a thing! We do not dare disobey God to follow human commands, even though this might cost our lives. We must obey God more than men.

(Hutterisches Geschichtsbuch, S. 730: *The Book of Hutterite History*, p. 730)

These words are confirmed by Jakob Hutter's courageous life and his martyrdom as a faithful servant of his Lord Jesus Christ. They challenge us to take God's will to heart: to take sides with the marginalized in society – both within our own churches and with others besides. This can take various forms: special care of children and of the elderly, hospitality shown to strangers and refugees, supporting those who are traumatised and endure injustice. Apart from the polemical rhetoric of his letter Hutter shows us that we can speak out against the abuse of power in the world and how to do this. His challenge to us is to put our hope in the God of justice, who wants us to cease being content with the *status quo* and – in patience and full of hope – to work hard for a society that is characterised by love and peace.



Jakob Hutter



The Underground Railroad, Charles T. Webber (1893). „Underground Railroads“ waren im 18. und 19. Jh. informelle Netzwerke, die Sklaven aus dem Süden der USA die Flucht in den Norden ermöglichten.

Jesse Hofer

Hutterische Silverwinds-Gemeinde,
Sperling, MB, Kanada

BIBELTEXTE DER HOFFNUNG

Jesaja 40,31

Aber alle, die ihre Hoffnung auf den HERRN setzen, bekommen neue Kraft. Sie sind wie Adler, denen mächtige Schwingen wachsen. Sie gehen und werden nicht müde, sie laufen und sind nicht erschöpft.

Erich Geldbach

The Separation of State and Church (Religion) – A Fundamental Principle



John Leland



James Madison

In the Constitutional Law (Grundgesetz, GG) of the Federal Republic of Germany, Article 140 states that the provisions of many articles from the German Constitution of 11. August 1919 (generally called the Weimar Constitution, Weimarer Reichsverfassung, WRV) are an integral part of the GG. The first sentence of Article 137 reads as follows: *There is no State Church*. This assertion has not been adhered to in the political and religious reality. It is already undermined in the same Article by the sixth sentence, which affirms: *Religious Societies, which are statutory bodies under public law, are permitted to raise taxes on the basis of civil tax registers*. Furthermore, Article 138 refers to the fact that certain religious societies received state benefits, although these were supposed to have been removed – and the Constitutional Committee for the WRV viewed this abolition as evidence for the complete separation of State and Church – but in fact this abolition was never implemented. This was the case, because a national law (of the German Reich) had not yet been passed. This meant that the German states were not in a position to negotiate with the relevant churches. So state benefits for the ‘major churches’, as they are seen by the general public, have already been in existence for over 100 years. Their traditional privileges are part of a ‘bundle of rights’. This also underlines the truth that in Germany religious freedom is not really in a healthy condition. So it is necessary to explain some of the reasons why the separation of state and church is a fundamentally important and absolutely necessary principle.

The Baptist elder John Leland (1754–841) brought up decisively the subjects of ‘separation’ and ‘religious freedom’ in conversations with James Madison (1751–1836). Madison was one of the founding fathers of the USA and the fourth president (1809–1817). He was one of the prime participants in the drafting of the American Constitution. The following quote makes Leland’s point of view unmistakably clear: *May every person speak clearly and without fear, may he freely utter the principles in which he believes, may he worship as he sees fit, whether he believes in one God, in a Trinity, in no God or in 20 gods – under the protection of the government.*

From this follows:

- ▶ The separation of state and religion is no attack on religion, but a precautionary measure to protect individual rights as well as freedom of religion. The Baptist minister Isaac Backus (1724–1806) opined that religious questions are not subordinate to the interests of the state, but on the contrary they are of paramount importance and sacrosanct and they lie beyond the competence of the state. Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), a trusted friend of Madison and his predecessor as President of the USA (1801–1809), seized on the metaphor of Roger Williams and referred to: *a wall of separation between church and state, which is essential in a free society*.
- ▶ Separation prevents a government favouring certain religions, which leads to the marginalisation of minorities. In this way all citizens can practise their religion without fear of persecution and discrimination, the rights of minorities are protected and an atmosphere of genuine respect for individual religious decisions is nurtured within society. This is not the case in Germany because there is no ‘single’ state church, but two churches, which are still partially state churches. From the point of view of the minority these state churches pursue their own ends rigorously. Many examples could be brought to corroborate this claim.
- ▶ Separation hinders the risk of moral coercion from religious motives and religious compulsion. It also stops a government and a religion joining together in a political alliance. The example of the so-called ‘Deutsche Christen’ in the Lutheran state churches springs to mind. They wanted to hand over the state church to the National Socialists. This was of course in the interest of the state to encourage the ideology of hate to prove the superiority of

„Wer die Hoffnung vor seinen Wagen spannt, fährt doppelt so schnell.“

Aus Polen

‘genuine German nationality’.

- ▶ Separation assists a society that acknowledges plurality and diversity to be an opportunity in themselves, enabling a fruitful sharing of ideas with churches and religions. This includes interreligious and ecumenical meetings and discussion on a level playing field. It must be learned and recognised that the different religious traditions embody their own cultural richness. That aids mutual understanding and helps to prevent a society breaking apart.
- ▶ Separation ensures the autonomy and integrity of religious organisations and communities and encourages the activities of groups, so that they are not exposed to external pressure or even manipulation by the government.
- ▶ Separation guarantees that the government makes its decisions with all of society in mind and is not dependent on the dogmas of any religious group, community, church or religion. In this way mutual respect is strengthened and the values of a social and constitutional democracy can be defended against enemies from within.

The American Baptist minister Barry Howard, from whom I have borrowed some of the aforesaid, summarises the problem in this way:

The separation of church and state makes possible a diverse and harmonious society, in which individuals are at liberty to practise their faith without fear, and where a government can rule by reason, fairness and in the best interests of their subjects. It is essential for the preservation of a healthy society that it adopts the separation of church and state and thus furthers the advance of democratic values in our world. (Five reasons separation of church and state is essential, Barry Howard, Baptist Global News, 17th July 2023)

Gyburg Beschnidt

Hope for Light, Purity and Security



Shaker-Stuhl



Versammlungshaus der Shaker
in der Sabbathday Lake Community

Dr. Gyburg Beschnidt
Pastorin im BEFG

This chair is an invention of the Fellowship of Shakers, or as the group is known officially: ‘The United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Appearing’. They call themselves ‘Believers’. It is possible to buy such a chair or to join – under certain conditions – this group, which counted about 6,000 members around 1840, but today only has about two or three. Apart from possessing American nationality and consenting to the creed a person must be free from debts, unmarried and prepared to lead a celibate life. In other words, a person must be free from everything else, in order to live for God and the fellowship alone.

Daily life in the fellowship of the Shakers is generally as I describe here: On weekdays breakfast is at 7.30 am, 8 am morning prayer (two psalms, Bible readings, prayer and silent prayer, a Shaker hymn), 8.30 am work begins, 11.30 am midday prayer, midday meal at 12 o’clock, 1 pm work is continued, 5 pm on Wednesdays Shaker studies, 17.30 pm supper. After that there is free time. On Sunday the church service is at 10 am, which involves an invitation to live in Sabbathday Lake in Maine USA, a on the s founded in 1794.

For Ann Lee (1736–1784), the founder of the fellowship, this was heaven on earth! Her father was a smith and she was born in Manchester, the second child of eight children. The English industrial city was a magnet for many. Her family lived in poverty; in cramped conditions, no private sphere, no running water and a toilet they had to share with others. Children had to work from a young age. Lee never learned to read or write, because she had to work in a cotton factory from the age of eight. Religion was a bright spot. In 1758 she met the Quakers James and Ann Wardley, who invited her to the Christian meetings in their flat. Lee was convinced that celibacy was actually the right path for her life, but then in 1761 she married Abraham Stanley, probably her parents’ wish. Her four children died in early childhood, her youngest daughter Elisabeth was six years old.

The peace on Sundays was disturbed by the Wardley group who preached provocative sermons on sin and on Christ’s return. On that account Ann was arrested several times. In prison she had a vision that the cross offered the only chance of salvation. She believed she herself was ‘The Word’. This was her interpretation of Galatians 2:20: *It is not me that lives, but Christ lives in me*. As a result she was acclaimed by the group as ‘Mother in spiritual matters’. Similarly to other Quakers she believed in the inner light and personal revelations, but for her and the Shakers celibacy was of paramount importance. Both groups could be led by men or women. The Shakers also developed a form of collective dance in their meetings. Shaking

symbolises shaking off sin in the life of a Christian and must be practised time and time again. This gave rise to the derisive nickname ‘Shaking Quakers’ or ‘Shakers’.

In 1774 Lee migrated with a group of followers to America after another vision. Her brother, her niece and her husband were among the group – her husband left her soon afterwards, so she retook her original surname. James Whittaker (1751–1787) was a member of this group. He was Lee’s successor. After two years in New York the group moved to Niskayuna and other settlements were soon formed. During Lee’s prolonged preaching journeys (1781–1783) over 1000 people followed her invitation to change their lives. This was the period of the Second Awakening.

Four years after her death the former Baptist minister Joseph Meacham (1742–1796) took over the leadership. Only Meacham and ‘Mother Ann’ had the spiritual gift of revelation. At first, he led the Shakers together with Lucy Wright (1760–1821) and consolidated the fellowship, which was under her leadership for a further 25 years. Rules and basic tenets of faith were formulated and the settlements were organised with



Shaker-Tanz

particular tasks for the whole fellowship.

The Shakers were not only spiritually influential and convinced many who had previously derided them, but they were also financially successful. Their communal economic activity made it possible to purchase equipment that an individual farmer and his family



would not be able to afford. The products that Shakers manufactured were of the highest quality. Customers gladly paid a fair price for excellent work. The furniture, the spices, the packets of seed or the Shaker chip boxes have a good reputation. Shakers followed Ann Lee’s advice: *Put your hands to work and give your hearts to God*.

The Shakers were not the first group that tried to put their ideals into practice in America. The Dutch Mennonites in ‘Plockhoy’s Commonwealth’ were the first to do so in 1663, but the Shakers had a decisive influence on other similar foundations, both religious and secular.

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Ralf Dziewas

Rauschenbusch`s Dream of a Just Society

In the 19th century genocide committed against Native Americans and the agrarian and industrial development of the West in the USA resulted in an economic boom. But at the same time there was a massive growth of inequality in society. Whereas banks, railways and oil firms became dramatically richer, the misery of the working class in the urban slums in the major cities of America Increased just as dramatically. Many immigrants from the impoverished areas of Europe, such as Ireland, Germany or Italy, had arrived over the Atlantic to seek their share of the American Dream. But for most of them this dream of personal fortune ended in the merciless rat race of the unregulated economic system of capitalism.

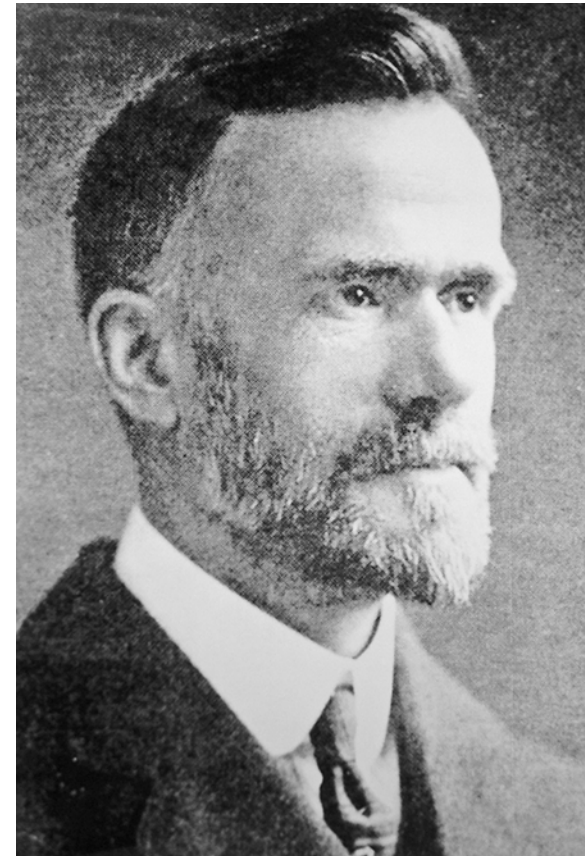
The Baptist pastor Walter Rauschenbusch experienced the misery of the people in a slum quarter of New York known as Hell`s Kitchen and was directly confronted with the importance of the social conditions for the preaching of the Gospel. If the message of the love of God is to be preached credibly, then surely the conditions of blatant injustice in society must be challenged and also a hopeful perspective for the future be made possible.

As on the European continent, American theology in the 19th century was characterised by evolutionary optimism because of the scientific, technical, medical and economic progress of that period. It was postulated that the solution to all the remaining problems would be achieved by a further cultural development of humanity. Therefore Walter Rauschenbusch, together with other socially active ministers, founded in 1892 an ecumenical *Brotherhood of the Kingdom*, which viewed its task for God`s Kingdom in both personal and social proclamation of the Gospel and in a societal renewal of America.

Rauschenbusch stood for a post-millennial theology of the Kingdom of God, as did other theologians who supported the Social Gospel. They believed that Christ`s return would take place after the reign of peace in the Millenium. Thus they nurtured the hope of a positive development in history, that would lead to the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God on earth. Rauschenbusch had no doubts that there had to be a social renewal besides the personal renewal, if the Kingdom of God was to become a reality in the world.

The social utopia of the Kingdom of God was expressed by Rauschenbusch in very clear-cut ways:

‘*Salvation*’ involves a saved environment. For a baby it means the breast and heart and love of a mother, and a father who can keep the mother in proper condition. For a workingman salvation includes a happy home, clean neighbors, a steady job, eight hours a day, a boss that treats him as



Walter Rauschenbusch,
amerikanischer baptistischer Theologe
und Hauptvertreter des Social Gospel

When Rauschenbusch died in 1918 he did not experience how quickly many ideas of the Social Gospel disappeared during the 1920s, when the general optimism regarding human progress was shattered after the horrors of World War One and in theology the pre-millennial concepts in eschatology were predominant again. These connected a more transcendent idea of the Kingdom of God with apocalyptic expectations. But Rauschenbusch`s dream of a just and peaceful civil society and the demand based on his theology that Christianity must constantly contribute to the aim of bringing about a more just society, remained effective.

The Black Church and the Civil Rights Movement that formed around Martin Luther King harked back to the Social Gospel, when they were fighting against the injustice of racial discrimination in the southern states of the USA. The freedom and emancipation movements of the present belong to the organisations that have been influenced by Rauschenbusch`s dream of a just society, because they also hope that in the end justice will triumph over injustice when the Kingdom of God becomes reality.

a man, a labor union that is well led, the sense of doing his own best work and not being used up to give others money to burn, faith in God and in the final triumph and present power of the right, a sense of being part of a movement that is lifting his class and all mankind, and ‘such like’. Therefore the conception of salvation which is contained in the word ‘the Kingdom of God’ is a truer and completer conception than that which is contained in the word ‘justification by faith’, as surely as the whole is better than a part.

(Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order*, Norwood, Mass., 1912, p. 47)

This would seem to modern readers to be a narrow-minded suburban idyll in a western residential area, but in Rauschenbusch`s time it was a challenging vision. It offered a direct alternative to the ever-present hardship of impoverished workers in the overcrowded slum areas, but it did not appear to be completely unrealistic, as long as America was in the process of development towards a more just society.

Jochen Birkenmeier

From Martin Luther to Martin Luther King



Martin Luther King Sr. am 14. Januar 1979

When the American Civil Rights Leader Martin Luther King Junior was born on 15th January 1929, his parents Alberta and Michael King called their son ‘Michael’ like the Archangel in the Bible. He only used the name ‘Martin Luther’ officially from 1957, 13 years after his father had changed his own name from ‘Martin King’ to ‘Martin Luther King’. Until today it has not been possible to ascertain why these name changes took place. It is also a fact that father and son gave differing reasons for it. His father explained in his autobiography that his own father originally wanted to call him ‘Martin’ and ‘Luther’, the names of his brothers, but his wife insisted on giving him the name ‘Michael’. When his father was on his deathbed in 1933 he promised him to go by the name ‘Martin Luther King’ in future.

But in 1957 the Nobel Prize winner told a different story in ‘Time Magazine’: his father and he himself had deliberately adopted the name of the German Reformer. This version gains plausibility because MLK’s father was a member of the American delegation at the fifth Baptist World Congress in Berlin and took advantage of the Congress in Europe as a pilgrimage to places that were holy to Christians such as Rome, Bethlehem and Jerusalem, but after the Congress was over he also visited places central to the Reformation including Wittenberg and Eisenach. However, this cannot be historically substantiated.

After returning to the United States his father did not only change his own name but that of his five-year old son as well, although MLK’s birth certificate was not altered until 1957, some months after the interview with ‘Time’. At the very latest this was when father and son identified with Martin Luther’s work and in his confrontation with the authorities and found points of contact with their own activities in the Civil Rights Movement. Martin Luther King Jr. viewed himself later as being in the tradition of the reformer and his 95 theses he (supposedly) nailed on the church door in Wittenberg on 31st October 1517. He nailed 48 theses on 10th July 1966 to the town hall door in Chicago, in order to reinforce before the public his demands to improve the housing situation, education and working conditions in the squalid areas of the city. Even on the eve of his murder in 1968 he referred in his final sermon to the German reformer.

From a Baptist point of view there is a certain irony in this choice of names. If Martin King Sr. indeed visited the Wartburg in Eisenach nobody seems to have drawn his attention to the fact that this historically important castle, where Luther’s famous Bible translation got under way, was also the place where the farmer Fritz Erbe was imprisoned under inhuman circumstances from 1540–1548 because of his Anabaptist convictions.

Dr. Jochen Birkenmeier
Direktor der Stiftung Lutherhaus Eisenach



Präsident Joe Biden in der Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, die Gemeinde der Kings

After spending seven years in the ‘Storchenturm’ (the ‘Stork Tower’), which is part of the city walls and still exists today, he was sent to the Wartburg and imprisoned in the South Tower in a dungeon without windows or heating. He languished there until his death in 1548 without recanting the faith he believed in.

Thus Erbe was not merely a martyr of the Anabaptist movement, but also an example of the brutal and gruesome treatment of the reviled supporters of the Anabaptist persuasion, who were vilified as ‘dreamers’ and ‘dregs of humanity’. Luther himself supported the recommendation of Philipp Melanchthon to the Elector of Saxony to punish Anabaptists with the death penalty, because they were spreading publicly inflammatory teachings. The Lutheran World Federation made its first official statement in this respect in the year 2010, expressing ‘regret and sadness about the persecution of the Anabaptists by the Lutheran authorities...’ and asked ‘for forgiveness for the suffering inflicted by our forefathers on the Anabaptists’. Four years before this statement excavations at the foot of the Wartburg uncovered human remains that had been interred there without a Christian burial, and it was possible to identify them as the body of Fritz Erbe.

It appears that, when Michael King Sr. changed his name, he was not aware of Martin Luther’s later books with their anti-Jewish tendencies, above all ‘Concerning the Jews and their Lies’, written in 1543. This was seized upon by the Nazis and their Christian supporters, the ‘Deutsche Christen’, as confirmation of their hate towards the Jews; and Nationalsocialist theologians portrayed Luther himself as a predecessor and pioneer

of anti-Semitism. To adopt the reformer in this way was to claim the complete opposite of the resolutions of the Fifth Baptist World Congress in Berlin, where King was present. Using Colossians 3:11 as the basis, every oppression and discrimination against Jews was condemned, and at the Sixth World Congress in Atlanta in 1939 these resolutions were expressly repeated and confirmed.

It is merely speculation whether King Sr. and King Jr would have refused to change their names, had they known of Luther’s attacks on Anabaptists and Jews. It is also possible they were aware of that. In that case appropriating Luther’s name would be a reminder that Luther held a different opinion in the early years of the Reformation – he believed at that time that spiritual conflicts had to be conducted without violence and that Jews should be treated in a friendly fashion, above all because Jesus and His disciples were themselves Jews.



Andreas Liese

In the Name of Christ

The Help Given by the German-American Baptists for their Brothers and Sisters in Germany after 1945

After the end of World War Two it was quickly evident to the American Baptists of German descent (in this text simply referred to as ‘American Baptists’) that their fellow-Baptists in Germany were in a precarious position – whether refugees or locals – after hostilities had ceased. So they felt it was imperative to help. They collected monetary donations and then began to collect material gifts, like food and second-hand clothes. But at first shipments of humanitarian aid were forbidden, because it was intended that Germans should ‘feel’ their defeat. But above all it was the German Americans who lobbied (with petitions to members of Congress) to change the attitude of the American government. The American Baptists were also involved in this action. This led to President Truman, himself a Baptist, allowing this aid to be shipped to Germany. An umbrella organisation was formed for this purpose, the CRALOG (Council of Relief Agencies Licensed for Operation in Germany) and many church relief agencies were also in this organisation, and they were the sole agencies that were permitted to send aid to Germany.



By what means could the gifts of the American Baptists reach Germany? The Mennonite Central Committee for Aid Relief (which belonged to CRALOG) offered their assistance. The aid consignments were meticulously prepared. The textiles even received a label with the words ‘In the Name of Christ’. Bibles and Christian literature were sent with these consignments. The first shipments were addressed to Jakob Meister who was the Director of the Deaconesses House ‘Bethel’ in Berlin. But this address led to problems because it was not clear that the consignments sent through CRALOG were intended for all the churches in the American Zone and also because they could not yet get to Berlin anyway despite the contract with CRALOG.

There existed clear rules set by the American military government in the American occupation zone regarding the recipients of donations: only officially recognised organisations came into question. Among others there was the relief agency of the Protestant church; the Mennonite Central Committee co-operated with that organisation, so the shipments were handed over to them. This arrangement, together with the ambiguous addressing of the consignments, led to problems.

Dr. Andreas Liese
Gymnasiallehrer i.R.
Lehrbeauftragter für Kirchengeschichte
(Osnabrück, Elstal/Wustermark)

„Jedes Kind ist ein Zeichen der
Hoffnung für diese Welt.“
Aus Kamerun

The American Baptists soon discovered that some consignments to their fellow-Christians had not reached them. The central office of the Mennonite Committee had its representative in Germany and had informed him regularly about the consignments that were sent by sea. His name was Robert Kreider. For his part he had also forwarded the information to the Protestant relief committee, but – as this committee later explained – it had not been taken into account due to initial bureaucratic difficulties. Thus these shipments had been included in the general relief aid of the Protestant relief agency. Kreider later admitted self-critically that he should have looked into the matter more closely. But ultimately he was able to ensure that the aid was able to reach the Evangelical Free Church (Baptists) directly from October 1946. He also contacted Eugen Gerstenmeier, who was the director of the Protestant Relief Agency, and so made sure that replacement aid reached the intended addressee, the Evangelical Free Church.

Although the American Baptists were initially disappointed when they heard that their consignments had not reached the intended recipients – after all they had invested much energy and money in this project – they were still prepared to send further aid to Germany via the Mennonite Committee. It was also an advantage that aid relief could now be sent into the British Zone.

The extent of the aid sent by the American Baptists can be measured by figures from July 1947: 700 bales of second-hand clothing weighing 40,000 kilos and 2,792 sacks of flour weighing 140,000 kilos had so far been sent to Germany.

It was not just church members who profited from this aid. The Evangelical Free Church in Göttingen decided to offer free meals to students on a regular basis. After liaison with university boards certain students were offered meals several times a week from June 1947. One student wrote a letter expressly thanking the American Baptists for providing him with food. This experience helped him discover that the love of Christ is still present in the world.

‘In the name of Christ’ – this motto was a driving force among the American Baptists. Their activities conveyed new hope in a world of despair after the end of the war. This was only possible at the beginning because the Mennonite Central Committee for Aid Relief made their resources available to the American Baptists. Their willingness demonstrates a good relationship between Baptists and Mennonites. The motivation for such welfare and social activity reflects the conviction on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean that Christians belonged to the one body of Christ.



LIEDTEXTE DER HOFFNUNG

BEFIEHL du deine Wege
und was dein Herze kränkt
der allertreusten Pflege
des, der den Himmel lenkt.
Der Wolken, Luft und Winden
gibt Wege, Lauf und Bahn
der wird auch Wege finden,
da dein Fuß gehen kann.

Text: Paul Gerhardt (1653)

Patrick Murphy

Hutterite Community Today

In 1918, the Hutterites established the first colonies in Canada, including the one I live in. They moved up from the United States because, as German-speaking pacifists, they were mistreated during WWI. (Two of the young men who were drafted were so abused they died.) Here in southern Manitoba, there are about 120 Hutterite colonies, each comprising about 100 members.

Hutterites have their roots in the Reformation; as Anabaptists, they are committed to living according to the teachings of Jesus and the New Testament; they hold to believers’ baptism, nonresistance, and view faith as best lived out communally. A common thought in Hutterite sermons is: Jesus taught us to love our neighbors as ourselves, and what better way to do so than in community of goods?

Modern society values individual wealth; Jesus, however, in Luke 12:33-34, says: “Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

To support themselves, most colonies still rely on agriculture and livestock; a small but growing number of colonies are also into manufacturing. Although they dress similarly to their better known religious cousins, the Amish, they differ from them in their acceptance of technology. Electronically steered tractors, CNC routers and robotic milkers are perhaps the best examples. These new technologies, as well as new government regulations for electricians and plumbers, are pushing the colonies to better educate their young people. The use of the internet is also an area where they differ from the Amish; indeed, many Hutterite leaders today are very concerned about the potential negative impact of the internet and social media on their members.

Following Christ in community of goods is an alternative lifestyle with many positive aspects. For example, the needs of the elderly and those with disabilities are addressed. In contrast, the concept of rugged individualism, which includes a belief in self-reliance and personal independence, is often celebrated in modern western society. That worldview, however, makes it difficult to even think about loving your neighbor as yourself. Unfortunately, such individualism can lead to social isolation and stress, as well as great difficulties in tough times, especially for those who are disadvantaged. There have been several articles making headlines lately about the negative impact of social isolation on both mental and physical health. The ideal, it appears, would be a connected lifestyle with mutual support – an idea that



Hutterische Frauen bei der Arbeit

we are in this together and need one another. The New Testament says each member has unique gifts; just as the eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you” it also says, “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.” (I Corinthians 12:21–26).

Is there hope for the Hutterite way? I think so. There are young people who are sincerely committed to following Christ’s teachings and example. Some are reading books like *The Kingdom That Turned The World Upside Down* about the Early Church and are excited to learn how the first followers of the way of Jesus lived and thought. There are young people and colony leaders studying the writings of Peter Riedemann, an early Hutterite leader. I should say, however, Hutterite life is not perfect. Indeed, I’m not perfect! There are many challenges. Although the ideal is not lived out fully; it is still worth striving for. It is a way to live out the teachings of Jesus, as He says: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” (John 13:34)



Gebäude in einer hutterischen Gemeinde in der Nähe von Tabor, South Dakota.

Patrick Murphy
Hutterische James Valley Colonie, Elie, MB,
Kanada

Excerpts from the Encyclical Letter *SPE SALVI* of the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI.

30. Let us summarize what has emerged so far in the course of our reflections. Day by day, man experiences many greater or lesser hopes, different in kind according to the different periods of his life. Sometimes one of these hopes may appear to be totally satisfying without any need for other hopes. Young people can have the hope of a great and fully satisfying love; the hope of a certain position in their profession, or of some success that will prove decisive for the rest of their lives. When these hopes are fulfilled, however, it becomes clear that they were not, in reality, the whole. It becomes evident that man has need of a hope that goes further. It becomes clear that only something infinite will suffice for him, something that will always be more than he can ever attain. In this regard our contemporary age has developed the hope of creating a perfect world that, thanks to scientific knowledge and to scientifically based politics, seemed to be achievable. Thus Biblical hope in the Kingdom of God has been displaced by hope in the kingdom of man, the hope of a better world which would be the real “Kingdom of God”. This seemed at last to be the great and realistic hope that man needs. It was capable of galvanizing—for a time—all man’s energies. The great objective seemed worthy of full commitment. In the course of time, however, it has become clear that this hope is constantly receding. Above all it has become apparent that this may be a hope for a future generation, but not for me.

And however much “for all” may be part of the great hope—since I cannot be happy without others or in opposition to them—it remains true that a hope that does not concern me personally is not a real hope. It has also become clear that this hope is opposed to freedom, since human affairs depend in each generation on the free decisions of those concerned. If this freedom were to be taken away, as a result of certain conditions or structures, then

ultimately this world would not be good, since a world without freedom can by no means be a good world. Hence, while we must always be committed to the improvement of the world, tomorrow’s better world cannot be the proper and sufficient content of our hope. And in this regard the question always arises: when is the world “better”? What makes it good? By what standard are we to judge its goodness? What are the paths that lead to this “goodness”?

31. Let us say once again: we need the greater and lesser hopes that keep us going day by day. But these are not enough without the great hope, which must surpass everything else. This great hope can only be God, who encompasses the whole of reality and who can bestow upon us what we, by ourselves, cannot attain. The fact that it comes to us as a gift is actually part of hope. God is the foundation of hope: not any god, but the God who has a human face and who has loved us to the end, each one of us and humanity in its entirety. His Kingdom is not an imaginary hereafter, situated in a future that will never arrive; his Kingdom is present wherever he is loved and wherever his love reaches us. His love alone gives us the possibility of soberly persevering day by day, without ceasing to be spurred on by hope, in a world which by its very nature is imperfect. His love is at the same time our guarantee of the existence of what we only vaguely sense and which nevertheless, in our deepest self, we await: a life that is “truly” life.

► Enzyklika *SPE SALVI* von Papst Benedikt XVI. an die Bischöfe, an die Priester und Diakone, an die gottgeweihten Personen und an alle Christgläubigen über die christliche Hoffnung. 30. November 2007, hg. vom Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz, Bonn 32008 (VApS 179), S. 38–40.

Erich Geldbach

‘Southern Baptists’ and Women

The ‘Southern Baptist Convention’ (SBC) changed significantly after bitter internal conflicts and splits in the 1970s and 1980s¹ and became a typically American, especially southern state, cultural religion – politically extremely right-wing and fundamentalist. But the SBC still bears the name ‘Baptist’ and because it is the largest non-Roman Catholic religion in the USA, it is imperative to focus on it. In those 20th century disputes the battle cry was ‘inerrancy’; that is the belief that Holy Scripture is completely free from error and that all theological, historical, scientific statements in the Bible are quite without mistakes and thus are not subject to any criticism.

In order to maintain the doctrinal ‘purity’ of the SBC a second battle cry has joined ‘inerrancy’: ‘complementarianism’. The constitution of the SBC will be correspondingly altered next year. It is stated that the offices of ‘Bishop’, ‘Elder’, ‘Pastor’ and ‘Deacon’ in the Bible refer solely to men, so a church that calls or ordains a woman as its pastor automatically breaks with the SBC and despite all claims that a local church is independent will be expelled from the SBC. The argument is as follows: Eve led Adam in the Garden of Eden to Fall. Therefore it is impossible for a woman to have ‘authority’ over a man. Adam and Eve were created ‘equal’ but must fulfil different roles that ‘complement’ each other. Being ‘complementary’ is not based on objective criteria, but is ‘a question of fundamental Biblical authority’ in the opinion of its advocates. Al Mohler defended this point of view at the SBC Convention in New Orleans. He is President of the Southern Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky and a supporter of Donald Trump.²

A woman serving as pastor violates both the teaching and the regulations of the SBC and of the church which allows that to happen.

Therefore, a church that calls or ordains a woman as pastor must be excluded from the SBC. The Executive Committee acted in this way towards two churches in 2022 and 2023. One was the Fern Creek Baptist Church in Louisville. The other was the church with the largest membership of all SBC churches – Saddleback Church California, that had been founded by the acclaimed author, Rick Warren. The SBC had no compunction in sacrificing a ‘Mega-church’, which was a hive of missionary commitment, for the sake of ‘purity’ in teaching and statutes.³

This approach is typical for fundamentalists. Many years ago a colleague of Mohler commented that the revised Confession in 2000 ‘Baptist Faith and Message’ (BFM), which codified the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy and was binding on all six SBC seminaries, could contravene the position of local churches. This revision of the BFM was set in motion while Paige

Patterson, the leading protagonist of the ‘conservative resurgence’, was President of the SBC. He had promised that the success of the conservative renewal would be sensational. However, it is deeply sobering to realise that when his presidency of once the largest theological training college in the USA, the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary ended, he left the institution with a debt of 125 million dollars and the student numbers had fallen to the lowest level since the end of World War Two. He was thrown out of his office in disgrace, but still attempted to pull the fundamentalist strings in the background.

Patterson conducts ‘evangelistic’ events for ‘fathers and sons’. His premise is that a ‘real boy’ needs three things: a father (‘dad’), a dog and a revolver. He is not talking about toy guns. In his meetings he concentrates on male participants; this derives from a barely camouflaged pseudo-theological machismo (from his ‘complementarianism’). In that context young women who had enrolled for the courses had to go to their own special courses on ‘home economics’, which were taught by Patterson’s wife Dorothy. She received her own ‘professorship’ for this, so the couple were financially exceptionally well-endowed.

Neither battle cry ‘inerrancy’ and ‘complementarianism’ can be discovered in the Bible by normal exegetical methods, at best in rudimentary form. They are applied to the Bible from the outside. The

assertion that the Bible is free from error ultimately leads to the absolute freedom of error from those who read the Bible in this way. This explains the ‘cherry picking’. For example, that the whole Bible is not the basis of the theological point of view, but only favourite verses are used, in this case such that confirm that the office of pastor can only be filled by a male. The testosterone level is raised to a new theological criterion, to decide who is in no way permitted to care for a church as pastor (a woman) and who alone possesses this privilege (a man). The SBC was born with the cardinal error of slavery. The decisions now being taken demonstrate a further fundamental aberration.



Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas

¹ Is today’s Southern Baptist Convention a ‘Baptist’ Body?, Erich Geldbach (editor): Crossing Baptist Boundaries. A Festschrift in Honor of Baptist Scholar William Henry Brackney on the Occasion of his Retirement, Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2019, 180–211.

² Although Mohler did not vote for Trump in 2016, he endorsed him in 2020. After all the scandals in Trump’s first four-year presidency this endorsement contradicts Mohler’s political, theological and ethical thinking.

³ On this matter, compare the detailed analysis by Mark Wingfield: ‘A primer on why Southern Baptists are Fighting over Women in Ministry Once Again’, in: Baptist News Global, 1st June 2023.

Prof. em. Dr. Erich Geldbach
zuletzt Professor für ökumenische Theologie
und Konfessionskunde an der Ruhr-Universität
Bochum

An open letter to all Southern Baptists, June 2, 2023

I'm writing this open letter for two reasons:

First, I'm deeply concerned about our denomination's 17 years of decline and the loss of a half million members just last year. [...] Second, many have asked me to explain why Saddleback Church is appealing an Executive Committee ruling. (Saddleback Church was excluded from the Southern Baptist Convention [SBC] because the congregation appointed a female pastor.)

The SBC is a mosaic of many kinds of Baptist "tribes" who came together to cooperate on the Great Commission. [...] From the start, our unity has always been based on a *common mission*, not a *common confession*. For the first 80 years of the SBC, we did not even have a confession because the founders were adamantly opposed to having one (www.sbcstand.com). They knew we never could get 100% of Baptists to agree 100% on 100% of every interpretation of Scripture.

That's why every version of the Baptist Faith and Message (BFM) has called itself a "consensus of opinion," and it repeatedly warns us it is not a creed to be used to enforce doctrinal uniformity or exclude members of our denominational family. [...] "Consensus" means "generally agreed on." It doesn't mean "universally or unanimously agreed on." For example, *none* of the messengers from our churches who voted against the changes made in the revised BFM 2000 have been kicked out, even though they disagreed with some of the statements. That's the Baptist way. We have never demanded every Baptist agree on every interpretation.

In fact, for 178 years, Southern Baptists have agreed to disagree on dozens and dozens of doctrinal differences so we could cooperate for the gospel.

The current ruling of the Executive Committee will open a Pandora's box of unintended consequences

unless we reject it. It will fundamentally destroy four historic SBC distinctives upon which the convention was organized by our founders.

It will:

1. Change the basis of our cooperation.
2. Change the basis of our identity.
3. Centralize power in the Executive Committee and take away autonomy from the churches.
4. Turn our confession into a creed, which Baptists always have opposed. We all grew up with the slogan "We have no book but the Bible, and we have no creed but Christ!"

[...] We want to cooperate on the Great Commission. All we're asking is that Southern Baptists act like Southern Baptists, as we have for 178 years, and continue to be a fellowship of independent churches who *agree to disagree* on many things in order to agree to fulfill our mission together.

This could be Southern Baptists' finest moment. It should be the moment where we say "no" to becoming a creedal denomination (like some Presbyterians who have 11 creeds and confessions) and instead reaffirm that it is the Great Commission that draws us together, not doctrinal uniformity in every jot and tittle.

This should be the moment where 47,000-plus autonomous, independent, freedom-loving churches say no to turning the Executive Committee into a theological magisterium that controls a perpetual inquisition of churches and makes the Executive Committee a centralized hierarchy that tells our congregations who to hire and what to call them.

This is a vote to affirm the God-given freedom of every Baptist to interpret Scripture as a Baptist – by saying no to those who deny that freedom. This is a vote to affirm *evangelism* by saying no to *factionalism*. This is a vote to refocus on the Great

Commission and say no to a Great Inquisition, which will waste enormous time, money and energy that we should be investing in revitalizing our churches.

This is a vote to continue being the denomination of Lottie Moon and Annie Armstrong – two strong, godly women who fearlessly spoke to men and challenged them everywhere about the priority of missions, and to say no to those who would have silenced these Southern Baptist women.

This is a vote to affirm our founding documents which insist that our unity is to be based on giving total submission to Christ in our deeds and not based on mental submission to man-made creeds. Hand me a Bible and I'll sign that as my authority. The Bible is Baptist's sole authority. [...]

For Southern Baptists, the independence and freedom of our churches has been a great strength. Our rejection of a centralized hierarchy has been a strength. And our rejection of an enforceable creed has been a strength. It was only in the last 17 years, as we moved away from these historic strengths, that our denomination started rapidly declining.

The SBC grew for 80 years (!) without any statement of faith because our unity never was based on a confession. Then we grew for 90 more years – with a consensus confession that never was used to exclude people on the basis of interpretation.

In our 178-year history, it has only been in the last eight years that the Baptist Faith and Message has been weaponized and turned into a creed for exclusion. That happened through a misguided amendment to the SBC Constitution passed in 2015. [...]

Southern Baptists know how to humbly correct wrongs. [...] In 1995, at the 150th annual meeting in Atlanta, there was another historic, Christ-honoring moment when Southern Baptists corrected a

grievous historic evil by adopting the "Resolution on Racial Reconciliation." [...] Since then, thousands of non-white churches have found a home in our convention. That growth resulted from a correction! We can do it again. [...]

Rick Warren
founding pastor of Saddleback Church and author of *The Purpose-Driven Life* and *The Purpose-Driven Church*.

► www.baptistnews.com/article/an-open-letter-to-all-southern-baptists/

Frieder Boller

Living Now, but Already in the Future – An Expression of Hope (Jeremiah 29:11)

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

That’s it! Peace instead of suffering, well-being instead of misery! A future instead of a blind alley! Hope instead of despair! Balsam for the soul, as we face the deep abysses continuing to open before us. Abysses of fear paralysing us, nameless misery, horrendous atrocities, hate utterly destroying peace, unpitiful opulence, devastating abuse of power, tragic failures, widespread homelessness, humiliating injustice, destruction of nature for profit – the list is endless. But then God Himself speaks! The verse above is sometimes paraphrased: *God has good intentions for you and has a wonderful plan for your life.* The words are often quoted as aptly characterising God’s will, as encouraging hope or even as a personal promise, but (as the paraphrase demonstrates) that would be to take it out of context.

The verse tells us that about 3000 Jews were deported by Nebuchadnezzar from Judea which he had conquered. Human spoils of war – first of all King Jehoiachin, his mother, his court officials and other leading men, then smiths and metal workers (Jeremiah 29:4), because they were useful for the Babylonian military production. As Psalm 137:1 tells us, they were sitting by the rivers of Babylon and weeping, when they remembered their lost home of Zion (Jerusalem).

That was not what we wanted

But these downcast and uprooted people expected something different from Jeremiah’s letter, which he wrote about 597 BC from Jerusalem, which had been destroyed.

What he wrote was felt to be a shameless imposition! It had to be repudiated (Jeremiah 29:24–32). They preferred to listen to other voices with different promises: *Don’t worry, it could be worse and will soon be over and gone. Nebuchadnezzar is finished in two years. So fight against his rule* (Jeremiah 27:28). Jeremiah calls these self-appointed prophets and erroneous diviners ‘liars’. He distinguishes these ‘spirits’ by their fruit (compare Matthew 7:16), by their talk of a hollow peace, by their politics of safety by forming alliances (Jeremiah 14:14–18, 27 and 29) and by their lack of integrity (Jeremiah 23:9–40; Micah 3:5–8). That is why he urges that his compatriots should accept Nebuchadnezzar’s rule and behave accordingly.

God’s message for those who had been deported to Babylon concludes that they should: *...build houses and live in them. Cultivate gardens and gather their crops. Marry and bear children. Seek the prosperity (shalom) of the city and pray for it. When things are prospering in the city, you too will prosper* (Jeremiah 29:5–7). *Let it be clearly stated: Your punishment is lifelong – 70 years – and you will die there. That is the period of time that Nebuchadnezzar and Babylonian rule will remain* (Jeremiah 27:7; 606–535 BC). Only then will the following generations return to Jerusalem.

Imposition and Encouragement

In the fate of the exiles the prophet minimises the importance of Nebuchadnezzar, because above all he sees God at work (Jeremiah 29:10; compare 27:1–7). Similarly, the return to Jerusalem in the future will be delayed until after the New Babylonian Kingdom has collapsed (Cyrus Edict 538 BC, Ezra 1:2–4; 6:3–5). God encourages the people to carry on living where they were. They were to seek *shalom* for the enemy nation among whom they lived and thus would experience *shalom* themselves. Was not that asking too much of them? Peace, well-being, prosperity, happiness, the very best for the city of their enemies – should that really be their concern? And even

pray for them? Rather than pray that they themselves might experience a more conducive situation, return home, or that they might be kept safe from the influence of other religions? That was certainly not forbidden, but neither was it a command, and the *lex talionis* (‘an eye for an eye’) is rejected according to the prophet. Jesus put it in a nutshell, when He said: *Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.* (Matthew 5:44)

This imposition is accompanied by encouragement: *I, the Lord, have plans to give you peace (shalom) and want to free you from your suffering. I will give you hope and a future.* This promise is a source of comfort, confidence, future hope. *I am the One-who-is-there-for-you, whose only concern is your well-being.* This encompasses everything that is good – Shalom, peace, happiness, welfare, justice, health, fulness. A gift of God, that makes people reliable, tough, strong, resilient.

I will give you hope and a future. That is no empty promise, but gives people the strength to live in a different way – to live in God’s way. Implied is not to take what is lost as their starting point, but instead to take what is promised as the basis for their lives. To live in the present now, but already from the future and its fulfilment. An amazing challenge! God’s concern is peace, not calamity. As a consequence, living from the future means ‘practising shalom’, seeking the best for the city and praying for it, even though one is living among ‘lesser mortals’ That is the message of great hope and responsibility which entails both imposition and encouragement.

A new epoch

Israel saw the time in exile as a period of transition that God had ordained. He had not changed in His intent to reforge an intact relationship between Himself and His people. It was merely the method that was unusual. The path begins here and now and where the people are living – in exile – so far away from the Temple and from all their rituals and cultic religion, which they believed would guarantee their security. *If you seek me with all your heart* (Jeremiah 29:13). That was the language familiar to them in services and pilgrimages. In Israel they spoke in this way when they set off for the Temple in Jerusalem. They were on the way to serve God with sacrifices and prayer, *to seek God with all their hearts.* That is, to turn to Him, to call upon Him, to seek His will. But now the situation is completely different: they will find Him here in Babylon (Jeremiah 29:13). Jeremiah was preaching nothing other than a new epoch in their

understanding of God and their religious practice. The sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, has become superfluous. But God has not disappeared or vanished into thin air; rather, He is close to them, just as if they were still in the Temple. They receive the written message (Jeremiah 29:12f.). The ‘One-who-is-there-for-you’ (compare Exodus 3:14) is there, wherever they might be. He is there, where they cannot imagine He could be or where they do not expect Him. He is close by them and always accessible. That is a concept they scarcely comprehend. This sudden insight opens the door to new ways of expressing their trust in God and of worship – one fruit of this insight is the synagogue.

Restored and re-established

Jeremiah’s hope appears in the form of imposition (in unexpected ways of meeting God) and encouragement. The holy presence of God can be found in the most unholy places, under the most unholy circumstances and conditions. God is also there where a person is in utter despair. There where life itself and one’s own failings are overwhelming. There, where one has no idea how to carry on living despite having lost everything. There, where a person is not free and is immobilised and trapped like a captive. Yes, even in a quite undesirable path through life a meaning can be discovered there, because there exists no ‘godless’ time or existence apart from God. In the most appalling circumstances the good news is that one can live ‘restored and re-established’ and enjoy ‘shalom’. For: *I, the Lord, have plans to make you prosper and free you from suffering. I plan to give you a hope and a future.* (Jeremiah 29:11). Live accordingly! Now!

Ins Gespräch kommen

- ▶ What makes me/us despair, lost, devastated, trapped, unfree?
- ▶ How do I/we experience God’s presence today?
- ▶ What criteria do I/we have to ‘distinguish the spirits’?
- ▶ What impositions (unexpected and difficult situations) in my/our life now make me/us want to ‘practise shalom’?
- ▶ Where does the encouragement touch my/our life today that God intends nothing but Shalom?
- ▶ Have you ever experienced an ‘unholy’ situation where the holy God was present?
 - I/We have (no) hope for ...! What encourages or inspires you, or has the opposite effect on you?

Frieder Boller
zuletzt: Pastor der Mennonitengemeinde
München,
freiberuflicher Berater und Trainer für
Konflikttransformation

Tom Yoder Neufeld

Jesus Christ – our Hope

The focus for this year’s Renewal 2028 was: Jesus Christ – our Hope.

I was privileged to among those here who were preaching yesterday. The main text I was given by Gerald was 1 Peter 1, with that memorable phrase in verse 3 that speaks of “a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

I am very grateful for having been given this opportunity, not least because it made me deeply grateful once again to be a part of the MWC. It made me grateful for our forebears who in the providence of God left the Scriptures to us.

Let me share a few thoughts that came to mind in preparing.

One is the sense of foreboding we share with those first recipients of 1 Peter in what is today Turkey. They are described as “exiles in the dispersion” suffering “various trials,” as the letter says.

It occurred to me that that describes very well the reality of many of our sisters and brothers in both MWC and WCRC.

► Covid has taken a big chunk out of our spirits. Philip Peacock, Cynthia’s nephew and member of the WCRC delegation, is not with us here. Arli is still recovering. I can speak from personal experience of spending my time in Indonesia in the hospital with covid, missing out on our assembly and much of the commission meeting. We feel under siege, one that seems not to end. We struggle to keep hoping for an end.

- War in Ukraine has literally dispersed millions of people, sending them into exile, both external and internal. That war, it seems, has brought an end to optimism. Military armaments are once again seen as the vehicle of salvation. The war is not only having an enormous impact on Europe, but it is bringing starvation to many of our sisters and brothers in vulnerable parts of the globe dependent on grain shipments, and on the money now being spent killing each other in the North. Francis Kamoto of our FLC has described the devastation on the sisters and brothers in Malawi, now compounded with Cyclone Freddy.
- The climate crisis has just been given extra emphasis by the UN scientific report on climate change about a week ago, which is ringing the alarm bell with great urgency. That crisis is bringing a loss of hope for many whose lives are just beginning. Our sisters and brothers are facing drought, storms, and floods, threatening their lives.

This and so much more weighs on my heart and mind, as I’m sure it does on all of ours, making hope intensely hard work. It is a stark reminder that hope has little if anything to do with optimism. It does, however, have everything to do with faith – with a faith that is sometimes joined at the hip with doubt.

A context of overwhelming challenges and great suffering is where hope is most threatened. That is precisely also where it is most at home. That was true when 1 Peter was written, and it is true today. It is tempting to “give up hope,” as we say, or to locate hope beyond this world. That, however, runs the risk of betraying the calling and the mission of the church we serve.



Evangelische Kirche in Zlan, Österreich

The Apostle Paul, who knew something about suffering and hope, speaks eloquently to this in his great letter to the Romans, in chapter 5:

Since **we** have been justified, made righteous (or rendered capable of acting justly), let **us** have peace with God through **our** Lord Jesus Christ through whom **we** have access to this grace in which we stand, and boast about God’s glorious hope. Not only that, but **we** also boast in midst afflictions and trials, knowing that affliction produces hope, and hope creates character, and character hope. And hope

does not disappoint **us**, because the love of God has been poured into **our** hearts through the holy spirit.

Do you notice the “we” in this passage?

- We** are made just.
- We** have peace with God.
- We** have access to grace.
- We** boast in the afflictions that result in hope.
- The love of God is poured into **our** hearts.

I learned from my study of Ephesians how important the first person plural is in Paul’s understanding. Because it always a “we”, the “our”, the “us” which the Spirit creates. It is always also a “we” of those who were and often still are strangers, sometimes even enemies.

- We stand in this grace *together*, in the language of 1 Peter.
- We are *together* being fashioned into a new human in the gracious womb of Christ, experiencing new birth *together*.
- We are built into God’s home *together*.
- We *together* are a contentious, reconciling, and reconciled communion, a *koinonia* – communion, fellowship, unity.
-

In the MWC and the WCRC we are *together* with those who suffer. They will teach us what true hope is, what it is to rejoice, midst suffering, what it is to have a character forged by affliction that is able to live in hope, a hope anchored in the resurrection of Jesus – an Easter hope. The Spirit uses them to pour the love of God into us.

One last comment. Those of you who preached yesterday will have noticed the striking phrase in 1 Peter 1:13: Therefore with guts of your minds braced for action, being totally sober, hope on the grace that the revelation of Jesus Christ brings you.

We are here to work. We’re here to be engaged. We’re here for action. This is hope at work; grace at work. We need engaged minds and tender receptive hearts and healthy bodies (we pray!) for the tasks ahead – to live our hope. Thanks be to the Spirit for pouring love into us for this task.

Ralf-Detlef Ossa

Micah 4:1–5 – The Hope of Peace

In his vision for peace the prophet Micah paints a picture of perfection before our eyes. The mountain, a symbol for God, towers over everything else. The nations are amazed: heaven touches earth. God is drawing people to Himself. They trust Him and learn to live their lives with Him. The transformation is entirely for the better. War and destruction are overcome. Every person finds his or her own place within society. Peace rules. I have tried to put these metaphors into this picture and just like Micah to link them together. We can see the future in the light of God, more exactly in the figure that cloaks the Mountain of God in its light. The veil is being lifted from above.

The signpost and the transparent figure of Christ are what first draw our attention. Christ seems to stand on the signpost and at the same time in front of the purple cross on the mountain. The various levels are blurred. Christ's arms and hands, his legs and feet project beyond the cross. It appears that He is leaning forward and treading on the pole with the signposts. He is moving towards us, naked, yet clothed in light.

In the painting I have interpreted the prophetic words of Micah (4:1–5) Christologically. Jesus is the person in whom heaven and earth meet and are joined together. Through Him God's peace enters into our world. Those who trust in His love seek fellowship with Him and He gives them clear guidance. The three signposts point in three different directions. That is how God's peace reaches out in our lives. The signposts in the picture show how the words of Jesus Christ point the way. Thus the people climbing the mountain are seeking to be near Him. Through their orientation on Jesus their life receives a solid foundation: they become Jesus' disciples.

As Christ moves from the mountain to tread on the signpost, so discipleship brings Christians back into day-to-day life. The top signpost points forward to us and addresses us in our real life situation.

What are the results of listening to God's word and taking it to heart? Micah 'paints' two pictures. In the first soldiers have laid aside their weapons and uniforms and are walking towards us. Trusting God means disarming. He does not use violence to achieve his aims. God's Spirit guides without using compulsion. He opens the possibilities of listening and understanding and enables us to encounter others without fear. The pictures overlap. In the second picture-frame we see a group of people eating, drinking and chatting under fig trees. Where God's Spirit is blowing and guiding, fellowship is created. That is where God's good gifts are shared and enjoyed by all.



Ralf-Detlef Ossa
Pastor der EFG Erfurt

Gyburg Beschnidt

The Mennonite Preacher Anslo and his Wife – Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn

This wonderful painting by Rembrandt hangs in the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin, and copies are sometimes found in the homes of Mennonites. Typically for Rembrandt's paintings he depicted the two persons in a very lively way. One can almost see the movement of the man's hand and how the woman sinks her head. The observer has the feeling that he or she has just walked into an interesting conversation and now wants to hear what is being said.

Who are these two people? Cornelis Claesz Anslo was a Dutch cloth merchant and shipowner who was born in Oslo (hence the name). He had three brothers and they had inherited a fortune from their father who had also been a cloth merchant. In 1611 he married Aeltje Schouten. In 1617 he was chosen as the preacher of the Waterland church in Amsterdam – about eight years after the first Baptist church had been founded by Thomas Helwys and John Smyth in conjunction with the Mennonite church. Their clothing reveals that they were Mennonites. It is simple but made of good quality fabric. Anslo's white collar is made of fur, but his wife's bonnet and her collar are unpretentious compared with what was usual at that time. Mennonites were no longer poor refugees as the Anabaptists had been 100 years previously, but they were still obliged to maintain a simple lifestyle, even when they could have afforded more luxurious things. Anslo had bought a new house in 1641 and this painting was presumably to be hung there. The rooms had to be correspondingly large and high, because the perspective is such that this painting, which was two metres high, had to be hung up somewhat higher. Cornelis Claesz Anslo was one of the richest merchants in Amsterdam.

The outstretched hand of the preacher dominates the middle of the painting. This points to the content of his words: the Bible on the table is higher than his hand and is brightly illuminated. For Anslo, the Mennonite preacher, the Bible was the sole authority. The Sermon on the Mount was the benchmark for his life. Not only do his clothing and his sermon demonstrate this, but also his business stance. He took over a home called *Anslohofje* that his father had founded in 1615–1616 for elderly and needy women. In 1642 he paid the debts of 60,000 Gulden, accrued by his brother-in-law in Gdansk (Danzig). He was under no compulsion to do that, but as a preacher he had no desire to remind others of their responsibility without living responsibly himself. He is believed to have written: *Although I am under no responsibility to pay for his debts I do not want to render my preaching fruitless or somehow ineffective through this situation.*

The Bible was not only the benchmark for his conversations but also for his conduct as a rich businessman. The Bible is the centre of attention on his desk.

Cornelis Claesz Anslo has turned his face to his wife Aeltje. She is listening to his sermon and this is the fulfilment of Matthew 18:20 where Jesus says: *Where two or three are gathered together in my name I am among them.*

Family is the place where faith must be practised first of all, where the Gospel is preached as in the church. A well-known Dutch Poet, Joost van den Vondel, wrote to Rembrandt: *If you want to see Anslo, you must hear him.* His wife Aeltje is listening to him in the painting, lowering her head and looking at the Bible. In this way we can recognise the sense and the effect of the sermon.



Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (1606–1669):
Der Mennonitenprediger Cornelis Claesz Anslo (1592–1646)
und seine Frau Aeltje Schouten
(176 cm x 210 cm)

Rembrandt painted a series of portraits of Mennonites, not just this one of the preacher and his wife. He must have had a good relationship with this section of the population. He also painted and drew many sketches on a number of Biblical subjects. Some people wonder if he belonged to the Mennonite church. This cannot be proven, but he certainly shared their love for Biblical stories, not just with his Mennonite clients but also with the Jews in Amsterdam. He hoped for a fellowship characterised by peace and love. What that meant to him can be seen in this picture.

Adrian Gray

Reviving Baptist History

A few years ago I moved to take up a job on the Nottinghamshire/Lincolnshire border of the East Midlands part of England – about 150 miles north of London. At the time I was already aware that this was where the ‘Mayflower’ Pilgrims came from – the small group who in 1620 set up a separatist colony in what was to become Massachusetts. However, it took me some time to understand that the same area gave birth to other notable parts of British Christian history.

An area of about 40 km around produced the architect of the English Reformation, Thomas Cranmer, several notable Protestant martyrs, the ‘Mayflower’ separatists, the first English Baptists, the Quakers, John and Charles Wesley, and the founder of the Salvation Army. Yet little was known about this locally and, of the Baptists, almost nothing at all. We began a project to raise awareness locally and also to attract visitors from further afield.

The story of the local Baptists has certainly been overshadowed by the ‘Mayflower’ story. Two separatist congregations formed about 1605 of which one, in Gainsborough, was led by John Smyth and eventually became Baptist after they moved to Amsterdam and came under Waterlander-Mennonite influence. Another congregation, at Scrooby, also went to the Netherlands

in 1608 as they combined forces for the journey, but subsequently followed Congregationalist lines which they took with them to America.

American Congregationalists have been active in celebrating their British heritage since the 1880s. They have funded churches and set up memorials at all the places linked to the ‘Pilgrims’ – sometimes in the wrong place, and quite often with the wrong information. Their version of the story entirely ignored the role of the group who became Baptist. For example, the main move to separation from the Church of England was instigated by John Smyth and the escape to Amsterdam for both groups was organised and funded by his closest follower, Thomas Helwys. Yet you could have visited Smyth’s birthplace at Sturton and seen only an information board about John Robinson, the man who became the leader of the other congregation when it moved to Leiden. Smyth and Robinson were both born in the same village – but only one was mentioned in the information!

Thomas Helwys was totally unknown in his homeland. Not only was he the second member of Smyth’s congregation to be baptised, but he wrote extensively about religious liberty and returned to England to start a Baptist congregation before dying in prison in about 1615. American Baptists have a publishing company called ‘Smyth & Helwys’ but in their homeland – nothing!

Our project, known as ‘Pilgrims & Prophets’, has managed to change this. We ran a series of events to commemorate Helwys and other local Baptists’ contribution to the issue of religious liberty, we have made use of the ‘Mayflower 400’ celebrations to ensure that Smyth and others were included in new historical information boards, and we deliver a variety of talks on Christian history to almost any organisation that will have us – this all helps with the ‘drip feed’ of making names recognised. We have also managed to set up a new Baptist history exhibition within a preserved local church at Gamston near Retford: the site happened to be a mile from where Helwys was born and is the place where an important Baptist leader of the 1700s was baptised. If you have access to the right information, you can manage to make things happen by building a story that people start to recognise.

We also have a plan to encourage ‘Baptist history’ tours. There has been a steady trickle of people from America who have visited – one of whom was overpowered with emotion on seeing a memorial from the 1500s with the name ‘Helwys’ on it. We have also done some YouTube videos including a guide to the best Baptist history sites in England and Wales.



We have also encouraged interest through social media. Facebook in Britain is full of groups with local history interest and these always welcome material about Baptists of the past – thus the story can reach often quite large non-Christian audiences quite easily.

Yet there remain challenges. It is a fact that the Methodists are far better at celebrating their history than Baptists, who in Britain at least seem almost entirely unaware of their own history. Only a few American Baptists, of whom there are many, have visited. But we have succeeded in making a lot more local people aware and the religious liberty issue has been especially attractive – and of course, religious liberty is one of the issues where the Mennonites influenced Smyth and Helwys. From Helwys it was developed by his friend John Murton, and from him reproduced in some seminal writings by Roger Williams of Rhode Island – whose father in law was an former friend of Smyth and Helwys. From Williams, it came to influence the US First Amendment; quite a powerful legacy for a few men from the small town of Gainsborough.



Mennonitisches Gemeindehaus

Adrian Gray
Historiker und Leiter von Pilgrims and
Prophets, Christian Heritage Tours



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We ask for your donation for the publication of further thematic booklets the traveling exhibition on the Anabaptist movement a documentary film on the Anabaptist movement conferences, seminars, online events materials for adult education celebrations in the anniversary year 2025, etc.

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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).



Geschäftsstelle „500 Jahre Täuferbewegung 2025 e.V.“
c/o Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen
Ludolfusstr. 2–4 · D-60487 Frankfurt/Main
info@taeuerbewegung2025.de
IBAN: DE18 5009 2100 0001 7351 01
www.taeuerbewegung2025.de