History and Renewal

in the Anabaptist/Mennonite

Tradition

by Abraham Friesen



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This book is dedicated to Irmgard Hörner-Braun, and to the memory of my beloved mother, Helene Braun-Friesen, and her favorite uncle, Abraham Braun.



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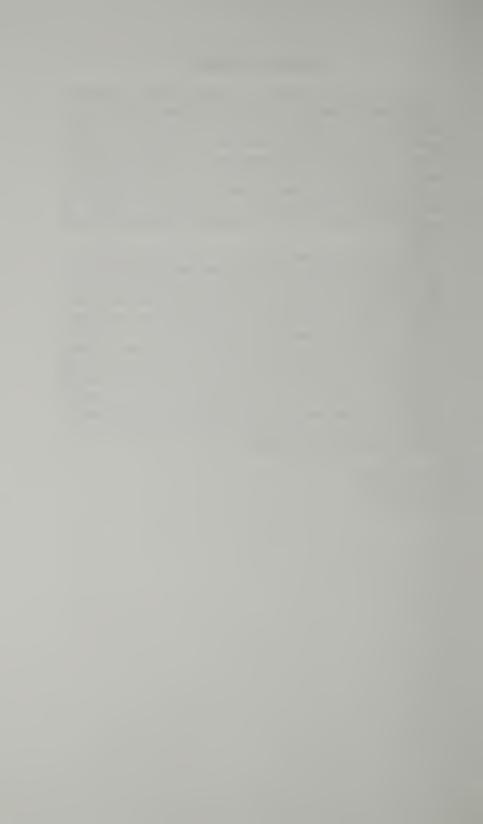


Series Preface

Cornelius H. Wedel, the first president of Bethel College from the beginning of classes in 1893 until his death in 1910, was an early scholar of Anabaptist-Mennonite studies. His four volume survey of Mennonite history, published from 1900 to 1904, helped to rescue Anabaptism and Mennonitism from their marginal and denigrated portrayal in standard works of church history. Wedel saw Anabaptism and Mennonitism as part of a tradition of Biblical faithfulness going back to the early church. He saw his people not in isolation but as a part of God's wider plan in world history.

The founders of Bethel College had a vision to promote the liberal arts through the cultivation of the intellect in all fields of knowledge and to serve the church through the preservation of Mennonite values and preparation for service. The 1994 college mission statement continues the commitment to "intellectual, cultural, and spiritual leadership for the church." The Cornelius H. Wedel Historical Series, initiated by the Mennonite Library and Archives at Bethel College as part of the college centennial celebration in 1987, hopes to further these goals by publishing research in Anabaptist and Mennonite history with a special emphasis on works with a connection to Bethel College, such as campus lecture series and projects based on the holdings of the Mennonite Library and Archives.

John D. Thiesen Series Editor



Author's Preface

Some historical visions have fared better than others in terms of their usefulness for spiritual renewal. Waldenses, Dante, Marsiglius of Padua, Petrarch, Faber Stapulensis and the great Dutch scholar Erasmus all alike appealed in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance to the vision of the "pure Apostolic Church." It was certainly also one, if not the only, guiding principle of the Anabaptist renewal in the sixteenth century.

The present study deals with Ludwig Keller's attempt in the late nineteenth century to use his concept of "Old Evangelical Brotherhoods" to bring spiritual renewal to European Mennonites. That attempt shattered on the internal tensions of his own historical vision, the split between Pietist South German and rationalist North German Mennonites, and the purposes Keller had in mind for his own renewal.

The destruction of Keller's historical vision, however, opened the way for new historical constructs, one of which was that of John Horsch, who was heavily influenced early in life by Keller's research. Horsch's vision came to be modified somewhat by his son-in-law Harold S. Bender, but it was, in some ways, still indebted to Keller's vision.

Bender's interpretation of sixteenth century Anabaptism, having reigned over the Mennonite historical landscape for fifty years, has today fallen into disarray, under attack from within and without the Church. Mennonites appear to have lost a center for their historical vision, and so some have grasped at the "polygenesis thesis," itself a negation of a focus. Those who wish for a new center can now pick and choose as they wish from a wide spectrum of "radical reformers" scattered across the historical landscape of sixteenth century Europe. And so, once more, the question arises: who speaks for the Anabaptists? Or is there only a cacophony of individual voices? And who determines who speaks for the Anabaptists? Insiders? Outsiders? Theologians? Historians? And by what methods do they do so? The case of Ludwig Keller, the historian and the outsider, is an interesting example of one attempt to use "his" historical vision for a particular kind of spiritual renewal.

This book grew out of my Menno Simons Lectures at Bethel College in October 1992. I wish to express my thanks to the Menno Simons Lectures Committee of Bethel College for their generous invitation to deliver the 1992 lecture series. Their invitation forced me to concentrate on a particular theme what had been only an idle curiosity in Keller's writings and correspondence. But in the process of elucidating the above theme I stumbled on an even greater theme in Keller's corpus,

which I hope to develop in a later study to be entitled Rewriting Reformation History: Ludwig Keller and the 19th Century Attack on Protestant Orthodoxy.

I wish also to thank John D. Thiesen, archivist of the Mennonite Library and Archives at Bethel College, for his time and unfailing courtesy, and for generously providing me with copies of Keller's letters when my time began to run out. In like manner I wish to thank Levi Miller and the Archives of the Mennonite Church in Goshen, Indiana, for allowing me to peruse the Horsch-Bender correspondence; and Paul Toews of the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Fresno, California, for allowing me to use the Center's microfilm copies of the *Friedensstimme* over several months. As always, I can blame all errors only on myself.

Part I

Autobiographical



Chapter 1

Becoming Anabaptist

On 22 November 1897, a twenty-four-year-old South Russian Mennonite student at the Baptist seminary in Hamburg-Horn, Germany, wrote to Ludwig Keller:

Forgive me [he said] for being so bold as to ask a favor of you. It is my goal, while in Germany, to learn as much as possible about the historical origins of the Mennonites. Since you have written so extensively on the Reformation era, I would very much like to be in possession of your books. But I am not in a position to purchase them. So I come to you with this request: Most honored Herr Keller, would you be so generous and kind as to send me the following of your books:

- 1. Die Reformation und die älteren Reformparteien; [The Reformation and the older Reform Parties]
- 2. Die Waldenser und die deutschen Bibelübersetzungen; [The Waldensians and the German Bible Translations]
- 3. Johann von Staupitz und die Anfänge der Reformation; [John Staupitz and the Beginnings of the Reformation]
- 4. Die Gegenreformation in Westfalen und am Niederrhein, 2 Teile;

[The Counter Reformation in Westphalia and the Lower Rhine, 2 vols.]

In the hope that my request will be granted, I remain,

Most respectfully yours, Seminarian, H. Braun.¹

At the top of the letter Keller wrote: "Starke Zumuthung!" [Most presumptuous]. Nevertheless, at the end of the letter Keller indicated that he had sent Heinrich Braun the following books:

1. Die Anfänge der Reformation und die Ketzerschulen [The Beginnings of the Reformation and the Heretical Schools]; 2. Die altevangelischen Gemeinden [The Old-Evangelical Brotherhoods]; 3. Die Böhmischen Brüder [The Bohemian Brethren].²

¹Heinrich Braun to Ludwig Keller, 22 November 1897. *Keller Correspondence*, Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas, MLA.MS.64. Hereafter cited simply as *Keller Correspondence*.

²Ibid.

At the time young Braun was a student at the Baptist seminary in Hamburg, August Rauschenbusch, the founder of the so-called "German Department" at the Baptist seminary in Rochester, New York, and father of the more famous Walter Rauschenbusch associated with the rise of the Social Gospel, was teaching church history there.3 On 7 March 1885, while still at Rochester, Rauschenbusch had been contacted by Keller regarding the possibility of translating Keller's Die Reformation und die älteren Reformparteien into English and editing the writings of Hans Denck. In a response dated 29 May, Rauschenbusch informed Keller that a translation of his book was unnecessary since interested Baptists were all of German extraction, and an edition of the writings of the semi-pelagian Denck would not be well received by the Baptists who were Augustinian in matters of the will.4 Shortly thereafter Rauschenbusch wrote a lengthy review of Keller's Die Reformation. In it he gently rejected Keller's attempt to connect the sixteenth century Anabaptists to the latter's "old-evangelical brotherhoods"-Waldenses in particular-and, on the basis of his own research carried on in Switzerland and Germany, stated:

It is certain that baptism upon confession of faith was first begun at Zurich at the end of January, 1525, when George Blaurock at one of the meetings arose from prayer and asked Conrad Grebel to baptize him with the true Christian baptism on a profession of his faith. Upon this, he was baptized by Grebel, and immediately afterward baptized Grebel and all the rest, after which Blaurock administered to them the Lord's Supper.

It is the clear result of all my investigations on this subject that all the so-called rebaptisms performed on a profession of personal faith in Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands during the whole of the 16th century can be traced back to this first baptism in Zurich.⁵

August Rauschenbusch had already presented these findings at a conference of some 200 Baptist ministers at the University of

³On August Rauschenbusch and Keller, see my "Baptist Interpretations of Anabaptist History," in Paul Toews, ed., Mennonites and Baptists: A Continuing Conversation (Fresno: Center for MB Studies, 1993), Chapter II.

⁴August Rauschenbusch to Keller, 29 May 1885. Keller Correspondence.

⁵A copy of the review was sent to the author by Dr. Georgia Cohen, Associate Director of Public Services for the Ambrose Swasey Library, Rochester, New York.

Chicago some fifteen years earlier—to the great consternation of the audience, for Baptists almost universally believed the Baptist church to reach back in a kind of apostolic succession all the way to John the Baptist himself! In spite of these differences with Keller, Rauschenbusch nevertheless visited Keller in Münster on several occasions, as his son was also to do later.

There can be little doubt that Heinrich Braun attended Rauschenbusch's church history lectures at the Hamburg seminary. Indeed, these lectures—with their undoubted discussion of Keller's thesis—may have inspired Braun to write Keller. At the same time, it may be assumed that Heinrich Braun—at least on occasion—must also have attended the Mennonite church in Hamburg-Altona pastored by Hinrich van der Smissen, who doubled as editor of the Mennonitische Blätter in whose pages the debate over Keller's research raged in the 1890s.

Heinrich Braun returned to Russia in June of 1899, having completed the four year course at the Baptist seminary. On 7 October he married Maria Peters, who died within a few years. On 27 February 1902, he married her sister, Helene, and, apparently, considerable wealth. In 1904 Braun purchased the Halbstadt print shop which, in 1909, was reorganized into the Raduga [rainbow] Press with Braun as principal shareholder. Here he published the Friedensstimme, the Liederperlen and other collections of songs, and, in 1911, Peter Martin Friesen's Die altevangelische Mennonitische Brüderschaft in Rußland (1789-1910).6 Is there a connection between this title and Heinrich Braun's contacts with Keller's works?⁷ He did receive Keller's famous 1887 Berlin address-Die altevangelischen Gemeinden-in which Keller developed his thesis in succinct fashion. But he must also have read—and perhaps purchased—Keller's other books as well. Did he not accept Rauschenbusch's corrections and the at times devastating criticisms of Keller carried in the Mennonitische Blätter? It would appear not, for in a March 1910 essay in the Friedensstimme entitled: "Mennoniten oder Baptisten?" Braun

⁶P. M. Friesen, Die alt-evangelische Brüderschaft in Rußland (1789-1910), (Halbstadt, Taurien, Verlagsgesellschaft "Raduga," 1911).

⁷As late as 1909, H. J. Braun listed Keller's Geschichte der Wiedertäufer und ihres Reiches zu Münster in a long list of books available in his Halbstadt bookstore, singling it out for high praise.

cited J. M. Cramp's Geschichte der Baptisten,8 a classic exposition of the Baptist apostolic succession theory,9 and somewhat later stated: "are we not, after all, all descendants of the pre-Reformation and Reformation 'Doopsgezinde' ["Wiedertäufer"-"Anabaptisten"]"!10 It is interesting in the above connection, however, that Braun nowhere cites any of Keller's writings on the subject of the "pre-Reformation 'Doopsgezinde'" but that he did recommend the latter's book on the Münster Anabaptists highly. Perhaps he tried to reconcile Cramp and Rauschenbusch by having it both ways: by arguing for the autochthonous origin of the Swiss Anabaptists but also holding to the baptismal apostolic succession theory when it came to Menno Simons and the Dutch Anabaptists. And since he must have been aware of the devastating attacks on Keller, he simply avoided citing him at all. Whatever the case, whereas P. M. Friesen's title is vintage Keller and the first chapter, which deals with the origin of the Mennonite movement in the Netherlands, repeats the origins" theory-Braun's "pre-Reformation 'Doopsgezinde'"—there is no mention of Keller's name either. From Braun's notebook¹¹ we know that he regarded Friesen's history as the greatest achievement of his press, and he must surely have discussed Keller's and the Baptists' theories with him. Perhaps P. M. Friesen omitted Keller's name for the same reason that Braun did. In any case, Keller's name does not appear in Friesen's history though he does go back to the theory as propounded by Thielemann van Braght and the Dutch Mennonites, and the appropriation of this theory by Reiswitz and Wadzeck who published their Beiträge zur Kenntnis der Mennoniten-Gemeinden in Europa und Amerika [Contributions to the Knowledge of the Mennonite Churches in Europe and Americal in 1821.12

⁸This is a German translation of J. M. Cramp's Baptist History from the Foundation of the Christian Church to the Close of the Eighteenth Century, translated and published in Hamburg, Germany, 1873.

See my "Baptist Interpretations of Anabaptist History."

¹⁰H. J. Braun, "Mennoniten oder Baptisten," Friedensstimme, VIII, #35 (March, 1910), p. 4.

¹¹A copy was given to me by my mother's cousin, Irmgard Hörner-Braun, of Mainz, Germany. She is the daughter of Abraham Braun.

¹²See my "P. M. Friesen the Historian," in Abraham Friesen, ed., P. M. Friesen and his History: Understanding Mennonite Brethren Beginnings (Fresno: Center for MB Studies, 1979), pp. 81-100. John B. Toews, "The Russian Mennonite Intellect of the Nineteenth Century," ibid., p. 17, reports that P. M. Friesen, Cornelius B. Unruh and Jacob J. Braeul went to study in Switzerland in 1870. But he does not

Aside from his publication ventures, Heinrich Braun was heavily involved in the affairs of missions,¹³ the leadership of the MB Church in Halbstadt,¹⁴ and repeatedly represented the Halbstadt Mennonites to the new Russian government formed in the wake of the 1906 Revolution.¹⁵ On at least two occasions he addressed questions of the historical origins of the MB Church in the pages of the *Friedensstimme*: in March of 1910 he addressed the question of Baptist influence in the early MB Church;¹⁶ and in May of 1914, he addressed the question of "rebaptism" within the MB Church.¹⁷ Both essays demonstrate a wide reading in Anabaptist, Mennonite and Baptist history as well as a well-developed historical sense. But Braun was too much the entrepreneur to devote himself fully to such a sedentary profession.

Heinrich Braun had three older brothers: John, born in 1862; Jacob, born in 1864; and Isaac, born in 1871. He also had two younger brothers: Peter, born in 1880, an outstanding educator among the Russian Mennonites; and Abraham, born in 1882, long time pastor and churchman among the German Mennonites. Peter graduated from the *Zentralschule* in May of 1897 and from the Teacher Training Institute in Halbstadt in 1899. In the fall of the same year he became the teacher in the village of Alexanderwohl, where he had been born and raised, following in the footsteps of a beloved teacher, B. K. Fast. Here he remained

tell us at what school. Was it St. Chrischona, the Basel Missionsschule, or some other institution? Knowing the school would help us to understand their theological leanings. And 1870 is remarkably soon after the 1860 creation of the Mennonite Brethren Church.

¹³See the *Friedensstimme*, VI, #12 (22 March, 1908), pp. 178-179; X, #81 (17 September, 1912), p. 1.

¹⁴Braun repeatedly signed his reports with "Prediger der Mol. Menn. Brüdergemeinde." He served on school boards, mission boards, the Forestry Service, etc., etc., See, e.g., Friedensstimme, X, #22 (7 March, 1912), p. 2.

¹⁵For example, "Berichterstattung der in Glaubenssachen nach St. Petersburg abgeordneten Gemeindevertreter," *Friedensstimme*, VIII, #22 (17 March, 1910), pp. 3-6.

¹⁶H. J. Braun, "Mennoniten oder Baptisten," Friedensstimme, VIII, #35 (5 May, 1910), pp. 3-5.

¹⁷H. J. Braun, ""Zur Mennonitenfrage.' An den Herrn Interessenten in Nr. 49 der 'Bürger-Zeitung'," Friedensstimme, XII, #42 (31 May, 1914), pp. 2-5.

¹⁸Jacob was the father of Peter Braun, author of Denn Er wird meinen Fuss aus der Schlinge Ziehen (Berlin-Grunewald: F. A. Herbig, 1963) and Nostra Pulchra oder das Glück von Polen (Düsseldorf: Eugen Diedrichs, 1965).

¹⁹See especially Benjamin H. Unruh, "Peter J. Braun," *Mennonitisches Jahrbuch* (1952), pp. 29-32. I am grateful to James Urry for this reference.

for five years, taking the summer vacation of 1902 to go on a trip to Siberia where his parents had moved in 1901. He described the trip in an essay that demonstrated a literary flair rather remarkable in a person of his cultural background. After five years of teaching in Alexanderwohl, Peter Braun returned to Siberia to be near his parents and study at the Pedagogical Institute in Tomsk. No sooner had he arrived there, however, than the institute was permanently closed. Too late to apply elsewhere, he remained in Siberia where he met and married Maria Friesen and then entered the Pedagogical Institute in St. Petersburg in the fall of 1905. Upon completion of his studies in St. Petersburg, Braun accepted a position in the Zentralschule in Halbstadt where he remained until his departure for Germany in 1922.

To a limited extent one can follow Peter Braun's career as educator in the pages of the *Friedensstimme*. There one finds, as early as 1908, the first of his book reviews covering a variety of topics, from literature,²² to pedagogy,²³ to science,²⁴ and history.²⁵ Pedagogy and history, however, were his passion. He reported on new books and journals dealing with the former,²⁶ attended workshops and seminars on the most recent methods,²⁷ and sought untiringly to improve his own performance in the classroom, attempting to lead the entire faculty in the same

²⁰Peter J. Braun, *Meine Ferienreise im Sommer 1902* (manuscript). A copy was given the author by Irmgard Hörner-Braun. See also Unruh, "Peter J. Braun," p. 30: "Er hatte sofort in den drei Zentralschul- und in den zwei pädagogischen Spezialklassen Unterricht zu erteilen, in den verschiedensten Fächern, was seine Zeit vollauf in Anspruch nahm und ihn zwang, auf literarische Betätigung, zu der es ihn schon frühe drängte, bis auf weiteres zu verzichten."

²¹Unruh, "Peter J. Braun," p. 30. One gets a sense of the close ties in the Braun family, and especially of Peter to his parents, from the latter's essay, "Meine Heimat," *Der Bote* (27 December, 1928), pp. 1-2.

²²Friedensstimme, VI #44 (1 November, 1908), p. 8.

²³"Ein neues pädagogisches Blatt," Friedensstimme, IX, #79 (7 November, 1911), p. 7; "Etwas über den Artikel 'Unsere Dorfschulen der Zukunft'," Friedensstimme, X, #22 (7 March, 1912), pp. 2-3.

²⁴ "Die Anschauungsmittel im naturkundlichen Unterricht," Friedensstimme, VIII, #67 (28 August, 1910), pp. 3-5.

²⁵"P. M. Friesen, Die Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Brüderschaft in Rußland (1789-1910) im Rahmen der mennonitischen Gesamtgeschichte," *Friedensstimme*, X, #1 (4 January, 1912), pp. 5-7.

²⁶See footnote #23 above.

²⁷P. J. Braun, "Lehrerkurse in Halbstadt," *Friedensstimme*, XI, #31 (20 April, 1913), pp. 9-10.

direction.²⁸ But it was history, and especially Mennonite history that attracted him. In his review of J. Zenian's *Denn meine Augen haben deinen Heiland gesehen* [For Mine Eyes have seen Your Lord] he called on Mennonites to begin mining Mennonite history for literary topics,²⁹ and in his 1912 essay, "Die Friedensbewegung," he took pride in the fact that "the first protest against slavery known to history came from a small group of Mennonites." In his review of P. M. Friesen's history, Braun remarked: "It would be eminently desirable that all of the historical material gathered and utilized by Friesen be carefully preserved, for example in a yet to be established Mennonite Museum and Archive. If we had such an institution, then much could be preserved for the use and benefit of our posterity which is now being irretrievably lost."³¹

In June of 1917, at a meeting of the General Conference of Mennonite Churches in Russia, Peter Braun addressed the conference on the topic of a Mennonite archive in a speech entitled: "The Necessity and Significance of a Mennonite Archive." Once again he advocated the establishment of a Mennonite archive. As so often in Mennonite circles, the man with the vision is commissioned to do the job, and so Peter Braun was appointed Mennonite archivist and given a six-man committee to assist him. As archivists are wont to do, Braun immediately appealed to his Mennonite constituency for relevant materials: "decisions and circulars of the administration, of school boards and others, Mennonite submissions to the government, old letters [especially of influential persons], diaries, various reports and other memoranda, old wedding and funeral invitations, contracts, agreements and wills, articles about Mennonites in foreign and Russian journals, newspaper articles about Mennonites, etc., etc., in short everything that has significance at all for the history of the Mennonites." The work of collecting had to be done hastily and as privately as possible,

²⁸P. J. Braun, "So ist es Recht," *Friedensstimme*, VI, #8 (23 February, 1908), pp. 117-118; "Protokoll der ersten Konferenz der Lehrer der deutschen Zentralschule des Odessaer Lehrbezirks in Chortitza am 11. u. 12. August 1909," *Friedensstimme*, VII, #36 (5 September, 1909), pp. 6-7.

²⁹Friedensstimme, VIII, #78 (6 October, 1910), p. 7.

³⁰P. J. Braun, "Die Friedensbewegung," Friedensstimme, X, #75 (22 September, 1912), pp. 5-6.

³¹See footnote #25 above.

³²Quoted by Harvey L. Dyck, "Odyssey to Odessa. Fresh Sources and Perspectives in Russian Mennonite Studies," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, LXV, #4 (October, 1991), p. 442.

for these were perilous times in Russia. At first housed in a room of the Halbstädter Kreditgesellschaft, the archive was soon moved to Braun's own house, and then to the attic of a building strangers were not expected to frequent. Although Braun himself left for Germany in 1923, the archive peregrinated from hiding place to hiding place until, in 1929, it disappeared from sight and was feared lost forever. Just a few years ago, however, two Canadian scholars, Harvey L. Dyck of the University of Toronto, and George K. Epp, then President of Menno Simons College in Winnipeg, nearly simultaneously and independently of one another, discovered the collection intact in the State Archives of the Odessa region. In Oberursel, Taunus, Germany, where the Russian Mennonite teacher and archivist settled in 1923, Braun proceeded to write two separate manuscripts on the Russian Mennonite educational system, only to have them tragically destroyed in a fire before they could be published. What we have from him on the topic is one major essay in the 1929 issue of the Mennonite Quarterly Review and a number of smaller pieces scattered in Mennonite periodicals. Peter's brother Heinrich had earlier sought to learn everything he could about the origins of the Mennonites; Peter himself did much to preserve Russian Mennonite documents and history for posterity.

By the time these two brothers arrived in Germany, their youngest brother, Abraham, had already been there since October 1908. He apparently came to prepare himself for missionary service, studying theology³³ and then spending some time at the German Institute for Medical Missionaries in Tübingen [Deutsches Institut für ärztliche Mission]. In the 5 January 1911 issue of the Friedensstimme he published a report on the work of the institute, indicating that it not only trained medical doctors but sought to prepare all missionaries at least in a rudimentary way to deal with medical problems on the mission field.³⁴ In 1912, however, Abraham Braun took a position as secretary and part-time instructor at the Allianz Bibelschule in Berlin. He described this school, in a 1913 essay in the Friedensstimme, as a "mission school, in the first instance [to train missionaries] for Russia."³⁵ In 1913 there were five Russian Mennonites studying there, he reported. He described the school's two year curriculum and

³³From Abraham Braun's 'Lebenslauf,' Der Mennonite (December, 1970).

³⁴Abraham Braun, "Deutsches Institut für ärztliche Mission in Tübingen," Friedensstimme, XI, #1 (5 January, 1911), pp. 5-6.

³⁵A. Braun, "Die Bibelschule in Berlin," Friedensstimme, XI, #73 (18 September, 1913), p. 2.

defended his remaining in Germany, at this school, against the expressed desire of a certain "brother" that he return to Russia, with the following words: "I see the matter from another perspective; for the work, which I am privileged to perform here, is a service for our fatherland; for my work consists primarily to instruct the Russian brethren in German so that they may participate fully in the [German] instruction and prepare themselves for the Lord's work in Russia."³⁶

The school was forced to close in 1915 in the wake of World War I, however, and so Abraham Braun taught at a trade school in Berlin for the next two years. From 1918 to 1919 he stayed with friends in Rheinpfalz, recuperating from an illness, but in 1920 he took over the direction of the *Deutsche Mennoniten Hilfe*—a German Mennonite relief agency directed primarily to helping the Mennonites in Russia—until he was appointed pastor in Ibersheim-Eppstein-Ludwigshafen in 1928. To recount here all the various offices he held in German Mennonite Church organizations would be to list nearly every one that existed. And he served most of these in leadership roles. When he died in 1970, the Dutch *Evangelie Verbreiding* called him "Eurpees Doopsgezind bruggebouwer"—Europe's Mennonite bridge builder.

Three brothers: entrepreneur and Mennonite statesman; historian-teacher-archivist; theologian and churchman—all from a family that had never produced anything but farmers; yet all committed to the Mennonites—past, present, and future. What, or who, had inspired them?

On 19 September 1957, a young Canadian Mennonite undergraduate student at the University of Manitoba set sail from Montreal for Liverpool aboard the *Empress of France*. Headed for the University of Göttingen on a German Government Exchange Fellowship, he spent several days in London, crossed the Channel at night to Hook of Holland and set out by train to the medieval city of Göttingen on whose coat of arms are still emblazoned the words: "Stadtluft macht frei!" [City air is liberating!] A history and German literature student, the young man also fancied himself a singer—he had already been a three-time "all star" on the university volleyball team. [Had his father and the church known of the latter he would probably have been banned from the MB Church!] At the time, music still played a major role in his life and he hoped to spend part of

³⁶ Ibid., p. 3.

each week studying voice at the Detmold Music Academy not far removed from Göttingen. But that was not to be.

It was with rather mixed emotions that this young man arrived in Germany, for he had begun school shortly after the outbreak of World War II. During the war years there was a great deal of anti-German sentiment in Canada. It reached even into the small community where he lived in Southern Manitoba. At home his parents spoke German with the children; at church the services were held in German. Ignorant of the Dutch origins of his ancestry, the youngster was defenseless against the racial aspersions cast against Germans by his classmates. This animosity affected the way he saw his parents, his church, and himself. If that was not bad enough, he had on occasion to suffer the embarrassment of having his father come to school just before Christmas to physically remove him from the practice sessions for the Christmas pageant before teacher and classmates alike. Even later on, when he played the leading role in one of the Mennonite Brethren Collegiate's annual plays—which was in the German language that should have hallowed it-and still later sang the solo parts in concerts, his father refused to attend. His mother, however, would not be denied her place in the audience. Had it not been for her, who knows what might have become of him. Mennonite mothers have at times played very important roles to save their sons from their fathers.

All of these emotions lay dormant—suppressed, festering, because unresolved. Much later, after reading Erik Erikson, he began to realize that he, too, had been undergoing an extended identity crisis; a normal identity crisis exacerbated by the ambivalent feelings of a child to his immigrant parents, wishing to belong to the mainstream yet painfully aware of the parents' conscious isolation from it; sharing the antipathy of all things German with his classmates in school yet compelled by circumstances to speak German at home and in church. And then to study German literature at the university, and win a fellowship to Germany—what irony! Thus he arrived in Göttingen around 10 September. He had about one month until classes were to begin at the university.

Before the young man left Canada, his mother had entrusted him with the address of her uncle. Should he get lonesome, there was family he could visit. Somewhere the young man had read that this great uncle had delivered the conference sermon at the 1957 Mennonite World Conference in Karlsruhe—he was 75 years of age at the time. "Too Mennonite for me," the young man thought at the time; and for a Mennonite, far too old! In his

experience, any Mennonite over forty was old, dogmatic, and set in his ways-clearly uninteresting and irrelevant. Even if this great uncle had delivered the conference sermon, nobody but old folks would attend anything as tedious as a Mennonite World Conference. But loneliness can be a great motivator, and so nearly before he knew it he had purchased a train ticket to Nierstein am Rhein-the home of some of Germany's best white wines-where the great uncle lived. He rationalized the trip by convincing himself that Nierstein was, after all, on the beautiful Rhine River and not far from Heidelberg-even country bumpkins from Southern Manitoba had heard of Heidelberg! And so he set off, arriving in the little town around nine in the evening unannounced! [Country bumpkins from Southern Manitoba had not been taught "old world" manners! Or any manners for that matter!] As he stepped from the train the pungent odor of newly pressed wine grapes, which pervaded the moist night air, invaded his tender Mennonite nostrils. He enquired directions from a native at the station-he had remembered to bring the address with him—and set out on foot, somewhat unsteadily, to locate it.

It was well after nine o'clock when he knocked on the door. He heard the sound of scurrying feet within and a woman's voice saying: "Wer kommt denn so spät?" [Who comes this late?] Who indeed! In a moment the door opened and a woman in her early thirties peered at the stranger in the dimly lit hallway. A momentary flash of recognition seemed to flit across her face; it faded, however, upon closer scrutiny of the young Canadian at the door. As she was to tell him later, she had at first thought to recognize her brother, Christian, in him, returning unannounced from his studies in the United States. But he was not "Christian"-hardly even Mennonite! Yet the quickly fading momentary recognition told him he was at the correct address and with members of his extended family. He was invited in, and for the next several hours explained to the venerable old gentleman and his daughter where he stood in the "Braun" scheme of things. I was that country bumpkin from Southern Manitoba and the old gentleman was my great uncle, Abraham Braun. And to my amazement a relationship was established that night between us that I can only describe as remarkable. A portrait of that same Abraham Braun-painted for my mother by an uncle of mine and intended for me-still hangs in my study at home. It has pride of place alongside portraits of Erasmus, Luther and Menno Simons.

During the course of nearly a month that I spent in Nierstein, I had numerous opportunities to discourse at length with my great uncle about Mennonite and related matters. I had never been able to do that with my father. There was an openness about him, a loving acceptance of me with my unresolved tensions I had not encountered before in Mennonite circles. While he most assuredly possessed the courage of his convictions, he nevertheless had a spirit of uncommon breadth. He became to me the grandfather I had never known. Every young Mennonite should be so fortunate.

One day, while discussing some aspect of Mennonite faith and life, he looked me squarely in the eyes and said: "Young man, some day you too will have to do something for the brotherhood." But I laughed in response; the "brotherhood" held little meaning for me at the time. By now he was well aware of my attitude, so he responded: "You know, if you intend to throw the entire Mennonite heritage overboard, you should at least do yourself the favor of trying to find out what it is you are rejecting. For what you have encountered as 'Mennonite' may not be the authentic product." Little did I realize at the time that I was no match for him in the matter of moral authority on the issue. He had served a lifetime in the Mennonite cause; his two older brothers had served the same cause, its people and their history. Who was I to laugh in the face of such commitment?

"It is my goal," wrote Heinrich Braun to Ludwig Keller in 1897, "while here in Germany, to learn as much as possible about our historical origins." I had not come to Germany for that purpose, but my great uncle's remarks to me—the would-be historian—cut me to the quick on that occasion. It was at that point that I began to contemplate becoming a Reformation historian. For the time being, however, I continued on the path I had chosen before coming to Germany. I spent the year studying German literature and modern and medieval European history, but completed an M.A. in Canadian history on returning to the University of Manitoba. But my heart and mind were no longer in it.

It was during the three years that I taught at the Mennonite Brethren Collegiate in Winnipeg, where I was required to teach Mennonite history to largely uninterested students, that I first really began to come to grips with my Anabaptist heritage. And I believe my increasing enthusiasm for the subject must have rubbed off on at least some of my students. It was during those years that I determined to continue my education, but now in the field of Renaissance and Reformation history. As Providence

would have it, I came to study at Stanford University under Lewis W. Spitz, a Lutheran and student of the relationship of Renaissance Humanism to the Reformation. At first I intended to write a dissertation on "Erasmus and the Anabaptists," but other topics overtook me and I wrote, instead, on the Marxist interpretation of the Reformation.

The years at Stanford were an eye opener for me. I had come there filled with suspicion of a Luther who had denounced the Anabaptists, written vicious tracts against the peasants and attacked the Jews. As an "outsider" myself, I related to the outsiders of the sixteenth century. But under the impact of a man who lived and breathed Luther, I could hardly escape exposing myself to the Reformer's theology. Coming from a Mennonite tradition that was filled with "do's" and "don'ts," one can imagine the liberation I experienced as I read and studied Luther's writings. I could relate with his struggle against good works, having prayed, as a child, that 'good' Mennonite prayer: "Lieber Heiland, mach mich fromm, daß ich in den Himmel komm" ["Dear Savior, make me pious [good], that I may get to heaven."]. If only I did this or that, God would surely be gracious to me-nearly the theology of the Nominalists Luther studied, who wrote: "Si homo facit, quod in se est, deus dat gratiam" ["If man does what is in him, God will grant him grace"]. Under these circumstances, Luther's theology of the "Righteousness of God" as imputed to the person whose faith was placed in Christ, his "theology of the cross" as presented in the Heidelberg Disputation, but especially his 'Freedom of a Christian Man" of 1520 with its argument that the Christian was simul justus et peccator-totally justified while still a sinner-was to me a tremendously liberating message.

For some time I did not seek to integrate this perspective into my Mennonite theology—did I even have one? Although I turned my attention from time to time to Anabaptist and related topics, I did not have occasion really to immerse myself in Anabaptist literature. The pressure of "publish or perish" at the University of California, where I had begun to work in the fall of 1967, allowed little time for extended reflection, and the city of Santa Barbara, where my campus was located, had no Mennonite church. We therefore joined—or at least attended—a nondenominational church where I did not have to be confronted by Mennonite thinking.

Shortly after being granted tenure in 1974, I received a call one day from J. B. Toews of Fresno, California, asking whether I would be willing to help with the translation of P. M. Friesen's

history. At the time I hardly knew who P. M. Friesen was-for all I knew, he could have been a relative of mine who never got out of bed until the afternoon. I had some of those! But then I recalled my great uncle's admonition and consented. When I discovered at what stage the process was that I had been asked to join, I must say that I had second thoughts. Some thirty or so separate individuals had been assigned different portions of the text to translate. For some reason, however, the person assigned the first hundred pages had not been able to fulfill his task and so I was asked to translate that section before we-as a committee of four-were to evaluate the entire translation. Upon completion of my assignment, we-J. B. Toews, Peter J. Klassen, Harry Loewen and myself-met in Fresno. The committee wished to sample the various translations to see how much work still needed to be done. It began at the beginning with the portion I had translated. One page was read, two pages, three—no one had a quibble with any part of the translation. We proceeded to the second part; it was a different story. Indeed, with the exception of some three sections-in all less than a hundred pages of the over 1,000 translated—all had to be redone. And I was commissioned by the other members to retranslate the sections in question. Now I knew I was back in Mennonite company! But was it Anabaptist?

As I worked on that retranslation—one of the most frustrating undertakings I have ever been involved in because it is more difficult to work from a bad translation than from an untranslated text—I began to notice an argument propounded by Friesen that caught my attention. He expressed it in the following words:

Evangelical Pietism in its wholesome essence has, like renewal, a harmonious effect on Mennonitism, just as Mennonitism is the critique and complement of Lutheranism. During the earliest period, both seemed to be mutually exclusive. In reality, together they form a whole when balanced in an apostolic arrangement. And as such a unified balance, and therefore purified whole, they were to lead the largely deteriorated and impoverished Christianity of the West during the Middle Ages, back to its source. In the

meantime, they long regarded it as their duty to condemn one another absolutely.³⁷

Somewhat later Friesen continued:

Just as we placed Menno Simons' "Withdrawal from the Catholic Church," the best of his works, at the beginning of our story of the Mennonites, so we place Wüst's inaugural sermon at the beginning of the section of the MB Church. Next to God's Word and His Spirit, Menno and Wüst have actually made the MB Church what it is and will be in the Church of Christ. If the joyous doctrine of justification is overly prominent in Wüst's Christian teaching, it counterbalances Menno's serious, somewhat melancholy theology, which is, however, based on justifying grace, and in their amalgamation, the two streams achieve an apostolic balance.³⁸

When I first read these passages I thought P. M. Friesen had gone just a little too far! I had also worshipped in an Evangelical church for some eight or nine years, leaving me with the distinct impression that there was little relationship between Evangelical theology and life or structure of the church. Christianity appeared largely creedal and intellectual, private and not at all social. Any mention of a "Social Gospel," or gospel that was to have a social impact, was taboo. Attenders had little loyalty to the church; what loyalty there was was to the pastor or to themselves. When crises entered the church as they inevitably did, people simply departed. Problems remained unresolved; simply left behind. Aside from the Reformers' concept of the "true," or "spiritual" church, there was hardly any thought given to what Christ's church on earth was to be. Adult and infant baptism, too, were practiced simultaneously with little or no awareness of the different concepts of the church each represented. As I began to reflect more and more on these matters, it became clear to me what had happened: while most churches had begun as territorial churches in the age of the Reformation, the separation of church and state in the United

³⁷P. M. Friesen, The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910), J. B. Toews, Abraham Friesen, Peter J. Klassen and Harry Loewen, Translation and Editorial Committee (Winnipeg: The Christian Press, 1978), p. 212.
³⁶Ibid

States had forced these territorial churches to become, in effect, voluntary or "free churches." Their theologies, however, had remained the theology of the territorial churches. The inevitable result was theological confusion.

In this context, certain passages from Thomas More's Utopia and Desiderius Erasmus' Enchiridion took on more and more significance for me. Regarding the Catholic Church, Thomas More wrote in the Utopia: "But preachers, who are indeed clever men . . . seeing that men will not fit their ways to Christ's pattern, have fitted his teaching to human customs, to get agreement somehow or other."39 And Erasmus wrote in his Enchiridion: 'Too many of our theologians and teachers only make matters worse by adapting the words of Scripture to the justification of their own crimes. In truth Scripture should be a source of that norm of behavior that can correct them."40 What these two Christian Humanists were saying was that priests changed Christian doctrine to justify whatever society did. Karl Marx and Ludwig Feuerbach were to say precisely the same thing later on!⁴¹ And the church had tolerated this. In the sixteenth century, Luther had brought forth a new theology; he had been forced to accommodate it to the old forms, however. And in many subtle and not so subtle ways these forms shaped and molded his theology.

With this in mind, I pondered P. M. Friesen's argument, and was gradually forced to the conclusion that he was mistaken. The confluence of these two streams—Pietism and Anabaptism—had played a much more problematic role in Mennonite Brethren history than Friesen had suggested. Nor is the doctrine of grace alone at issue in this relationship between Anabaptism and Evangelical Lutheranism. Much more important, it seemed to me, was the doctrine of grace in the context of the respective concepts of the church.

As a consequence, I began to see the relationship between Anabaptism and Pietism in terms of "form" and "spirit"—Anabaptist forms filled with Pietistic spirit. But that Pietistic spirit had accommodated itself to the territorial Lutheran church forms. Could it then also fit Anabaptist forms? At the same time, Pietism spoke of grace in Lutheran terms—terms the

³⁹Quoted in Abraham Friesen, "Wilhelm Zimmermann and Friedrich Engels: Two Sources of the Marxist Interpretation of Anabaptism," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, LV, #3 (July, 1981), pp. 252-253.

⁴⁰Quoted in ibid., p. 252.

⁴¹ Ibid.

German Lutheran Dietrich Bonhoeffer had called "cheap grace" in his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*.⁴² In Christianity, Pietism was the parallel movement to Romanticism in literature, art and history. Thus a new element not present in Luther was added: the emphasis on the "language of the heart" rather than of the head, on the emotions, on the "joy" of salvation, and once more on "free grace." A grace largely, if not completely, unrelated to the concept of the believers' church. In many ways it was the language of American Evangelicalism. It is a language and a form of Christianity early Anabaptists described as irresponsible, attempting to divorce precept from action.

Does Pietist spirit really fit into Anabaptist forms? Or is the tension between the two the reason why so many MB churches are moving more and more into the Evangelical camp? I decided to turn to the Anabaptists themselves to see whether their resolution of the difficulty might help me. It was under these circumstances that the following passage from Conrad Grebel's letter to Thomas Müntzer of 4 September 1524 became

increasingly significant to me. There Grebel wrote:

In respecting persons and in manifold seduction there is grosser and more pernicious error now than ever has been since the beginning of the world. In the same error we too lingered as long as we heard and read only evangelical preachers who are to blame for all this, in punishment for our sins. But after we took Scripture to hand too, and consulted it on many points, we have been instructed somewhat and have discovered the great and harmful error of the shepherds, of ours too, namely, that we do not beseech God earnestly with constant groaning to be brought out of this destruction of all godly life and out of human abominations, to attain to the true faith and divine practices. The cause of all this is false forbearance, the hiding of the divine Word, and the mixing of it with the human. Aye, we say it harms all and frustrates all things divine.⁴³

The phrase that struck me was the one where Grebel expressed the desire "to attain to the true faith and divine practices." The early

⁴²Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, revised edition (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1976).

⁴³Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, translated and edited by George H. Williams and Angel M. Mergal (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957), pp. 74-75.

Anabaptists were as concerned about the true faith—the spirit of Christianity, if we may say so—as they were with the practices—the forms—in which this spirit was expressed. They called the latter "divine practices," implying that they somehow grew out—or should grow out—of true faith or correct doctrine. They were expressing the principle of the need for congruence between faith and practice; between apostolic beliefs and the forms in which they were expressed. Even the ecclesiastical institutions and ordinances were to embody and reflect these beliefs. Nothing was indifferent here—Christ and the apostles had presented the world with an *integrated* whole and the early Anabaptists wished to recover the *whole*. A person's faith needed to find appropriate forms of expression—one of which was discipleship. Believers needed a believers' church.

The Anabaptist concept of faith is nowhere more clearly expressed than in Menno's own conversion as he narrated it in his "Departure from the Papacy." There he spoke of his intellectual development: his initial doubts about the Catholic Mass in 1525; his questioning of infant baptism in 1531. Not able to resolve his doubts, even with the help of his spiritual superior or the reformers, Menno turned to the Bible, studying it diligently until, by 1534, he knew it exceptionally well. He became adept at debating opponents, especially the Münsterites. He acquired a great deal of biblical and theological knowledge. But at the height of the Münsterite crisis, at the time when his own brother was executed as a result of the revolt at the Old Cloister, and he had just denounced—or was in the process of denouncing-Jan of Leiden in his "Against the Blasphemy of Jan of Leiden," Menno recalled to mind Christ's story of the "mote" in the brother's eye and the "beam" in his own, and was convicted of his own hypocrisy. He knew better than all the rest, but for his ease and convenience he had remained in the Roman Catholic Church, When he realized this—and it must have struck him with considerable force—he submitted his volition, his will, not only his mind, to Christ. He brought practice into conformity with profession and cast his lot with the despised followers of the Münsterites and took upon himself the cross of Christ, suffering persecution for the rest of his life.44

⁴⁴For a fuller treatment of this subject, see my "Menno and Münster: The Man and the Movement," in *Menno Simons: A Reappraisal*, Gerald R. Brunk, ed. (Harrisonburg, VA: Eastern Mennonite College, 1992), pp. 131-162.

It was this kind of conversion Felix Manz spoke of in his *Protestation* of December 1524 where he referred to conversion as the inner—spiritual—prerequisite for baptism, the outer sign of an inner renewal. Or, as the *Schleitheim Confession* expressed it: "Baptism shall be given to all those who have been taught repentance and the amendment of life and [who] believe truly that their sins are taken away through Christ, and to all those who desire to walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and be buried with him in death, so that they might rise with him." ⁴⁵

Congruence between true faith and divine practices. Practices instituted by Christ and his apostles. Integrity: faith and practices, two halves of a greater whole. No doubt, we might see some things somewhat differently than they did. But what a noble goal, and what an amount of blood sacrificed in its realization! I must say, I prefer the Anabaptists to any and all derivations, MBs included, though I belong to the latter. I wish all Mennonites could go back to our common roots—to the early Anabaptists—and recover our Mennonite unity in their position.

These are high and noble ideals, as I have said, and I will be the first to confess that I do not always live up to them; that at times my life does not have that integrity that it should have. It is at those times that I realize anew how important it is to keep the apostolic church and the apostolic ordinances and practices intact. Because they help to restore me, to lift me up and renew me. In this case, the Anabaptist forms can help to repristinate the spirit. And so, once again, form and spirit are mutually reinforcing.

Becoming Anabaptist, however, brings obligations with it; obligations to the fellowship of believers, as my great uncle knew only too well. Toward the end of World War II, when he was serving three different churches considerably removed from one another, he would walk the long distances between the churches to serve his congregations. My task is, and has been, a much less onerous one. For I enjoy the pursuit of history [I hope that is not a crime!], and that pursuit shall focus more and more on Anabaptist history. This summer I recorded twenty-four lectures on the Radical Reformation for the Institute of Theological Studies in Grand Rapids, Michigan, which I hope to transform into a major interpretive essay. At the same time, I have, for some years now, been collecting material for a book on *The*

⁴⁵See my "The Radical Reformation Revisited," Journal of Mennonite Studies, 2 (1984), pp. 149-150.

Politics of Baptism in the Age of the Reformation. And then there is Menno Simons who deserves a new biography—a biography done on a broad scale, a kind of life and times.

There is also another obligation that comes with becoming Anabaptist: laying hands on members of the younger generation—as my great uncle did to me—and calling them into service. We need young Mennonite Reformation scholars, indeed we need Mennonite church historians of the first rank who will do church history on the grand scale. For Mennonites bring a unique perspective to bear on that church history which others do not possess. And history is a strange discipline: the historian usually finds what he is looking for and little else. I have read some of Erasmus' writings fifteen or twenty times, and every time I am struck by something I did not see before. On the other hand, I may just be getting senile! All the more reason for me to lay hands on you to join me in becoming Anabaptist.

I began this confession with the story of my great uncles and their commitment to the Mennonite cause on an ecumenical scale. Had I not encountered the youngest of these and had he not practiced his Anabaptism on me, I am convinced I would not be in your presence today. Becoming Anabaptist will not only make a difference in your life; it will also transform the lives of others.

Chapter 2

Doing Anabaptist History

In the summer of 1963, my wife and I packed a few things into a Karman Ghia convertible and headed for Goshen College and its famous library-a library, my great uncle in Germany observed on occasion, Harold Bender and his American cohorts had procured in one fashion or another from devastated, wartorn European brothers and sisters. When we arrived in Goshen toward the end of June, however, I realized this was not the worst thing Harold Bender had done: he had housed the collection of Anabaptistica et Mennonitica in a non-airconditioned building where eager young researchers were forced to work-during the summer months-in 98 degree temperatures and 97% humidity! It would seem he wanted researchers in Anabaptist history to appropriate first hand what Ethelbert Stauffer in 1933 called the Anabaptist theology of martyrdom.¹ Like the monks of the Middle Ages who began to castigate their flesh in an era of peace in order to continue to feel like martyrs, Harold Bender may have wished to perpetuate that same feeling in contemporary Mennonite researchers of Anabaptist history. But let us leave the field of psycho-history and return to the equally perilous art of autobiography.

I came to Goshen to work on what I hoped would turn out to be a doctoral thesis on Erasmus and the Anabaptists under the guidance of Lewis W. Spitz, the leading authority on the relationship of Christian humanism to the Reformation. It was not until 1992, however, that I published anything on the subject.2 What happened comes under the general category of

the best laid plans of mice and men.

It was during my first quarter at Stanford that a chance remark by George L. Mosse, visiting professor from the University of Wisconsin, in a class on Modern European Intellectual History, drew my attention to the "Marxist" Müntzer. The following quarter I pursued the topic in Lew Spitz's research seminar.3 The paper on Müntzer and the Marxists led naturally to the larger

3Abraham Friesen, "Thomas Müntzer in Marxist Thought," Church History,

XXXIV (September, 1965): 306-327.

¹Ethelbert Stauffer, "Märtyrertheologie und Täuferbewegung," Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte, 52 (1933): 545-598.

²Abraham Friesen, "Humanism and Anabaptism: A Study in Paradigmatic Similarities," in Manfred P. Fleischer, ed., The Harvest of Humanism in Central Europe. Essays in Honor of Lewis W. Spitz (St Louis: Concordia, 1992), pp. 233-261.

question of the Marxist interpretation of the Reformation—which became the subject of my dissertation. And so Erasmus and the Anabaptists were put on a back burner, as they say.

My work on the Marxist interpretation of the Reformation forced me off the narrow path of Anabaptist history onto a much broader one. I had always wanted, ultimately, to devote at least some time to Anabaptist studies when I began my doctoral work, but the Marxists forced me to broaden my horizons, not only in terms of Reformation history, but also in terms of nineteenth century German intellectual history. As I did so, I became more and more convinced that Anabaptist history had been—and continued to be—done in far too narrow a context. Part of this was intentional—to isolate Anabaptists from the mystics, the revolutionaries, and the humanists of the age; part of it was unintentional, done simply out of ignorance of other movements and their history.

Aside from my work on Thomas Müntzer, to which my studies of the Marxists led me, ⁴ I also began, at the invitation of Harry Loewen in 1983, Chair of Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg, to explore this broader context of the Radical Reformation in a first series of lectures.⁵ I continued to do so in the annual Anabaptist lectureship at Regent College, Vancouver, Canada, in 1985, ⁶ and again at the University of Winnipeg in 1987. It was in the last series of lectures on "Anabaptism and Monasticism", "Humanism and Anabaptism", and "Reformers, Radicals and the Parable of the Tares", ⁹ that I began to look at Anabaptism from larger perspectives. But it is the findings from my research on Erasmus and the Anabaptists that I wish briefly to mention here. I do so in order to demonstrate

⁴Abraham Friesen, Thomas Muentzer, A Destroyer of the Godless. The Making of a Sixteenth-Century Revolutionary (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1990).

⁵Abraham Friesen, "The Radical Reformation Revisited," *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 2 (1984): 124-176.

[&]quot;These were published separately as: "Thomas Müntzer and the Anabaptists," Journal of Mennonite Studies, 4 (1986): 143-161; "Thomas Müntzer and Martin Luther," Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte, 79 (1988): 59-80; and "The Intellectual Development of Thomas Müntzer," in Rainer Postel und Franklin Kopitzsch, hrsg., Reformation und Revolution. Beiträge zum politischen Wandel und den sozialen Kräften am Beginn der Neuzeit. Festschrift für Rainer Wohlfeil zum 60. Geburtstag (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1989), pp. 121-137.

⁷Journal of Mennonite Studies, 6 (1988): 174-197.

See note #2 above.

This essay is still in the process of "becoming."

how this increasingly broad Renaissance and Reformation perspective may inform our interpretation of Anabaptist history.

The key, it seems to me, to the connection between Erasmus and the Anabaptists is Erasmus' interpretation of Matthew 28: 19-20, Christ's "Great Commission." This interpretation became normative for Balthasar Hubmaier and the Hutterites who quoted Erasmus verbatim on the Great Commission. It also provided the context for Felix Manz's argument in his December 1524 *Protestation*. And as I pursued that passage of Scripture in the writings of the Anabaptists, in their debates with the reformers, and in other writings, I began to realize the pivotal role it had played in their thinking. Here I would like to use Hubmaier's quotation of the Erasmus interpretation to demonstrate how that interpretation can help us illuminate another—until the present—seemingly unrelated event.

In his Old and New Teachers on Believers' Baptism, Hubmaier wrote:

He [Erasmus] recounts all the articles of faith as they are contained in the *Symbolo Apostolorum* [Apostles' Creed] and adds these words: "After you have taught the people these things and they have believed what you have taught them, have repented of their prior life, and are ready henceforth to walk according to evangelical doctrine, then immerse them in water in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." Here Erasmus publicly points out that baptism was instituted by Christ for those instructed in the faith and not for young children.¹¹

Hubmaier then proceeded to quote Erasmus' commentary on Acts 2:38 and Acts 8, and referred "to other places," probably Acts 9 and 19. The first passage deals with Peter's Pentecost sermon, in which the apostle says: "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins . . ." In his commentary, Erasmus placed Peter's words into the context of Christ's Great Commission, for he observed: "The Lord commanded the evangelical shepherds: Go forth and teach all peoples, baptize them, teach them to hold all things which I

¹⁰See also chapter IV, "The Great Commission," in Franklin H. Littell, *The Origins of Sectarian Protestantism*. A Study of the Anabaptist View of the Church (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1964), pp. 109-137.

¹¹H. Wayne Pipkin & John H. Yoder, translators, Balthasar Hubmaier, Theologian of Anabaptism (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989), p. 155.

have commanded you." Erasmus did the same for the passage in Acts 8 which deals with Philip's baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch; chapter 9 which deals with Saul's conversion and baptism; and chapter 19 which deals with the baptism of John the Baptist and the baptism instituted by Jesus—all interpreted in the larger context of the Great Commission, where teaching preceded baptism. Obviously, what Erasmus was doing was using the Great Commission as the context within which to interpret the apostles' actions, as well as using the apostles' interpretation of teaching, conversion, and baptism—their practices as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles-to demonstrate how they had understood Christ's Great Commission. This approach should not surprise us, given Erasmus' stress both on the Scriptures lespecially the New Testamentl as normative for the Christian, and the primitive or apostolic church as the best interpreter of Christ's teachings.12

With this as introduction, let us turn to the issue of infant baptism in Wittenberg. We have consistently been told by historians and theologians alike that the issue of baptism was first raised there by the Zwickau Prophets who appeared in the city on 27 December 1521 while Luther was absent at the Wartburg. In particular, the Prophets challenged Melanchthon, Luther's junior partner in the cause of reform, to prove to them from sola scriptura—one of Luther's fundamental principles—that infant baptism could be substantiated by that authority. Melanchthon had consequently-as Elector Frederick the Wise observed---"written His Grace in such an emotional manner" 13 concerning the Prophets' challenge of infant baptism. Not only did Melanchthon write George Spalatin and Frederick the Wise in this manner, he also wrote Luther at the Wartburg in like fashion.¹⁴ Why should this challenge, coming from essentially unlearned men, have troubled Luther's young reform partner to such an extent that even Elector Frederick was taken aback by the emotional tone of Melanchthon's letter? Could it be that this was not the first occasion on which the problem of infant baptism was broached in Wittenberg? Spalatin's notes on the meeting between

 $^{^{12}\}mbox{For the full argument, see my essay on "Humanism and Anabaptism," cited above.$

¹³Nikolaus Müller, "Die Wittenberger Bewegung 1521 und 1522," Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte, Texte und Untersuchungen, VI (1908/09), p. 396.

¹⁴See Luther's letter of 13 January 1522 to Philip Melanchthon, where Luther tells him that he disapproves of "your timidity." *Luther's Works*, vol. 48, Gottfried G. Krodel & Helmut T. Lehmann, eds. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955), p. 365.

Melanchthon, Nicholas Amsdorf, and the Elector, which took place on 2 January 1525 to discuss this matter, deserve to be quoted in this context.

To begin with, the matter that moves me happened as follows: On the day of St. John the Evangelist [27 December] there came to me in Wittenberg Claus Storch with two companions, who informed me that an uprising had occurred in Zwickau. The issues involved had been baptismi parvulorum and fides aliena. And they had done so on the authority of Doctor Martin.

In a separate discussion later with Marcus Thome, one of the three, I was told that he, as well as Storch had received revelations from [spoken openly with] God. Nor did any of them preach anything except that which God commanded.

So much I have noticed from him, that, in the most important articles of faith, he has interpreted the Scriptures correctly, even though he speaks in a strange manner.

Half a year ago I also debated this Marcus, but at that time he did not say anything about his conversations with God. [Did he say anything about infant baptism?]

And so I have mulled the matter back and forth over in my mind, especially because they told us about the unrest it had created in Zwickau and might create elsewhere. I thought since such unrest cannot be quieted by force, but primarily through Scripture and the judgments of spiritual men, it would be essential to get Doctor Martin's judgment [on the matter], especially since they call on him as their authority.

Two questions especially are not to be dismissed [despised] lightly by learned persons, [questions] that may well agitate the common people as well as myself.

I also thought: the devil wished to attack us at a weak point.

Augustine and others of his time disputed about infant baptism, but accomplished little. Augustine rested his case on [the doctrine of] original sin and an old custom.

Doctor Martin well knows the import of this issue. And that, in sum, was then, and still is, my concern.

I was not particularly perturbed by the fact that they claimed to have spoken with God, and the like. For such matters must rest on their own merits and are not of great import, except that under this guise other problematic matters might be undertaken.

But the question de baptismi has perturbed me, and in my view, justifiably so [italics mine]. 15

These notes contain a number of indicators that all point to a prior discussion of infant baptism in Wittenberg between Luther and his reform colleagues. The first is Melanchthon's statement that 'Doctor Martin well knows the import of this issue." Would Melanchthon have made such a statement had the matter of infant baptism not been discussed—and that fairly thoroughly-in Wittenberg prior to Luther's appearance at the Diet of Worms in April 1521 and his going into hiding at the Wartburg? Second, Melanchthon observed that the issue of baptismi parvulorum—and the last sentence of the passage makes it abundantly apparent that it was this issue alone that perturbed him-was a "weak point" in their theology where the devil was now attacking them. Surely, he had not come to this conclusion suddenly without having thought about the issue earlier, and that at some length. That he had-and not he alone—thought about the problem earlier is further indicated by his observation that "Augustine and many others of his time disputed about infant baptism, but accomplished little." No doubt, Melanchthon had not pulled his annotated Augustine from the bookshelf after the arrival of the Prophets to check out what the learned church father had said on the subject; he, together with his Wittenberg colleagues had already had occasion to do this earlier. Not only had they investigated what Augustine had said on infant baptism, they had apparently concluded from their study of Augustine—and the other church fathers—that these great teachers had "accomplished little" with respect to the problem. In other words, Augustine and the others had not resolved the issue for them. This would appear to be confirmed by Melanchthon's subsequent observation that "Augustine rested his case on [the doctrine of] original sin and an old custom" [italics mine]. The reference to "an old custom" was probably made to contrast Luther's emphasis on scriptura sola.

As intriguing as the above is Melanchthon's observation that the Zwickau Prophets, with respect to their rejection of baptismi parvulorum and fides aliena, appealed to Martin Luther—not Thomas Müntzer!—as their authority. Melanchthon made the point at least twice. Nor did he make any attempt to deny that Luther was indeed an authority for such a position! Surely he

¹⁵Müller, "Wittenberger Bewegung," pp. 394-395.

would have done so had there been no reason to justify the Prophets' appeal to the authority of Luther. Rather, what he did say was: "Doctor Martin well knows the import of the issue."

The assumption that infant baptism was discussed in Wittenberg well before the Zwickau Prophets arrived there on 27 December 1521 would appear to be confirmed in a cryptic paragraph contained in a document dated 14 December 1521 and signed by a group of Wittenberg university professors headed by the dean, Lorenz Schlamau. A response to the Elector's memorandum on the subject of church reform in Wittenberg dated 25 October 1521, the document contains the following passage on baptism totally overlooked by scholars thus far:

In the same way the church at the time of the apostles soon changed the form of holy baptism. Those who baptized in the holy name of Jesus in chapters 2, 8, 9 and 19 of [the book of] Acts did so according to the form of baptism they had received from Christ in Matthew 28: go ye into all the world, teach the people and baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.¹⁶

Several aspects must strike the reader of this passage. First, it is stated as a matter of established fact that "the church at the time of the apostles soon changed the form of baptism." This can only mean that the signers of the document had been convinced that infant baptism had not been practiced in the earliest church. The above assumption is confirmed by the biblical references cited. The first is to Acts 2 which tells the story of the events that took place on the day of Pentecost. On that day Peter proclaimed Jesus, who had just been crucified, to the Jews as the Christ, saying: "Therefore let the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made the same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." When his listeners asked what they should do in light of this, Peter said: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the Holy Ghost." Thereupon the writer of the book observes: "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls."

The second passage comes from Acts 8 and speaks of Philip preaching in Samaria where Simon the Sorcerer was active. "But

¹⁶Müller, "Wittenberger Bewegung," p. 304.

when they [the Samaritans] believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ," verse 12 tells us, "they were baptized, both men and women." The eighth chapter of Acts also contains the story of the Ethiopian eunuch who, after Philip had "preached unto him Jesus," requested to be baptized. And Philip said to him: "If thou believest in thine heart, thou mayest." When the eunuch affirmed that he did indeed believe in his heart "that Jesus Christ is Son of God," Philip commanded "the chariot to stand still; and they went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him."

The ninth chapter narrates the story of Saul's baptism at the hands of Ananias, and the nineteenth the story of the "rebaptism" in the name of Christ of those who had previously only been baptized with the baptism of John the Baptist. Clearly, then, all the passages in the Acts of the Apostles listed by Lorenz Schlamau and his Wittenberg colleagues in their response to Frederick deal with adult or believer's baptism.

What is more, the quoted portion of the document also indicates that a discussion concerning the problem of baptism must have taken place in Wittenberg, and before the Zwickau Prophets arrived in the city. Not only had a discussion of baptism taken place, but at least Schlamau and his colleagues were convinced—and the biblical references cited confirm this-that the "form of holy baptism" had been changed soon after the time of the apostles. Melanchthon's reference to the conflict over the issue at the time of Augustine confirms the above assumption. And his observations about Augustine's opinion on the subject would tend to substantiate the view that he was in agreement with Schlamau and the other signers of the 14 December document. Furthermore, Melanchthon's repeated assertion that Luther knew how important an issue this was suggests that the latter had been, very probably, a party to the discussion if not its instigator. No wonder Melanchthon was so perturbed by the statement on infant baptism by the Zwickau Prophets: this was not a subject about which he and the other Wittenberg theologians were ignorant. Rather, they had in all probability discussed it at some length and in some depth before the arrival of the Prophets. And they appear to have been in some quandary as to what to do about the fact that the form of baptism had been changed so soon after the time of the apostles.

¹⁷Some versions have omitted this passage.

The passage in question does not conclude with the citation of examples of believer's baptism from the Acts of the Apostles, however. It concludes by saying that these examples of baptism were performed "according to the form of baptism received from Christ in Matthew 28: go ye into all the world, teach the people and baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost." Such a use of the Great Commission would give the appearance that the authors of the passage believed Christ's statement in Matthew 28 to have been a kind of paradigm, to have been the command upon which all the examples of baptism cited from the Acts of the Apostles had been based. Why should they have chosen this particular passage as their model? For the same reason that Hubmaier, the Hutterites, the Swiss Brethren, even Bernard Rothmann did: they all found it in Erasmus' paraphrases and his annotations on the New Testament and believed it persuasive. The emphasis on the Great Commission as model, the citation of Acts 2, 8, 9 and 19 are contained in these documents as they are in Hubmaier's and the Hutterites' direct quotation. Erasmus first raised the issue of believer's baptism in the age of the Reformation; but it was not only his authority as 'Prince of Humanists' that lent credence to his interpretation. What made his interpretation persuasive was his exegetical approach to the problem: he interpreted Christ's Great Commission through the actions of the apostles as recorded in their Acts and argued that the manner in which the apostles proceeded with respect to "teaching" and "baptizing" were determined by what Christ himself must have taught them.

Our story does not end here, however. In the course of his conversation with Frederick the Wise, Melanchthon informed his prince that the issue of *baptismi parvulorum* was important enough to deserve a full discussion in a public forum not unlike that of the famous Leipzig Disputation of 1519. Frederick, not called the "Wise" and the "cautious" for nothing, refused to be persuaded. For at least several months he had attempted to prevent the Wittenberg theologians from introducing innovations into their eucharistic services, specifically forbidding Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt from performing an "evangelical eucharist" on 1 January 1522 in the Wittenberg Castle church. A man obedient to the letter of the law but not its spirit, Karlstadt had celebrated an evangelical eucharistic service on Christmas day, several days earlier—not without tension in the church and social unrest in the city. Nor had Frederick been happy with the aftermath of Leipzig—the disputation had drawn far too much attention to Luther and his reform. And now Melanchthon was suggesting

that infant baptism be debated in a public university forum before all Christendom! If such a discussion, on a much smaller scale in Zwickau, had led to social unrest, what might happen in this larger context? And—worst of all possible scenarios—what if infant baptism were to be rejected? What innovation might replace it? Therefore, despite the fact that Melanchthon had asserted that Augustine and his allies had "accomplished little" in the matter, Frederick refused Melanchthon's request. Instead, he enquired of the young reformer whether Augustine was not held in high esteem by the Wittenberg theologians. Receiving an affirmative response, the Elector proceeded to ask Melanchthon what form of baptism Augustine had practiced. Informed it had been infant baptism, Frederick in effect told Melanchthon that what had been good enough for the great church father would have to be good enough for the Wittenberg reformers. And so it was. Obviously, there were political limits beyond which religious reform, without the universal approbation of the Church, would not be allowed to go in Saxony.

Why is this story important and how does it change the way we have seen Anabaptism? First, it places the responsibility for raising the issue of believer's baptism squarely on the shoulders of Erasmus, locates the source of the intellectual impetus for the debate, and broadens the issue far beyond the "sectarian" confines of the relatively small dissident group in Zurich. Second, it explains why Zwingli, Bucer, Capito and a host of other South German and Swiss reformers entertained the rejection of infant baptism in the early years of the Reformation. Third, our story makes apparent that tinkering with infant baptism was politically dangerous. What happened in Saxony must surely also have happened in Zurich—that is, the introduction of adult baptism was more of a political than theological problem. Fourth, it lends credence to the Radical criticism of the Reformers that they succumbed to political pressure and compromised their stand on scriptura sola. Fifth, given the overt political opposition, the stand of the Swiss Brethren in regard to adult baptism appears all the more courageous, doomed as it was by the political odds. And sixth, the failure of the Magisterial Reformers-especially Zwingli, Luther, and Melanchthon-to stand up fearlessly to the political pressure may well have left them, at least in part, with residual feelings of guilt which could explain the vicious language they employed against the Radicals on occasion. A strong offense is often the best cover-up!

But let us turn to another example where a broader knowledge of Reformation history informs our understanding of Anabaptism. We begin this story where we left off the previous one. The encounter between Melanchthon and Frederick the Wise over baptism and the Zwickau Prophets points unerringly to two principle factors that concerned the Elector about the budding reform movement: liturgical and ritual innovations and the social unrest that must surely follow—as it already had from Karlstadt's evangelical eucharistic service and from the attempt to reject infant baptism in Zwickau. Both posed dangers to Frederick as ruler of Electoral Saxony, for either one—or both—could be used as excuse for Imperial intervention in the internal affairs of his territories. Yet, Frederick had just spirited Luther away to the Wartburg after the Diet of Worms, seeming to indicate his willingness to protect the reformer—perhaps even to defend his theology—until such a time as Luther could be tried by a legitimate council of his theological peers.

This policy of Frederick with respect to Luther and the Reformation—protecting Luther so he could continue to preach the Gospel while not allowing any changes to be made in the ceremonies, ritual, and practice of the worship services¹⁸—came to be implemented on the Imperial level through the Nuremberg Edict of 6 March 1523—an edict that has all but been ignored in Reformation history.¹⁹

At the Diet of Worms in 1521 a new executive branch of government was created to rule in the absence of Charles V who had become Holy Roman Emperor in 1519, but who was also Archduke of Austria and the Netherlands, King of Naples and Sicily, King of Spain and much of the new world. This new branch of government was called the *Reichsregiment* [or Imperial Governing Council]. The presidency was to rotate every six months between the two vicars of the realm: Frederick the Wise and Frederick Count Palatine of the Rhine. It was during the presidency of Frederick the Wise in late 1522 and early 1523 that the Elector's representative at the council, Hans von der Planitz, 20 and a proto-Lutheran knight, Hans von

¹⁸Wilhelm Borth, *Die Luthersache (Causa Lutheri)* 1517-1524 (Lübeck & Hamburg: Matthiesen Verlag, 1970).

¹⁹Only Leopold von Ranke in his history of the Reformation and, more recently, Cornelius Augustiin, "Allein das heilig Evangelium. Het mandat van het Reichsregiment 6 maart 1523," in Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis, 48 (1968): 150-165, have dealt with the edict, but without tracing its origins or consequences.

²⁰Hans v. d. Planitz, Berichte aus dem Reichsregiment in Nürnberg 1521-1523, eds., E. Wülker & H. Virck (Leipzig, 1899).

Schwarzenberg²¹—one of sixteenth-century Germany's best legal minds—pushed an edict through the council that was an obvious extension of Frederick's policy vis-a-vis Luther and the Reformation in his own territory. Reflecting Frederick's desire to allow Luther to continue preaching the "pure" or "holy Gospel," but worried about the violent consequences of innovations, Planitz and Schwarzenberg drew up the law, which read in part:

that every elector, prince, prelate, count and other estate in the realm shall, with all due diligence, so order and decree that all preachers in his territory are justly and equitably advised to avoid everything that might lead to disobedience, dissension and revolt in the holy empire or that might cause Christians to be led astray [in their faith]. Instead, they are to preach and teach only the holy Gospel and that in accordance with the interpretation of the Scriptures as approved by the holy Christian Church.²²

There are two distinct aspects to this edict: first, no innovations or changes are to be made in the Church's liturgy, ceremonies, ritual, and the like. It was precisely such changes that Frederick had opposed when reform of the mass began to be broached in Wittenberg in the fall of 1521. As we have seen, Frederick not only feared social unrest but also Imperial intervention, an intervention that did occur in January of 1522. The second part had to do with preaching and teaching "only the holy Gospel"-nearly the Lutheran doctrine of scriptura sola and the aspect Frederick wished protected. But the edict added the clause: "according to the interpretation approved by the holy Christian Church." In the original draft, Planitz had written in specific names of such teachers approved by the "holy Christian Church." They were: Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose, Cyprian, and the like—the great church fathers of the third and fourth centuries. But the Catholics on the council had objected. The best teachers of the Christian church, they insisted, were the latest ones: Aquinas, Scotus, Occam, Biel, etc.—the great Scholastics of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries. Clearly, the

²¹Willy Scheel, *Johann Freiherr von Schwarzenberg* (Berlin: J. Guttentag, 1905); and Erik Wolf, "Johann von Schwarzenberg," in Friedrich-Christian Schroeder, ed., *Die Carolina* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980), pp. 120-161.

²²Adolf Wrede, ed., Deutsche Reichstagsakten unter Kaiser Karl V (Göttingen, 1963), III, pp. 149-150.

conflict reflected differences of opinion between Reformers and Catholics as to who the best teachers of the Christian church were. In this case, Luther and Melanchthon had adopted the Christian humanist position that one should return to the Bible as the purest source of authentic Christianity and to those interpreters who stood closest in time to it. But in the Reichsregiment the two opposing sides drew a stalemate, and so it was decided to delete any specific names from the text of the edict and simply say: "as approved by the best teachers of the Christian Church."

This compromise—as most compromises—did not resolve the problem; it merely allowed both sides to interpret the passage in diametrically opposing ways, and transferred the quarrel from the council, where it could not be resolved, to the empire at large. Would it be more easily resolved there? Had we the time, we could demonstrate in detail how Catholics interpreted this passage in one way and the Lutherans in another.

No sooner was the edict issued than Luther responded to it with a document entitled: "Against the Perverters and Falsifiers of the Imperial Edict." With respect to the passage from the edict in question, he wrote:

One is to preach the Gospel according to the interpretation of those teachers accepted and approved by the Christian Church. This article the Catholics interpret in such a way as to mean that one is not to preach the Gospel any differently from the way in which the universities, foundations and monasteries with their teachers Thomas [Aquinas], Scotus and others whom the Roman Catholic Church has approved, teach. But no matter what Catholics might think, the edict says nothing about the Roman Catholic Church. And one should note, in accordance with the plain words, that it means the oldest teachers, such as Augustine, Cyprian, Hilary and the like even though it is common knowledge that these teachers did not all teach the same thing nor even always the correct things.

And so Luther informed Frederick that if the edict were to be interpreted in a Catholic sense, he would not be obedient to it.

Martin Bucer, the reformer of Strassburg, went even farther. In a document of summer 1523, only several months after the edict's

²³D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimar, 1883), 12, p. 63.

promulgation, he remarked that the edict gave cities the *legal* right to dismiss priests "who are out for their own or someone else's gain, and who direct you to the reading of the mass and other similar works." Indeed, he continued, "the Imperial Edict just issued, which commands that we are to preach the Gospel in accordance with the teachers accepted by the Church, gives you full authority" to dismiss such priests. He concluded:

Wherever this edict is not implemented and you continue to be taught the doctrine of men, or the Gospel according to their [i.e., the Catholic's] perverted notions—rather than Luther, or the biblical writings which the Church has always accepted—you are duty bound, by your soul's salvation and the displeasure of our Lord Jesus Christ, to depose such false teachers and in their place set truly Christian ones.²⁴

One could heap example upon example, but these two already make it apparent that the Nuremberg Edict of March 1523 was to be interpreted in two diametrically opposed ways, and the resulting conflict lies at the root of much—if not most—of the turmoil of the years 1523-1526.

The political context in which the confrontation over the interpretation of this edict took place was of critical importance. Great territorial princes such as the dukes of Saxony, Bavaria, Württemberg, Austria, and the like were virtually independent and most jealous of their autonomy. Who was to stop them if they decided to give the edict a 'Protestant' interpretation? Great ecclesiastical prince-bishops, as the Archbishops of Mainz, Trier, and Cologne, too, were virtually sovereign in their territories. Then there were the free imperial cities, governed by a mayor and several councils, who owed allegiance only to an increasingly weak Holy Roman Emperor. Other cities, however, were under the direct control of bishops—as Constance—or the Archduke of Austria-as Hubmaier's Waldshut, Because of their virtual autonomy and the Nuremberg Edict, the Reformation spread rapidly in the free imperial cities and some of the territories. For with the promulgation of the Nuremberg Edict, the Reformation became an eminently political matter-whether Luther, Bucer, Hubmaier, or anyone else liked it or not. How did

²⁴Martin Bucer, "An den christlichen Rath und Gemeyn der statt Weißenburg," in Robert Stupperich, ed., *Martin Bucers Deutsche Schriften* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1960), 1, p. 136.

these factors affect the Anabaptist Hubmaier and the Reformation in Waldshut?

When Hubmaier returned to Waldshut from the Second Zurich Disputation in the fall of 1523, he began to implement his reforms; the people were already on his side, if not all the clergy. He presented his Eighteen Articles on the Christian faith, abolished the laws on fasting and celibacy, and married, all with the tacit approval of the mayor and town councils. But Waldshut was not autonomous, like the free imperial cities of the Holy Roman Empire. Waldshut's overlord was Charles V's brother Ferdinand, Archduke of Austria, and an ardent Catholic. Sometime between Hubmaier's return from Zurich in early November 1523 and 11 December 1523 the Austrian government at Innsbruck must have written the Waldshut authorities, demanding that Hubmaier's reforms be reversed. They made this demand, they said, on the basis of the Nuremberg Imperial Edict of 6 March 1523. Innsbruck argued that Hubmaier was preaching an heretical version of the "holy Gospel" and had introduced unheard-of innovations—changes—into the church services, something expressly condemned by the edict. It charged that Hubmaier had "interpreted the holy Gospel differently than it actually was," and this, it was asserted, had angered the people of Waldshut. To these charges the mayor and councils answered as follows: first, they had always published all imperial mandates, and this last one of 6 March 1523 had been read from the pulpits of their churches by two secular priests from Constance. Second, Hubmaier had not preached anything contrary to the holy Gospel; nor would they have tolerated him preaching in opposition to the imperial edict-rather, they were all seeking to enforce it. Third, as far as they could tell, Hubmaier was interpreting the Gospel from the pulpit as it actually was. His intention was, as he stated openly from the pulpit, to preach the "pure and clear Gospel from here on out, which he has done according to our understanding. We even invited the dean and priests to see if he preached anything but the clear and pure Word of God."²⁵ If the Austrian authorities wished, the mayor and councils continued, they could act in compliance with the edict and send several theologians from the Bishop of Constance to check Hubmaier out. If such experts

²⁵J. Loserth, "Die Stadt Waldshut und die Vorderösterreichische Regierung in den Jahren 1523-1526," Archiv für österreichische Geschichte, 77 (Vienna, 1891): 112-113.

could prove Hubmaier's interpretation of the "holy Gospel" wrong, the latter would surely retract his teachings. But it was difficult to prove Protestant teachings wrong on the basis of Scripture alone, as Catholics had learned by this time, for virtually every debate in the early years of the Reformation between the contending parties—when based on the Bible—was lost by the Catholics. And so the Bishop of Constance did nothing. This confrontation demonstrates clearly enough that two opposing interpretations of the 6 March 1523 edict were here in collision. To make a long story short, the party with the greater power would in the end prove to be the better "interpreter"—and in the case of Hubmaier and Waldshut this turned out to be the Austrian army. When Hubmaier was later burned at the stake in Vienna, on 10 March 1528, it was for disobeying imperial law-he was considered a political revolutionary. But from the point of view of the local authorities, Hubmaier was considered a thoroughly law-abiding subject.

The case of Hubmaier and Waldshut raises some interesting questions about Anabaptism's potential for becoming a territorial church. At the same time, it suggests that Hubmaier's unique position regarding the "sword" within Anabaptism may have been influenced by the political situation he found himself in. But we do not wish to pursue these issues here. Rather we intend to make the claim that this edict also lay at the source of the 1524-1525 Peasants' War in Germany. The connection comes through Christoph Schappeler, reformer of the free imperial city of Memmingen, who reformed the city on Bucer's and the Imperial Edict's authority, and his friend and parishioner, Sebastian Lotzer, who authored the famous Twelve Articles. The first article of that famous document reads:

First, it is our humble petition and desire, as also our will and resolution, that in the future we should have power and authority so that each community should choose and appoint a pastor—[recall Bucer's words that the edict mandated dismissing Catholic priests and appointing only such as would preach the "pure Gospel"]—and that we should have the right to depose him should he conduct himself improperly. The pastor thus chosen should teach us the

Gospel pure and simple, without any addition, doctrine, or ordinance of man.²⁶

Here we have the same emphasis on selecting one's own pastor, one who will preach the Gospel purely and simply, as we saw in Martin Bucer's tract of summer 1523. When the Twelve Articles were promulgated in February of 1525 they quickly superseded all the other articles, local and otherwise, that had already been drawn up and published. And there can be little doubt that these Twelve Articles were based on the Nuremberg Edict.

The peasants, however, had no position or political power in sixteenth-century Germany. Some were vassals of free imperial cities—such as Memmingen—others of bishops, archbishops and monasteries, still others of princes and other secular lords. Memmingen, for example, granted its peasants extensive rights in the wake of its own Reformation; others did not. Territorial lords reserved these rights for themselves, with Catholic lords—whether secular or ecclesiastical—set on suppressing any demand for change. Under these circumstances, who were the real revolutionaries? The Catholic lords-secular ecclesiastical—who sought ruthlessly to suppress all preaching of the "holy Gospel" not in line with their Scholastic teachers? Or the peasants-and Hubmaier-who sought to implement what the Nuremberg Edict appeared to grant them by law?! No wonder such resentment arose against the Catholic Church and its political supporters. On the other hand, no wonder Catholic rulers accused Luther and the Radicals of being revolutionaries.

But what about rulers like Frederick the Wise, who allowed the preaching of the Gospel but refused to allow church practices to be brought into conformity with the new understanding of the Gospel? Was not the edict, if implemented as written, itself cause for revolt because it promoted preaching which undermined the Catholic religion but allowed no changes to be made in the church services? Should not the peasant find this a wholly contradictory policy, as the Radicals did in the face of the Magisterial Reformers' cooperation with the authorities? The reasoning of the peasants was more social and economic; that of the Radicals more theological—but both based their argumentation on the same imperial law. Even the vaunted revolutionary Thomas Müntzer was a victim of this dilemma and

²⁶Kyle C. Sessions, Reformation and Authority. The Meaning of the Peasant's Revolt (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1968), pp. 17-18.

might never have joined the peasants in their revolt had he not believed the Catholic princes surrounding Allstedt to be the real revolutionaries because they refused to implement the law permitting the preaching of the "holy Gospel." Hear even these words of Michael Sattler just prior to his torture and execution:

We do not admit that we have acted counter to the imperial mandate; for it says that one should not adhere to the Lutheran doctrine or seduction, but only to the Gospel and the Word of God; this we have held to. Counter to the Gospel and the Word of God I do not know that I have done anything; in witness thereto I appeal to the words of Christ.²⁷

This common foundation led to at least some common interests between peasants and Anabaptists—nor were either of them guilty of revolution in the technical sense. Each wanted only what had been granted them—according to any number of important spokespersons—by the law. The real revolutionaries were the Catholic rulers and the Catholic Church who had allowed themselves to be outmaneuvered at the Diet of Nuremberg by a minority of Protestants, and who, in clear contravention of the edict, were unwilling—indeed, refused—to allow the Gospel to be preached "clearly and purely" as the edict mandated.

What all of this tells us can probably be summed up in the following axioms: First, the more we know of the historical period in question, and the wider we cast our nets, the better we will be able to understand the Anabaptist movement. Attempting to isolate it from the world which gave it birth is a tragic mistake. And, I believe, with this broader approach we may yet discover many things about the movement heretofore undreamed of. I would therefore encourage any aspiring historian to join the search. Prepare well and widely before you turn to Anabaptist studies. But do turn to them; we need you. And church

²⁷John H. Yoder, translator & editor, *The Legacy of Michael Sattler* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1973), p. 71. This statement of Sattler's is most intriguing, for it suggests that Lutheran political authorities used the 6 March 1523 Imperial Edict against the Anabaptists! In light of the fact that Lutherans at the Münster Colloquy of 1533 conceded that infant baptism could not be validated by the New Testament, and that Luther himself conceded the point on a number of occasions, the attempt by Lutheran authorities to use the edict to justify their torture and execution of Michael Sattler must appear hypocritical at best.

history—the early church, the Patristic period, the Middle Ages, the nineteenth century, need you. As Mennonites you can bring a new and fresh perspective to the study of the church through time.

Second, are you going to allow others to interpret the past of your people to you? To determine who speaks for the Anabaptists? To tell you that Anabaptism was essentially a social, not a religious movement? You need to become Renaissance and Reformation historians who dabble in Anabaptist history, American historians who dabble in Mennonite history. And do it all for the sake of truth and justice. As Garrett Mattingly, the famous author of the book on the Spanish Armada once said: it may not matter to the dead how you treat them, but it does matter to you. Nor can you make history relevant by idealizing it or making it over in your own image—to do so is only to fool yourself. Recreate it lovingly but carefully, your subjects were all members of God's extended family. Only when we attempt to do what Leopold von Ranke asked of himself-to write history wie es eigentlich gewesen—will it have any relevance for us. Then we can enter into a dialogue with it, learn from it, correct its mistakes. Our ancestors deserve this from us: we owe it to ourselves.

Part II

Biographical

Chapter 3

Ludwig Keller, Hans Denck, and the German Mennonites

Among German Mennonites of the second half of the nineteenth century there was an increasing, often agonizing awareness that the fellowship needed renewal. At the same time, there were few, if any, Mennonite educational institutions that might have instilled a sense of Anabaptist/Mennonite history in the church. Children of Mennonite parents, educated in local schools, were, for purposes of religious instruction, classified as 'Protestant' and then placed under the tutelage of Lutheran ministers/teachers. The educational, religious, and psychological consequences of this practice have hardly been investigated. Anna Brons of Emden, in her book Ursprung, Entwicklung und Schicksale der Taufgesinnten oder Mennoniten [Origin, Development and Travails of the Anabaptists or Mennonites] of 1884, speaks of her own education under conditions where she, as a Mennonite, was exposed to the aspersion and ridicule of her classmates.1 Given the inherited interpretation of sixteenthcentury Anabaptism that still prevailed in mid to late nineteenthcentury Germany, and, consequently, the interpretation that must have come from such theological instruction, this should not surprise us. Anna Brons, coming from a family that treasured its Anabaptist heritage, possessed the courage, ability, and family support to overcome such an assault on her young psyche. But how many did not? How widespread this problem was can be seen from the fact that German Mennonites, aside from a few larger centers such as Hamburg-Altona where the pastor organized a school for the religious instruction of the children, had virtually no Mennonite schools until the Weierhof was established by the Palatine Mennonites in 1867.

Not only were the vast majority of German Mennonite children given a Lutheran religious education, those Mennonite families not living in Mennonite communities had no Mennonite church close at hand and so attended the local Lutheran church.² Even where Mennonites had viable congregations, their pastors had been trained in non-Mennonite schools. Writing to Ludwig Keller

¹Anna Brons, Ursprung, Entwicklung und Schicksale der Taufgesinnten oder Mennoniten (Norden: Diedr. Soltan, 1884), p. Vil.

²See the letters of John Horsch to Keller beginning in 1885. Keller Correspondence.

from Gelchsheim, Bavaria, on 8 April 1885, John Horsch, future father-in-law of Harold S. Bender, remarked: 'If only we had a theological seminary so that our ministers would not be forced to acquire their education in other institutions; for in the latter, what little of that old Mennonitism they received from their parents at home is usually extinguished.''³ As a rule, Horsch continued, most of the Mennonite preachers and elders had no theological training whatsoever. Under these circumstances it is remarkable that Mennonite congregations in Germany retained any identity at all and did not simply vanish into the German Lutheran landscape.

Larger Mennonite centers, such as Hamburg-Altona, the Vistula Delta region, Danzig, and Krefeld did have some outstanding preachers, but even in some of these churches there were men of Lutheran background—like H. G. Mannhardt, preacher in Danzig—who, though active in Mennonite church and historical affairs, could write on one occasion that he would like to change the Mennonite church completely into a *Volkskirche*. No doubt, it was already well on its way to becoming one, with knowledge of its origins, its struggle for the establishment of a believers' church, and its many distinctives only a rather vague memory, if remembered at all.

That renewal, both spiritual and historical, was necessary for the continued existence of the Mennonite church under these circumstances became increasingly apparent to many German as well as Dutch Mennonites of the day. Although these Mennonites had probably never read their Machiavelli, the latter had, in his Discourses on Livy, himself addressed the issue of renewal, a theme central to the age of the Renaissance and the Reformation which had given birth to Anabaptism. There Machiavelli had written:

It is most certain that there is a kind of limit for the existence of all things in the world; but they generally move through the entire course ordained for them by heaven without getting their bodies into confusion by keeping them in the way ordained; this way either does not change or, if it does, the change is to their advantage, not to their harm. And because I am speaking of mixed bodies, such as republics and religion, I say that those changes are to their

³Keller Correspondence.

⁴Mannhardt to Keller, 29 November 1888. Keller Correspondence.

advantage that take them back to their beginnings. And therefore those are best organized and have longest life that by some accident outside their organization come to such renewal. And it is clearer than light that if these bodies are not renewed they cannot last. The way to renew them, as I have said, is to carry them back to their beginnings; because all the beginnings of religions and of republics and of kingdoms must possess some goodness by means of which they gain their first reputation and their first growth. Since in the process of time goodness is corrupted, if something does not happen that takes it back to the right position, such corruption necessarily kills that body.⁵

By the 1880s this sense, so unmistakably expressed by Machiavelli who had absorbed the Renaissance humanists' belief in the necessity of returning to the spirit and morality of what they called the "Golden Age of Antiquity," began to be voiced by some European Mennonite leaders. The Anabaptist movement of which they were the heirs had sought to restore the primitive, the apostolic church and was thus, through Christian humanists like Erasmus, an heir to this central Renaissance principle. By the nineteenth century, however, sixteenth-century Anabaptism had itself become a tradition, and Machiavelli's observations about religious bodies now fully applied to it. But there was at least one major difference between the Anabaptist renewal movement and the renewal hoped for among German and Dutch Mennonites in the late nineteenth century: the first had been founded on a return to the Bible and its theology as resurrected by reformers like Luther and Zwingli, and on the return to the model of the apostolic church; the second sought renewal in a return to the early Anabaptist movement. Is history enough to effect renewal?

Not everyone may have agreed as to the extent to which the European Mennonite church stood in need of renewal at the time; but everyone was in agreement as to the general Mennonite ignorance about its ancestry and spiritual legacy. Speaking of a Keller essay on "Hans Langenmantel" in the *Mennonitische Blätter*, A. M. Cramer, retired Dutch Mennonite pastor and historian who died in 1894, wrote:

⁵Niccolò Machiavelli, *Chief Works and Others*, translated by Allan Gilbert, vol. 1 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1965), p. 419.

such essays do not cost you much effort, but are very interesting to everyone, even 'revivalist.'

This last aspect is highly to be desired, indeed a revival is urgently needed! For what is the state of affairs? The first fiery enthusiasm of the Anabaptists has cooled; for some time now—indeed for a long time already—the Mennonites have fallen into a mundane, petty pedestrian rut.⁶

And Carl Harder, Mennonite preacher in Elbing, speaking of renewal in the German Mennonite church, wrote:

I, for my person as well as my congregation, would gladly agree to any statute that would rest on the foundations of apostolic freedom and appear life-giving, even though it might not fully meet all our desires. God grant that we would finally make a sure beginning.⁷

Even Anna Brons, who wrote her 1884 book on the Mennonites because she had learned "no comprehensive knowledge about the history of the Mennonites and their origin" despite the fact that she was a member of the Emden congregation where J. P. Müller, the pastor, was himself a student of Mennonite history, wrote in her first letter to Keller:

What Dr. [A. M.] Cramer says about the German Mennonite congregations is partially true, . . . On the whole, however, according to my judgment, it is no worse in Mennonite churches than in the state churches, perhaps better.⁹

How good was it in the state churches? Surely Anna Brons must have realized that she was damning with faint praise, for she was later to enter the cause of renewal with enthusiasm. Indeed, her own study of Anabaptist beginnings and subsequent Mennonite history confirmed, at the very least, that German Mennonites—even in the most advanced centers like Emden—were ignorant of their own history. Like Carl H. A. van der Smissen in the introduction to his 1895 Kurzgefaßte Geschichte

⁶A. M. Cramer to Keller, 29 May 1885. Keller Correspondence.

⁷Carl Harder to Keller, 14 July 1885. Keller Correspondence.

⁸Anna Brons, Taufgesinnte oder Mennoniten, p. IX.

Anna Brons to Keller, 14 March 1883. Keller Correspondence.

und Glaubenslehre der Altevangelischen Taufgesinnten oder Mennoniten [A Short History and Doctrine of the Old Evangelical Anabaptists or Mennonites], where he wrote:

May God... grant that our youth may recognize the rich treasure God has mercifully granted our brotherhood and seek to preserve them so that the blood of so many Anabaptists may not have been spilled in vain but produce lasting blessings, 10

Anna Brons, too, sought a renewal of her Mennonite church through a revival of the study of Anabaptist/Mennonite history.

At the very moment German Mennonites were beginning to verbalize these desires and turn to historical studies of their own, Ludwig Keller appeared on the Mennonite horizon as a knight in shining armor riding on a white charger. In 1880 he wrote his widely acclaimed and—for its time—seemingly impartial history of the Anabaptists in Münster;¹¹ in 1882 he presented the German Mennonites with a biography of Hans Denck;¹² and in 1885, in his *Die Reformation und die ülteren Reformparteien* [The Reformation and the Older Reform Parties],¹³ he provided the scholarly world with an entirely new context within which the history of the "old evangelical" churches was to be read. But where was this relatively unknown Münster archivist coming from, and what was his agenda? Was he merely an impartial historian setting the record straight, as he insisted repeatedly? Or was he, as H. G. Mannhardt, the Danzig Mennonite pastor, suggested in a letter to Keller of 18 April 1891, more than an historian? In that letter Mannhardt wrote:

But, honored Sir, you never sought to hide the fact, and everyone who came into closer association with you could not escape the fact that you were not only an historian, but that you also wished to be, in a certain sense, an organizer or reorganizer.¹⁴

¹⁰⁽St. Louis: Selbstverlag, 1895), p. VI.

¹¹Ludwig Keller, Geschichte der Wiedertäufer und ihres Reiches zu Münster (Münster: Coppenrath'schen Buch & Kunsthandlung, 1880).

¹²Ludwig Keller, Ein Apostel der Wiedertäufer (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1882).

¹³(Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1885). ¹⁴Keller Correspondence.

But not even Mannhardt knew what Keller wished to organize or reorganize. As early as 29 November 1888 he had written Keller:

Honorable Herr Archivrat, we do not know what the goal of the "Bewegung"—movement—is, we do not know to what goal we are to be led. You will recall that I requested [last summer] that you inform me regarding these [goals], and at that time you promised me an answer in the future. But this answer has never come.¹⁵

If H. G. Mannhardt who, of all the German Mennonite leaders was closest to Keller, was unaware of the ultimate goal of Keller's "Bewegung," it is hardly possible that other German Mennonites were any better informed. Like Mannhardt, the question of Keller's motives has also agitated my mind, even before I turned to Keller's correspondence. Should I be more fortunate in pursuit of this quest than Mannhardt and the German Mennonites of his day? I sincerely hope so!

The key to Keller's thinking is not the Freemasons whom he joined in 1897 in Berlin, as I at first suspected, but a man by the name of Dr. Friedrich Fabri whom he used to attempt to win Mennonites to his "Bewegung" in March of 1888. Fabri is mentioned repeatedly in Keller's correspondence, and as early as 1883 Otto zur Linden¹⁶ wrote Keller: "I am pleased that Inspector Fabri, too, has expressed his pleasure over your Denck to you. I have repeatedly heard him speak during the semester break. He is a man with a clear, penetrating mind who knows how to assert a laudable freedom of speech."17 In an extended letter to the Dutch Mennonite scholar, Christiaan Sepp, of 25 August 1887, Keller wrote that 'Inspector Dr. Theol. Fabri, who shares my view of the matter [Keller is speaking of his attempt to organize the Mennonites], will himself visit many of your various congregations in the month of September, in order to assess the potential of the movement."18 He went on to say that Fabri's evaluation would be decisive for their decision. Whether Fabri came to Hamburg in September or not is unclear; what is clear is that he did visit both B. C. Roosen there as well as

¹⁵Keller Correspondence.

¹⁶On Friedrich Otto zur Linden, see the entry in the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, III (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1957), p. 349.

¹⁷Otto zur Linden to Keller, 15 October 1883. Keller Correspondence.

¹⁸Keller Correspondence.

Hinrich van der Smissen.¹⁹ Fabri may also have visited with H. G. Mannhardt either in Danzig or Hamburg.²⁰ All three of the above Mennonite leaders—van der Smissen, B. C. Roosen and H. G. Mannhardt—clearly gained the impression that Fabri was as much of a spokesperson for the "movement" as was Keller himself,²¹ perhaps even more important.²² It was to Fabri, on 14 March 1888, that Keller sent a memorandum [*Denkschrift*] in which he laid out the objectives though not the organizational form of the proposed movement. In the accompanying letter he discussed the various aspects of the memorandum in some detail.²³ This memorandum does not appear to have been sent to anyone outside of the Mennonite circles. Respect between Fabri and Keller appears to have been mutual, though we possess only one piece of concrete evidence from Fabri to this effect.

We have already mentioned Otto zur Linden's remark that he was pleased Fabri approved of Keller's Denck biography. Although third hand evidence—Keller must have apprised zur Linden of this approbation—it is nonetheless an important piece of evidence as we shall see. The only other piece of evidence comes from Fabri's opening address at the first Gnadauer Conference²⁴ held at Gnadau on 22-24 May 1888, a critical point in the cooperative Mennonite venture of Fabri and Keller. There, in an address entitled "The Justification, Necessity and Limits of Lay Participation," Fabri observed:

¹⁹See Keller's letter to Christiaan Sepp, 29 August 1887. Keller Correspondence, where Keller wrote: "Einer meiner Freunde, Herr Inspektor Dr. Theol. Fabri, der meine Auffassung der Sache theilt, wird sich im Laufe des September persönlich in verschiedene Ihrer Gemeinden begeben, um sich ein Urteil über die Aussichten der Bewegung zu bilden."

On 14 March 1888 Keller wrote Fabri, sending him a draft of the "memorandum" in case he wished to see it before meeting with B. C. Roosen.

On 19 February 1888, B. C. Roosen wrote Keller, speaking of "...in der hiesigen Konferenz mit Dr. Fabri die von meinen mitanwesenden Vorstehern gebilligte Äußerung gethan, wir könnten auf den recht kostspieligen Plan erst dann zurückkommen und event. Interesse dafür zu erwecken suchen, wenn wir genauer über den Plan unterrichtet wären."

²⁰Whether Mannhardt is to be included in Roosen's "mitanwesenden Vorstehern" in the above letter is not clear. See also Mannhardt's letter to Keller of 28 May 1888. Keller Correspondence.

²¹See the above letters dealing with Fabri.

²²It was Fabri, after all, who was sent to enlist the Mennonites in the cause.

²³Contained in the Hamburg city archives.

²⁴See especially Alfred Roth, 50 Jahre Gnadauer Konferenz in ihrem Zusammenhang mit der Geschichte Gnadaus (Gießen: Brunnen-Verlag, 1938).

Even though a distinction between clerics and laity gradually emerged in the first centuries, as long as the Church continued to be persecuted it did not become a distinction on principle; and especially in the area of Christian charity the fellowship of believers still remained very active and alive. This changed when the Church threw herself into the arms of a Christianized Roman state. The separation between clerics and laity sharpened and culminated in the world-dominating Roman Church of the Middle Ages. Much that should have been undertaken by the Christian laity was now undertaken, at least to a degree, by the flowering monastic movement.

Nevertheless, even those centuries were not totally bereft of spiritual gifts and powers, which, though they were now held by individuals, effectively stimulated and promoted [charity] in many places; I remind you only of the fervent and illuminated circles which the representatives of a profound mysticism gathered around themselves in those days. But such deeper expressions of the Spirit of God have always drawn the suspicion of the hierarchy, and they were not only watched and inhibited, but also often condemned and forcibly suppressed. Even more true is this of those congregations of the Quiet and Hidden [groups] which can be found throughout the Middle Ages in various forms and under different names [Waldenses, Beghards, Bohemian Brethren, etc.] and which, in recent years, have been given the collective name of "old evangelical congregations." ²⁵

This last sentence can only be a reference to Ludwig Keller's writings, in which he developed the term. If Keller was therefore influenced by Fabri, it would appear that Fabri was no less attracted to Keller. It therefore behooves us to enquire at this point: Who was this Inspector Fabri and how does he provide the key to our understanding of Keller? For the sake of brevity we shall focus our attention on only those aspects the two men shared in common. Before we do that, however, a brief look at Keller's early life and influences may be helpful.

According to Keller's daughter, Amalia, her father was born into a Hessian family belonging to the Reformed Church and was himself confirmed in that faith. She speaks of her grandfather as holding honor and religious liberty as the noblest ideals of life.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 69-70.

Keller was later to marry the daughter of an old Hamburg Huguenot family that had fled France seeking religious freedom after the 1685 Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Born in Fritzlar near Kassel in 1849, Keller and his family moved to Rinteln two years later. Amalia does not say whether these regions were heavily impacted by Pietism. But some historians have argued that precisely those Hessian regions that had been centers of Anabaptism in the sixteenth century became centers of Pietism in the nineteenth. It would be interesting to know whether Ludwig Keller, the apparent nineteenth-century defender of Anabaptism, came from such an Anabaptist-turned-Pietist region in Hesse. What is clear is that there were Pietist, but also rationalist, influences working upon Keller's thinking.

At what point Keller began reading Friedrich Fabri's writings, or when he met him is not yet known. Nor is it known to what extent Fabri was already a kindred spirit of Keller when the latter did meet him. From Otto zur Linden's remarks about Fabri in his 1883 letter to Keller, and from other remarks about Fabri scattered throughout Keller's correspondence, there can be little doubt that the two must have met and become fast friends prior to Keller's first study on the Anabaptists of 1880—with Fabri, who was born in 1824 and died in 1891, the older man with a

national reputation by the time Keller met him.

Fabri received a theological education at the universities of Erlangen and Berlin, taking his examinations at the close of 1845, then transferring to the Munich seminary. He graduated from the University of Tübingen with a thesis on the Medieval Scholastic philosopher/theologian Duns Scotus in 1849, the year of Keller's birth. The following year he was appointed vicar in Würzburg; in 1851, pastor in the nearby parish of Bonnland. In the spring of 1857 he was called to become director—"inspector"—of the Rhenish Missions Society located in Barmen which he served with distinction until his retirement in 1885. This missionary organization, the successor of the Elberfelder Missions Society founded in 1799, was created as a direct Pietistic response to the growing missionary movement and the spiritual decadence of the German state church. Though its primary concern was foreign

²⁶See the entry under "Hesse" in the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, II (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1956): 719-727.

missions, the society—especially during Fabri's inspectorate—also had a powerful impact on German society.²⁷

It would be rewarding to take the time to develop in detail the various aspects of Fabri's theology that influenced Keller. But that is impossible in our context. We must, however, briefly outline its fundamental aspects. Of primary importance to his theology is Fabri's missions orientation and Pietistic-mystical heritage which provided him, in his kingdom of God theology,28 with the framework within which his theology was shaped. Inherited both from nineteenth-century liberal theology and Pietism, which viewed the collegia pietatis as beyond confessional boundaries and the embodiment of the kingdom of God on earth, Fabri came to have this view reinforced by a study of Jakob Böhme, Friedrich Oetinger, Baader, and Johann Albrecht Bengel as well as through a personal encounter with Christoph Blumhardt, the pietistic nephew of the co-founder of the Basel Missions Society.²⁹ Missions especially had to be carried on from this higher vantage point since, in fulfillment of Christ's Great Commission, one was to preach "the Gospel of the kingdom," not the Gospel of any particular confession. German missions societies-such as the Rhenish Missions Society-were to be above confessionalism because they were to draw all peoples into the kingdom. The apostolic church was the model in this respect, and the mission societies of the nineteenth century attempted to renew the apostolic ideal. Preaching the kingdom of God on earth would naturally reproduce the apostolic church—the church at the outset of Christianity and at its culmination.

It is from within this context that Fabri became a powerful advocate of the separation of church and state. He repeatedly

²⁶See Fabri's letter to his fiancée of 2 April 1849. Timotheus Fabri, ed., *Im Lenze der Liebe. Briefe aus dem Nachlaβ von Friedrich Fabri* (Berlin: Wilhelm Hertz, 1895), pp. 76-79.

²⁷See especially Ed. Kriele, Geschichte der Rheinischen Mission. Vol. I, Die Rheinische Mission in der Heimat (Barmen: Missionshaus, 1928), pp. 142-160.

²⁸On Fabri, see the following: H. Beyer, "Friedrich Fabri über Nationalstaat und Kirchliche Freiheit," Zeitschrift für Bayerische Kirchengeschichte, 30 (1961): 72-97; Erich Foerster, "Liberalismus und Kulturkampf," Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte, XLVII, Neue Folge X (1928): 543-559; Heinrich Bornkamm, "Die Staatsidee im Kulturkampf," Historische Zeitschrift, 170 (1950): 41-72; and 273-306; Klaus J. Bade, Friedrich Fabri und der Imperialismus in der Bismarckzeit (Freiburg i.B.-Zürich, 1975); Wolfgang R. Schmidt, Mission, Kirche und Reich bei Friedrich Fabri (Wuppertal-Barmen: Missionshaus, 1965); and Jörg Ohlemacher, Das Reich Gottes in Deutschland Bauen. Ein Beitrag zur Vorgeschichte und Theologie der deutschen Gemeinschaftsbewegung (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 1986).

addressed the issue in writing, especially in the wake of Bismarck's startling military successes against Austria in 1866 and France in 1870 when, as Fabri argued, a great opportunity presented itself for a reorganization of this relationship on a national scale.³⁰ In a meeting with the Iron Chancellor himself, Fabri apparently came close to convincing Bismarck to promote a program of independence for the German churches from the state, but the latter procrastinated and the *Kulturkampf*,³¹ following in the wake of the First Vatican Council's proclamation of papal infallibility in 1870, diverted the issue onto other tracks which preempted the discussion. Fabri addressed the topic in 1872, *Staat und Kirche* [Church and State] and again in 1887, *Wie weiter? Kirchenpolitische Betrachtungen zum Ende des Kulturkampfes* [How farther? Church Political Considerations at the End of the Kulturkampf]. It was in the last book that he wrote:

Viewed historically, the separation of Church and State has long since ceased to be an abstraction; in the United States, the Netherlands, Belgium, and to a certain extent in England and elsewhere it has long since been implemented and is effective. And to a large extent these countries have been spared a Kulturkampf and other church-political upheavals. Under these circumstances one can truthfully say that the separation of Church and State is a church-political principle which was already enunciated by the Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth century.³²

The reference to the Anabaptists must have come from Keller; their emphasis on the recovery of the apostolic church must have been especially appealing to him.

Fabri's missions and kingdom of God orientation also led him to search for a universal point of contact for Christianity within all peoples on earth. In this connection, the mystical component

³⁰For example: Staat und Kirche. Betrachtungen zur Lage Deutschlands in der Gegenwart (Gotha: Friedrich Andreas Perthes, 1872). Of Fabri, Heinrich Bornkamm, "Die Staatsidee im Kulturkampf," HZ, 170 (1950): 65, has written: "Von ihm [Fabri] stammen die einzigen konstruktiven Vorschläge, sie heben sich hoch aus der übrigen theologischen, juristischen und politischen Literatur heraus."

³¹On the Kulturkampf, see Erich Schmidt-Volkmar, Der Kulturkampf in Deutschland 1871-1890 (Göttingen: Musterschmidt Verlag, 1962).

³²Friedrich Fabri, Wie weiter? Kirchenpolitische Betrachtungen zum Ende des Kulturkampfes (Gotha: Friedrich Andreas Perthes, 1887), p. 26, as well as Schmidt, Kriele, and Ohlemacher.

of Fabri's theological thought, fostered by the lectures of the Romantic philosopher, Schelling, at the University of Berlin and by what Fabri himself calls the "Württemberg Fathers"-Jacob Böhme, Baader, Oetinger, Bengel—became useful.³³ This mystical element is clearly visible in Fabri's 1861 tract: *The Sensus* Communis, the Vehicle of God's Revelation in all Men.34 He described this "vehicle" as the divine spark present even in natural, non-Christian man which draws all persons to God.35 To prove his contention, Fabri cited the classic biblical passages used by the ancient Neoplatonic church fathers and Renaissance Christian humanists to make the identical case: the opening verses of the Gospel of John and St. Paul's Sermon on Mars Hill at the head. Of the first, St. Augustine had written in his Confessions that when he had read the Platonists in Latin translation, he had been surprised to find the first six verses of the Gospel of John there, "not indeed in the same words, but to the selfsame effect." And John Tauler, the great fourteenthcentury German mystic cited Augustine as proof of the fact that Plato and Proclus had known and spoken of this "divine spark"-or, as the mystics called it, this "Abyss of the soul"-long before the Bible had. But was this a truly biblical and not an extra-biblical concept that allowed Augustine and the other church fathers to read their Neoplatonism into the Bible?

Fabri combined this mystical element in his theology with an emphasis on personal conversion. Such an emphasis had long been central to mystical thought—Tauler referred to it as "the baptism of the Holy Spirit." It was modelled on the conversions of St. Paul and St. Augustine—the latter described in his Confessions—and came into Pietism through Johann Arndt's True Christianity of 1609 and Philip Jakob Spener's Pia Desideria of 1675. The concept can even be found in the life and theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher, who combined Pietism with Romanticism to win what he called the "cultural despisers of Christianity" back to the fold. Fabri heard Schleiermacher lecture at the University of Berlin, emphasized his own personal conversion and defended the revivals that took place in 1857 in Elberfeld and elsewhere in Germany in an 1861 tract entitled: Revivals [Erweckungen] on German Soil. A Depiction and

³³See especially Bade, Friedrich Fabri, pp. 29-33.

35 Ibid., p. 7.

³⁴Friedrich Fabri, Der Sensus Communis, das Organ der Offenbarung Gottes in Allen Menschen (Barmen: W. Langewiesche's Verlagshandlung, 1861).

Explanation of Conversions in the Elberfeld Orphanage and their Accompanying Manifestations.³⁶ A conference of ministers and laymen from Lutheran, Reformed, and Union [Alliance] Rhineland and Westphalian churches met subsequent to the 1857 phenomenon in order to evaluate it and drew up some ten theological theses regarding such conversions. The fourth read: "According to the testimony of the Bible as well as of history, these revivals are to be interpreted as gracious visitations from God which, as powerful calls to repentance, are intended to terrify the hearts of sinners and strengthen the faith of the children of God."³⁷ It was this kind of an evangelical church Keller joined when he came to Münster in 1874.

One last factor must be mentioned before we turn to our topic proper. It was not only the German Mennonites who sought renewal in their German churches. So did virtually every other Protestant group, especially the Pietist groups within them. The Scientific Revolution, rationalism, religious wars, the Industrial Revolution, and the rise of secular socialistic ideas—especially communism—had all undermined established religion over the years. The Enlightenment had led to the religious indifference of nineteenth century political liberalism, and thus to many Christianity seemed on the very brink of extinction. In 1800, as we have seen, Schleiermacher began his public career with addresses to the "cultural despisers of religion" in Germany. In 1855 Friedrich Fabri wrote his Letters Against Materialism, and in his 1872 State and Church he observed:

It is nearly universally assumed to be self-evident that the political rejuvenation of the new German Empire will also bring about a revival of our German-evangelical church conditions. No one could desire this more fervently than the author of this tract. But according to what logic such a consequence must follow, is not apparent to him. Even the witness of history contradicts such a thesis, for great political epochs seldom coincide with great religious movements.³⁹

Fabri was not a voice crying for renewal in the German wilderness; there were literally thousands upon thousands with

³⁶⁽Barmen: W. Langenwiesche's Verlagshandlung, 1861).

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸Friedrich Fabri, Briefe gegen den Materialismus (Stuttgart, 1855).

³⁹Staat und Kirche, p. IV.

him. Ludwig Keller was one of them. And in Keller's contacts with the German Mennonites and their history the two movements for renewal came together. Did they have identical goals?

We have finally arrived at what was originally to be our point of departure. This preamble was necessary, however, for without it Ludwig Keller would confront us in an intellectual vacuum and our story would be incomplete, if not incomprehensible. Not that it shall now be fully comprehensible: this historian, as all historians do, shall see to that!

Ludwig Keller arrived in Münster in 1874, and—as archivist he literally "sat" on the documents-early turned to the study of Anabaptism in that city. Cornelius had already done so before him, but his work on the Münster uprising of 1525 had remained incomplete. And so in 1880 Keller published his first major work: Geschichte der Wiedertäufer und ihres Reiches zu Münster [A History of the Anabaptists and their Kingdom in Münster]. Was Keller attracted to the topic because of Fabri's "kingdom of God" theology, a kingdom the Münsterites-however wrongheadedly-had attempted to establish? Whatever the case, Keller's treatment seemed to many a model of historical impartiality for his day, especially of a topic that had traditionally lent itself as a vehicle for the vilification of sixteenthcentury Anabaptism.40 But the study also contained indications of the future development of Keller's scholarly work. He stressed the Anabaptist attempt to revive the apostolic congregational model, rejected the thesis that adult or rebaptism was a fundamental aspect of the movement,41 recognized the emphasis on the New Testament but then exalted the "inner Word" which he seemed to think permeated the movement. He also drew attention to the concept of the community of goods, good works, and the rejection of the oath. His later thesis, fully developed in his 1885 Die Reformation und die älteren Reformparteien [The

⁴⁰For this theme in Fabri and the Pietistic "Gemeinschaftsbewegung" generally, see Jörg Ohlemacher. Das Reich Gottes in Deutschland Bauen. Henry S. Burrage, himself an American Baptist historian of Anabaptism, wrote Keller on 6 July 1881 upon reading Keller's study: "In reading this book I have not been able to detect a party bias. I have found nothing that shows whether you are a Roman Catholic or a Protestant. This is as it should be. Men too long have been accustomed to read history through their prejudices. What we want are the facts, and these, it seems to me, you have honestly endeavored to give." Keller Correspondence.

⁴¹Geschichte der Wiedertäufer, p. 8.

Reformation and the older Reform Parties], was also already present in embryonic form. And his predilection for Hans Denck, whom he called "one of the most interesting personalities of an eventful epoch," was quite apparent. He noted the connection of Denck's thought to Germany's medieval mystical tradition and asserted that this tradition "had found learned representatives in Germany." It had also been opposed "to the externalization of religion [and] strove to realize a renewal of all aspects of human life through an inner and practical religiosity."⁴² With respect to the "inner Word," Keller quoted Denck as having asserted: "I hold the Bible above all human treasures, but I hold the inner Word still higher; for it is the voice of God itself. The Bible is useful for salvation; the voice of God in man, or the inner Word, is essential." Denck, Keller continued, "conceived the inner Word as the natural revelation of God in the human conscience. The 'inner Word,' Denck said, has been given to all people and nations, even to those who do not know or possess the Bible."43 Here was Fabri's sensus communis for which the latter had argued on the basis of a tradition going back at least to the medieval mystics.

Keller's history of the Münster Anabaptists, his first major historical study, remains his best. One can, it is true, detect predilections here and there; one can also—in light of Keller's connections with Fabri—see how certain aspects of Anabaptist thought appeared to confirm views he himself must already have held. Nonetheless, he was remarkably impartial, viewing the entire event as a tragedy of considerable magnitude that had not only affected the development of Anabaptism, but all of sixteenth-century Germany.

Keller's attraction to Denck must have induced him to write the latter's biography; it was published in 1882 as *Ein Apostel der Wiedertäufer* [An Apostle of the Anabaptists].⁴⁴ Clearly his hero, Keller also made Denck the hero of a great multitude in the early years of the Reformation, observing in the introduction:

The name of the man, to whom the following lines are dedicated, is known at present only to a few scholars. But there was a time when Hans Denck was the leader of a great party, when many thousands hung on every word that

⁴² Ibid., p. 34.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 35-36.

⁴⁴⁽Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1882).

issued from his lips and drew from his writings the enthusiasm that made it possible for them to face martyrdom and death with courage.⁴⁵

Of what party or branch had Denck been the leader, according to Keller? It was the party, he said, not of the "Anabaptists," but of Sebastian Franck and Caspar Schwenkfeld—of the "Spiritualists." It was the party under the influence of Thomas à Kempis' *Imitatio Christi* and the anonymous fifteenth century *Theologia Deutsch* [The German Theology]. Keller conceded that Denck had deviated from these teachings in several points later on—a not very veiled reference to Denck's "Anabaptist" interlude. But Denck had "recognized and confessed this error before his death." Clearly, Keller had not yet met the German Mennonite heirs of those Anabaptists.

Dutch Mennonite scholars like A. M. Cramer and his son, Samuel, Christiaan Sepp, and de Hoop Scheffer, wrote Keller complimentary letters after his first book, but it was not until his book on Denck appeared that German Mennonites began to write him. On 14 March 1883 Anna Brons wrote for the first time, remarking that every time she read in his Denck biography "it was as though those who had died for the faith more than three hundred years ago had been resurrected by the breath of God and were looking around to see if anyone of the present generation held them in any esteem." On 10 April 1883 the Mennonite pastor at Leer, A. G. Gilse, wrote Keller to say he had just been to Emden where he had met Bernard Brons. The latter had already visited Keller and stood in correspondence with him.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. Ill.

[&]quot;Es freut mich, daß auch Inspektor Fabri seine Freude über Ihren Denck geäußert," would seem to indicate that Keller had indeed stumbled upon a topic that confirmed Fabri's theology. Indeed, it could be argued that Keller's historical studies confirmed what Fabri had set out systematically in his theology. And in what would appear to be another confirmation of Fabri's influence upon Keller—this time in terms of his anticonfessionalism—Friedrich Nippold wrote Keller from Bern on 20 October 1883, quoting from his review of Keller's studies: "Im Anschluß an die von Lassen's Lehrer Cornelius ausgegangene Würdigung der Täuferbewegung dürfen hier auch die ebenso gründlichen wie erwärmenden Werke von Ludwig Keller 'Geschichte der Wiedertäufer und Ihres Reiches zu Münster' und 'Ein Apostel der Wiedertäufer' (Hans Denck) schon darum nicht vergessen werden, weil der Verfasser eine Weitsicht des historischen Blickes bekundet, die dem protestantischen Konfessionalismus völlig abhanden gekommen ist." Keller himself underlined the last few words. Keller Correspondence.

⁴⁷Anna Brons to Keller, 14 March 1883. Keller Correspondence.

It was from Brons, Gilse continued, that he had heard of Keller's "far-reaching enthusiastic plans." What, we ask with H. G. Mannhardt, were these plans?

This casual remark by van Gilse would appear to place the initiative for the evolving relationship between Keller and the German Mennonites squarely with Keller; but it is significant—as the sequel will demonstrate—that it was the liberal Emden Mennonite, Bernard Brons, who served as his Mennonite co-conspirator.⁴⁹

Anna Brons was not the only German Mennonite to respond favorably to Keller's *An Apostle of the Anabaptists*. On 29 May 1883 Ernst Weydmann, Mennonite pastor in Krefeld, expressed his heartfelt thanks to Keller for the "inestimable service" the latter had performed for the German Mennonites. In his letter, Weydmann spoke of a "vindication of the honor" of peaceful sixteenth-century Anabaptists.⁵⁰

On 13 June 1883 Bernard Brons wrote Keller regarding an advertisement for his Denck book. In order to have an impact, ostensibly on Mennonites, such a notice would have to carry Mennonite endorsements. He and Dr. Müller, pastor in Emden, were prepared to supply these. Two days later, in response to a postcard from Keller, Brons halted the printing of what he called a "circular." On 20 June, H. van der Smissen, co-pastor of the Mennonite church in Hamburg-Altona and editor of the Mennonitische Blätter, wrote Keller saying he was returning Keller's own manuscript upon which the circular was to be based. He wished to know, however, what was behind the circular, and how this "defense of Hans Denck" [Eintreten für Hans Denck] was to be accomplished. Did the Emdeners, he queried,

envision recommending in favor of a proclamation of Denck's views as the official confession [of faith] and symbol of present-day Mennonites, and thereby indirectly rejecting the older position which appealed more or less completely to the ideas espoused by Menno Simons and the theological positions later developed in conjunction with these?⁵²

⁴⁸A. G. van Gilse to Keller, 10 April 1883. Keller Correspondence.

⁴⁹Bernard Brons was the son of Anna Brons.

⁵⁰E. Weydmann to Keller, 29 May 1883. Keller Correspondence.

⁵¹B. Brons to Keller, 13 June 1883. Keller Correspondence.

⁵²H. van der Smissen to Keller, 20 June 1883. Keller Correspondence.

But van der Smissen was nearly alone in his concern about the direction the "Emdeners," as Keller's surrogates, were taking; for men like Ernst Weydmann of Krefeld regarded Keller's work on Anabaptism to be "impartial and non-partisan" and his intentions above suspicion.

On 22 July 1883 Bernard Brons informed Keller that he and Pastor Müller, after some hesitation on the latter's part, had, on the basis of Keller's draft, drawn up a final version of the circular and sent it out for approval and signature endorsements.⁵⁴ In the meantime, Brons, Weydmann, and others began to promote Keller's An Apostle of the Anabaptists in the German Mennonite churches, with Weydmann reporting to Keller on 8 August 1883 that, on his recommendation of the book, some forty persons had placed orders with him.55 Keller himself provided Brons and others with complimentary copies for distribution where pastors and influential members might not be able to afford them. Finally, by mid August, the circular was ready and Bernard Brons reported to Keller that of the 1300 copies printed, 1000 had been sent to ninety German and Russian Mennonite congregations, five had been sent to Keller, and the rest were to be sent to America. What did the circular contain?

The circular was addressed to "our Mennonite fellow-believers" and carried the autographs of Bernard Brons, deacon in Emden, Carl Harder, preacher in Elbing, J. Ellenberger, pastor at Friedelsheim and Bad Dürkheim, Dr. J. P. Müller, pastor in Emden, Reinhard Rahusen, deacon at Leer, H. van der Smissen, preacher in Hamburg-Altona, F. H. G. Brouer, archdeacon at Leer, A. H. van Gilse, preacher at Leer, H. G. Mannhardt, preacher in Danzig, H. A. Neufeld, preacher in Friedrichstadt, Theodor Silmon, deacon at Leer and E. Weydmann, pastor in Krefeld—virtually all North German or Prussian Mennonite leaders. Even van der Smissen, despite his earlier misgivings, signed the document. It read as follows:

Many of the most prominent German periodicals have, in the last year, focused their attention on a book which possesses a very special interest for us Mennonites. We refer to the biography of Hans Denck which the Archivist, Dr. Ludwig Keller of Münster in Westphalia has published with

⁵³E. Weydmann to Keller, 3 July 1883. Keller Correspondence.

⁵⁴B. Brons to Keller, 22 July 1883. Keller Correspondence.

⁵⁵E. Weydmann to Keller, 8 August 1883. Keller Correspondence.

S. Hirzel in Leipzig under the title "An Apostle of the Anabaptists."

The most important epoch of our fellowship's history lies in the age in which Dr. Martin Luther began the great work of Reformation. It was precisely in this period that Hans Denck became one of the leaders of the movement whose descendants we Mennonites proudly claim to be. The contemporary opponents labelled our forefathers "Anabaptists"; but our ancestors consistently rejected such an appellation and simply called themselves "Christian brothers" or "Disciples of Christ"; they also rejected any connection to the kingdom of Jan of Leyden.

If a man who does not belong to our fellowship now proves on the basis of Denck's own writings that the latter belonged to the noblest and most spiritual of men to have lived in Germany at the time, this must be—we are convinced—an important testimony to us that the book is an impartial and truthful account.

We are proud to have such a man among our forefathers. In the interest, especially the spiritual/intellectual interest of our Mennonite fellowship, it would, in our view, be most lamentable if Keller's study were to pass unnoticed in our wider circles. Even amongst those who might not share Denck's views in every detail, the warm spirit of peace and love that emanates from the fragments quoted by Keller from Denck's writings has to impress everyone most favorably because, on the one hand, they demonstrate the ties that bind and unify, and on the other, make us forget those things that antagonize and divide. Until several hundred years ago, Denck's writings were at home in many Anabaptist congregations. Perhaps Keller's study will inspire [someone] to collect and publish them in a modern idiom. But until that happens, we wish most sincerely to recommend to our fellow believers that they avail themselves of the substitute offered by Keller's study; in order that Denck's spiritual and ardent piety, the expression he gave it in his life through a quiet toleration and a consistent defense of the truth, would exercise its blessed and healing power in our day-as it did

upon thousands in his—for the welfare and renewal of our fellowship.⁵⁶

The circular concluded with a plea for books and manuscripts from those first years of Anabaptist history to be sent to the editor of the *Mennonitische Blätter*.

Were Denck and his theological ideas really to provide the means by which a revival of the German Mennonites was to be effected? And was Keller's understanding of Denck the same as that of the leaders of the North German Mennonites? What about the South German Mennonites? What kind of a Hans Denck was this anyway? In a letter of 18 August 1883, Gustav Kawerau wrote Keller to complain about the latter's reaction to his and Theodor Kolde's criticism of the Denck biography. In passing, Kawerau observed that it had probably been for the best that men like Denck had been forced outside the mainstream of sixteenth-century Germany, that the Church had not followed in his footsteps and adopted what Kawerau called "this mixture of Medieval Mysticism and modern Rationalism" even though Denck had represented a "revived lay element," an influence that had not reentered the Lutheran Church "until 150 years later in the form of Pietism." Keller, Kawerau concluded, had provided a translation of Denck into the language of their time.⁵⁷ A. Lamers, in a letter to Keller of 17 October 1886, argued the latter had done even more. 'With your Hans Denck," he wrote, "you have quite apparently given the Mennonites a new hero to empower and encourage them. But you have also provided the entire Protestant world with a religious ideal type."58 Obviously, Keller's non-Mennonite critics were not quite as sanguine about Keller's impartiality and objectivity as were the Mennonites.

Denck the Mennonite hero, a mixture of medieval mysticism and modern rationalism. How would such an ideal type play in

58 Ibid.

⁵⁶Keller Correspondence. On 21 August 1883 Samuel Cramer wrote to Keller that he had received a copy of the circular from Emden. From the letter it would appear that Keller had also desired to push the German Mennonites, by means of the Dutch, toward establishing their own theological schools, for Cramer wrote: "Die Ideen von Holland aus Theolog. Ausbildung bei den deutschen Mennoniten anzuregen hat sich dahin geändert, daß ich an einige Deutsche Mennoniten, Brons, v. d. Smissen, u.s.w. schreiben werde: sollten die Deutschen etwas derartiges stiften aber ihnen nicht genug Geld zur Verfügung stehn, so sollen sie nur in Holland anklopfen, wo einflußreiche Leute gerne unterstützen wollen. Aber die Deutschen müssen die Sache in Angriff nehmen." Keller Correspondence.

⁵⁷Gustav Kawerau to Keller, 18 August 1883. Keller Correspondence.

a German Mennonite community in which North Germans—such as Bernard Brons—were proud of the fact that, as he put it in the *Mennonitische Blätter* in 1909, "the first and for a long time the only person to possess Strauß's 'Life of Christ' [in Emden] was the then preacher of the Mennonite congregation, L. van Hulst," and the South German, especially the Palatine Mennonites were, as even Samuel Cramer put it in a letter to Keller, too pietistic. Would Keller's Denck appeal to these two groups in which rationalism and Pietism had come to be separated?

În the meantime, Keller and the leaders of the North German Mennonites proceeded, where they could, to promote Keller's Denck biography. Keller also began to seek to organize the German Mennonites into a closer association by means of which they might undertake programs important to the role he wished them to play: first, the organization of a society to promote the publication of Anabaptist sources-first and foremost the writings of Hans Denck; second, the establishment of a Mennonite theological seminary in Germany, or at least the appointment of a Mennonite professor for this purpose at a German university; and third, the appointment of itinerant preachers among the Mennonites in order to stem the erosion within their congregations.⁶¹ To this end Keller called a meeting of Mennonite pastors and lay leaders in Münster for 29 May 1885, which had the organization of such a society as its goal. Recognizing the rift between the urban congregations of the North and the more conservative landed congregations, the agenda sought to discover the means by which the latter could be won for the organization. Once German Mennonite unity was achieved, Article 4 of the program required German Mennonites to seek ways of establishing closer relations with the Mennonite churches of North America, Holland, Russia, and Switzerland.62 And while he was attempting to facilitate the organization of a world-wide Mennonite community, Keller was also establishing contacts with Baptists, Quakers, Templers, Waldenses, and anyone else he could place into his "old evangelical" category.

⁵⁹Bernard Brons, "Früher und Jetzt," Mennonitische Blätter, #5 (May, 1909): 45. ⁶⁰S. Cramer to Keller, 8 June 1883. Keller Correspondence.

⁶¹Innumerable letters between August 1883 and May 1885 testify to Keller's ims.

⁶² 'Programm für die Versammlung mennonitischer Männer in Münster am 29. Mai 1885.' Keller Correspondence. Also in the Mennonitische Blätter (1885): 65-70.

In his opening remarks to those who responded to his invitation to gather in conference in Münster, Keller observed that his correspondence with Mennonites in preparation for the meeting had convinced him "that the old spirit of witnessing, which I have so often observed in the history of the old evangelical brotherhoods over the centuries, is still present, that it, although dormant at the moment, only needs to be reawakened in order to prove anew its trust in God, its willingness to make sacrifices, and its energy."63 He told the Mennonites they were at a crossroads, that this was their decisive hour, and in order for them to be able to face the grave dangers the future held in store, they would have to revive their sixteenth-century heritage.⁶⁴ As far as Keller was concerned, Denck and the intellectual/spiritual position he represented stood at the heart of this heritage. In subsequent years he made this increasingly clear. On 28 November 1886 Keller wrote Anna Brons:

Finally the *inner renewal* of the fellowship must be pursued energetically on the basis of the *pre-Münsterite* principles [i.e., the principles of the period 1517-1534]. Professor de Hoop Scheffer has occasionally written [in a Protestant periodical] that Menno Simons defended "precisely the most narrow-minded interpretation" of his community . . . and there is some truth to this. Not the post-Münsterite, but the pre-Münsterite epoch is the greatest period of the Church.⁶⁵

⁶³ Keller Correspondence.

⁶⁴Ibid. In a letter to H. van der Smissen of 4 December 1888, Keller wrote: 'Mein Ziel u. mein Wunsch war u. ist, wie Sie wissen, daß mit Gottes Hilfe eine innere Wiedergeburt der altevangelischen Gemeinden im Anschluß an die Tradition [my italics] sich vollziehen möge, zum Segen vieler Menschen, deren Glaube heute erschüttert ist." Keller Correspondence.

⁶⁵Keller to Anna Brons, 28 November 1886. See also the following passage from a letter to Christian Neff of 7 April 1888: "Ich habe oft die Empfindung, die einst der 'Befestiger' Mennos, Obbe Philipps, gehabt hat, daß seit der Zeit von Johann Matthys aus Haarlem (auf dem, wie Sie wissen, die Bestätigung Obbes zurückging) einer der wichtigsten Grundsätze, nämlich die apostolischen Succession als 'selbstaufgeworfener Prophet' verlassen und verleugnet hat, die Geschichte der alten Gemeinden eine unglückliche Wendung nahm. Es gibt kein Mittel, um hier Rat zu schaffen, als daß man zu den ältesten und reinsten Überlieferungen, die vor Matthys Zeit liegen, zurückkehrt und an die apostolischen Zeiten wieder anknüpft." Keller Correspondence.

Though left unspoken here, Keller left no doubt that he considered Hans Denck the most important of the pre-Münsterite Anabaptist leaders;66 and Denck had belonged to a tradition exemplified by the "writings of the friends of God, the great preacher John Tauler, the German Theology, the books of John Arndt and John Staupitz, among others," as he wrote in a letter to Jacob R. Toews of Newton, Kansas.⁶⁷ While other early Anabaptist leaders might be interesting and their writings worth resurrecting, it was Denck's position that was to be the cornerstone upon which Mennonite renewal was to take place. H. van der Smissen's question to Keller in his very first letter of 20 June 1883—whether the circular sent out to so many Mennonite churches, both at home and abroad in mid-August of that year, envisioned "recommending in favor of a proclamation of Denck's views as the official confession [of faith] and symbol of presentday German Mennonites" and the concomitant rejection of Menno Simons—was to be answered in the affirmative. Keller, however, never responded directly to van der Smissen on the matter.

To accomplish his goal, Keller first sought to saturate the German Mennonite churches with copies of his Hans Denck biography, even accepting monetary contributions from the Brons family for the purpose. The circular of mid-August 1883 was clearly intended to promote such a saturation. Second, Keller sought to recover all of Denck's writings from the German archives in order to publish his collected works. Too busy to do this himself, he appealed, at the close of his 1885 essay on Hans Langenmantel in the *Mennonitische Blätter* for an "industrious hand" to at least copy these from the originals, and make additional copies. At the same time he tried to get August Rauschenbusch⁶⁹ to prepare an edition for publication in the United States, only to be told in a letter of 29 May 1885:

⁶⁶See especially Keller's "Neuere Urteile über Hans Denck (1527)," Monatshefte der Comenius Gesellschaft, VI (1897): 77-98.

⁶⁷Keller to Jacob R. Toews, 11 February 1889. Keller Correspondence.

⁶⁸Ludwig Keller, "Lebensbeschreibungen altevangelischer M\u00e4nner aus der Reformationszeit. I. Hans Langenmantel," Mennonitische Bl\u00e4tter, XXXII, #5 (May, 1885): 36.

⁶⁹August Rauschenbusch was the father of Walter Rauschenbusch of Social Gospel fame, and founder of the so-called "German Department" at the Rochester Baptist Seminary.

With regard to your important inquiry concerning the publication of an edition of Denck's writings, it appears to me most improbable that such a project would garner much support among American Baptists. Permit me to state quite candidly that Denck would not meet with much sympathy among Baptists since he, even much more than other Anabaptists, is a semipelagian; Baptists, by contrast, are Augustinian.⁷⁰

However, even before he received Rauschenbusch's rejection, Keller must have received a letter of 10 May 1885 from the young German Mennonite, John Horsch of Gelchsheim, Bavaria, offering to copy, and prepare extra copies of, Hans Denck's writings. As it turned out, Horsch never did any extended work on the preparation of Denck's writings, but he did publish an edition of the *German Theology*, with disastrous consequences. But that story will be told in a later chapter.

In the meantime, the Mennonitische Blätter, under Keller's influence, began to publish excerpts from the German Theology,72 calling it a Waldensian document, and Keller himself kept dispensing copies of his books gratis to German Mennonites. On 16 October 1885, for example, Ernst Göbel, director of the school at the Weierhof, thanked Keller for some 24 copies which he had disbursed among South German Mennonites.73 Then, beginning in January 1886, Keller began to publish the very positive reactions to his Denck biography in the Mennonitische Blätter under the title of "Neuere Urteile über Hans Denck" [Recent Judgments on Hans Denck] which ran through seven issues.74 Already in 1885 Keller also began to contact German university students, sending them copies of his books and, on occasion, even providing them with stipends so that they could come to Münster to work on historical documents under his guidance. At other times, Mennonite university students contacted him, as did Christian Neff on 7 October 1885, on the recommendation of van der Smissen. Wishing to learn more about the spiritual heritage of his people, Neff requested a copy of Keller's The Reformation

⁷⁰Rauschenbusch to Keller, 10 May 1885. Keller Correspondence.

⁷¹John Horsch to Keller, 10 May 1885. Keller Correspondence.

^{72&}quot;/Einige Abschnitte aus der 'deutschen Theologie'," Mennonitische Blätter, XXXII, #10 (September, 1885): 1; and #2 (November, 1885): 1-2.

⁷³E. Göbel to Keller, 16 October 1885. Keller Correspondence.

⁷⁴Ludwig Keller, "Neuere Urteile über Denck," Mennonitische Blätter, XXXIII, #12 (January-July, 1886: 5-6; 21-23; 30; 38-39; 51; 61-62; 89-92.

and the older Reform Parties.75 Keller replied on the 10th stating that he had given van der Smissen permission to

refer you and all your fellow Mennonite students who are studying theology at German universities to me, because I have come to the realization that if it is not possible to enthuse persons for the study of the old evangelical churches—for that is the historical name of your fellowship—who will later be able to carry on independent studies in the field, then, I say, there is little hope for it to make a gratifying progress.⁷⁶

For the ruling churches, Keller concluded, were determined systematically to hush up and ignore these matters and any books that dealt with them. Thus began a relationship between the two that lasted until Keller's death.⁷⁷

On 20 January 1888 Keller, still seeking someone to prepare Denck's writings for publication, wrote Ernst Göbel at the Weierhof. The desire had been expressed, he said, for a popular account of the life of Denck with excerpts from his writings. He could not do this himself, but he would be prepared to assist anyone willing to undertake the project. Could Göbel name a suitable person with the required scholarly ability? Göbel could; he named Christian Neff. Keller responded on 25 January, laying down the following conditions for Neff, should he accept the assignment: first, the project should be begun immediately and completed no later than January 1889; second, once completed and in the publisher's hands, a subscription form should be sent to every Mennonite congregation; third, a major publisher should be selected; and, last, extensive excerpts from Denck's own writings should be included. No polemic was to be allowed.⁷⁸

On 30 January Neff accepted the assignment on Keller's terms even though, as he said, he had as yet studied relatively little church history and had never worked with original sources. But since he had been asked to give a report on Keller's Denck biography at the next Palatine Mennonite ministers' conference, he would get to work immediately.⁷⁹ Keller acknowledged

⁷⁵Christian Neff to Keller, 7 October 1885. Keller Correspondence.

⁷⁶Keller to Neff, 10 October 1885. Keller Correspondence.

⁷⁷See Neff's essay on Keller in both the Mennonitisches Lexikon and the Mennonite Encyclopedia.

⁷⁸Keller to E. Göbel, 25 January 1888. Keller Correspondence.

⁷⁹Neff to Keller, 30 January 1888. Keller Correspondence.

Neff's response on 1 February. In his letter he enclosed a copy of Denck's "Ordnung Gottes" so that Neff could prepare a copy for himself, and he promised to send other pieces as Neff completed his assignments. He also recommended that Neff devote himself especially to a study of the *German Theology* which, as Keller put it, "in many respects is indispensable for an understanding of Denck's theology." And he commended to Neff his "Neuere Urteile über Hans Denck" and the talk he had just recently given in Berlin on the old evangelical churches.⁸⁰

The press of his pastoral duties and untimely illnesses, however, did not allow Neff to make the kind of progress on his Denck project that he had envisioned and Keller had laid down as a precondition. The latter enquired as to Neff's progress from time to time,81 but it was not until 25 October 1888 that Neff informed Keller that he had been forced to put a halt to all work on Hans Denck.82 By November 1889 Keller appears to have given up on Neff, and the correspondence between the two comes to a stop. Not until February of 1898 do we discover the true reason for the cessation of Neff's work on Denck. In a review of Gerhard Haake's Hans Denck, Ein Vorläufer der neueren Theologie [Hans Denck, a Precursor of the Newer Theology], 83 in the Mennonitische Blätter of 4 March 1898, Neff wrote that the more he read in Denck's writings the more he realized that the latter's "way of thinking was alien to mine. This very fact," he continued.

hindered me, some eight years ago, from pursuing the kind recommendation of the honored archivist, Dr. Keller, and writing a popular account of Denck's life. The more I immersed myself in Denck's writings the more I sensed and realized the distance that existed between our religious views, and I therefore believed, since I could not write such a biography with enthusiasm, to back away from it entirely.⁸⁴

⁸⁰Ludwig Keller, Zur Geschichte der Altevangelischen Gemeinden (Berlin: Ernst Mittler & Sohn, 1887).

⁸¹Keller to Neff, 5 April 1888; 7 April 1888, and 10 October 1888. Keller Correspondence.

⁸²Neff to Keller, 25 October 1888. Keller Correspondence.

^{83 (}Norden: Diedr. Soltan, 1897).

⁸⁴Christian Neff, "Zur Haake'schen Schrift Hans Denck, ein Vorläufer der neueren Theologie," Mennonitische Blätter, XLV, #3 (1 March, 1898): 22.

Clearly, if Denck represented what Keller had called "the oldest and purest tradition [which to be sure lay in the time before Menno]," Neff and the South German Mennonites wanted none of it.

But if the South German Mennonites could not stomach Denck's mystical theology, perhaps the North Germans could. On 10 April 1897 Gerhard Haake, former university student at Strassburg and now pastor of the Mennonite church at Monsheim, but originally a North German Mennonite, wrote Keller that he had read the latter's books and fallen in love with Hans Denck. He now wished to write a doctoral dissertation for the University of Jena under the direction of Friedrich Nippold⁸⁵ on: "Hans Denck the Theologian as seen through his own Writings." All he would have to do, Haake asserted, is "make a thorough study of Denck's writings; in this fashion I could perform a service for us Mennonites and your hero, seeing to it that his ideas are widely disseminated." He requested Keller's personal copies of Denck's writings and assured him that he would "work totally in agreement with your assumptions."86 Keller must have responded affirmatively, for on the 16th Haake wrote again, thanking Keller for the proffered help. His desire, he said, was to portray Denck as "modern theologian." He explained what he had in mind in a letter written two days later. There he wrote:

if one has once, as it were, fallen in love with a hero, as I have with Hans Denck, and begins to formulate ideas about a thesis, one can no longer be rid of them. I have myself noticed that it is somewhat difficult to portray Denck's theology with clarity; it is much more interesting both for me and others to treat him as a "modern" theologian. At every stage we encounter parallels with Lessing, Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Lipsius, above all with Richard Rothe.⁸⁸

By 9 July 1897, that is some four months later, Haake informed Keller he was to receive his *Lic. Theol.* at the University of Jena on the basis of his thesis: "Hans Denck, a Precursor of

⁸⁵On Friedrich Nippold, a correspondent of Keller, see the entry in the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, III (1957): 888.

⁸⁶Gerhard Haake to Keller, 10 April 1897. Keller Correspondence.

⁸⁷Haake to Keller, 16 April 1897. Keller Correspondence.

⁸⁸ Haake to Keller, 18 April 1897. Keller Correspondence.

Schleiermacher."⁸⁹ On the 30th he could report that everything had gone as planned and he had been awarded the degree. On the recommendation of Professor Nippold, he asked whether the thesis might be published in the *Monatshefte der Comenius Gesellschaft*, a journal founded by Keller in 1892. Haake also offered to defend Keller in a postscript against the attacks of a Professor Lüdemann of Bern, Switzerland.⁹⁰

Keller published his "Neuere Urteile über Hans Denck" in his Monatshefte in the same year. Written from what Herbert Butterfield has called a "Whig interpretation of history,"91 Keller emphasized Denck's theological modernity and his importance to the early Anabaptist movement. He concluded that "in the writings of Denck an outstanding memorial of German intellectual life has come down to us, and it is a duty imposed by the national honor to collect and sort them, making them available to the general public in a new edition."92 But he informed Haake that his study was too long for inclusion in the Monatshefte. In a letter of 2 October 1897 Haake requested that Keller at least review the book when published. He feared, he added, "that many adherents of our church [the German Mennonites] will scream [bloody] murder when they read the booklet, for I have spoken openly of the fact that many contemporary Mennonites have deserted Denck's idealism." He anticipated a resulting conflict but hoped Keller could be kept out of it.93 In his answer of 4 October Keller suggested strongly to his young pupil that he not do anything rash but consider the consequences rationally and in cold blood, and never do anything to give ammunition into the hands of those jealous of vou.94

Having railed against the "Lords of the Curatorium" [Board of Trustees of the *Vereinigung*] in his letters to Keller, Haake now dedicated his *Hans Denck* to them. He set the tone for the piece in his opening sentence: "Hans Denck," he wrote, "is a prophet of the new theology which, beginning with Schleiermacher, is

⁸⁹Haake to Keller, 9 July 1897. Keller Correspondence.

⁹⁰Haake to Keller, 30 July 1897. Keller Correspondence.

⁹¹Herbert Butterfield, The Whig Interpretation of History (London: Bell, 1950).
92Ludwig Keller, "Neuere Urteil über Hans Denck," Monatshefte der Comenius Gesellschaft, VI, #3 & 4 (1897): 77-98.

⁹³ Haake to Keller, 2 October 1897. Keller Correspondence.

⁹⁴Keller to Haake, 4 October 1897. Keller Correspondence.

gaining ground every day."95 Like Keller, Haake also regarded early Anabaptism as essentially mystical, with Denck as its principal spokesman. 6 But at this point he parted company with Keller and adopted the thesis of Karl Hagen, a friend and fellow pre-1848 radical of Wilhelm Zimmermann. The latter, as we know from an obscure study, plagiarized a description of Thomas Müntzer from Sebastian Franck's 1531 Chronica but then substituted "reason" for Franck's "Holy Spirit" in his 1841-43 three volume history of the German Peasants' War.97 Hagen, who wrote after Zimmermann, appears to have followed the latter's lead, and Haake quoted him as saying that the mystical movement, going beyond the Bible, "had declared that God lived in all men, that there was a divine spark in everyone—reason. At the time they called this the 'inner Word' in opposition to the external Word of the Bible." From the vantage point of a continual revelation of God in man, these mystics then began to attack the deity of Christ, the Trinity, and other cherished concepts still retained by the Reformers.99

In order to assess the importance of Denck the theologian, Haake asserted, one had, above all else, to understand him in the context of his own time. This could be done, he asserted,

if we sharply isolate those points in which he touches his contemporaries and those in which he goes beyond them and places himself alongside the representatives of the newer theology. Under the latter we understand those men who, since the time of Schleiermacher, have striven for a unified world view which meets all the justified requirements of every science; men who return to the historical Jesus whose crystal-clear image they cleanse of all the debris accumulated by the apostolic, post-apostolic and ecclesiastical teachings; men whose motto is: "For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth" 2. Cor. 13:8, no matter how much they may have been attracted to the alleged inherited [truths].

⁹⁵Gerhard Haake, Hans Denck, ein Vorläufer der neueren Theologie 1495-1527 (Norden: Diedr. Soltan, 1897), p. 1.

[%]Ibid., p. 6.

⁹⁷See Abraham Friesen, Reformation and Utopia: The Marxist Interpretation of the Reformation and its Antecedents (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1974), pp. 76-145.

⁹⁸ Haake, Hans Denck, pp. 6-7.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 7.

Denck was such a herald of truth; he audaciously accomplishes his pantheistic conception of the world in that he relies, as guide in religious matters, only on his own pious self-consciousness and the man Jesus in whom the love of God and love of man became flesh. Here we experience once again that marvelous truth that a religious genius may anticipate the development many centuries down the line: that which contemporary theologians seek with difficulty to establish in their battle with a regressive ecclesiastical movement, is present in completed form in Denck. In doing so Denck is no shallow Rationalist, no fanatic in Luther's sense, no member of the Enlightenment; but a devout Pietist who earnestly heeds the voice of God in his breast, over whom God comes as a fully armed man to take captive his thinking, feeling and desiring, and who therefore remains unconcerned whether divine truth is appreciated or is in agreement with tradition.

... But he does not lose himself in the uncritical blissful introspection of the later Pietists; his clear head, his philosophical endowment prevented this; he is not exactly indifferent to the teachings of the Reformation scribes, who quickly invented 613 dogmas [laws] to add to the simple Gospel, but opens, in accordance with the example of Meister Eckhard and Tauler, the eternally fresh and bubbling fountain of all revelation: the warm heart, the clear meaning of Jesus. Thus he is Rationalist and Pietist in one person and as such neither of the two; he is a Schleiermacher amongst the Reformers! Just as Schleiermacher sought to return to primitive Christianity by drawing the content of Christian teaching from men's pious self-consciousness, Denck sought to do the same by drawing from the revelation of "the Word" within himself and from the teaching of Christ.¹⁰⁰

Only a pseudo-theologian could write history in this fashion—even in the late nineteenth century! Christian Neff had it right when he wrote in his review:

The above-named work of Haake, which, by the way, earned him the genuinely Mennonite title of a licentiate in theology, is, in my opinion, a partisan theological tract in the real sense of the word, from which it is impossible to expect

¹⁰⁰Ibid., pp. 44-45.

an objective evaluation of Hans Denck. Herr Haake [Neff does not call him "brother"] expressly calls himself a student of Lipsius, one of the leading exponents of theological Liberalism in the state church. He confesses himself an adherent of the "newer," that is the modern Liberal theology. His expositions of Hans Denck's teachings are in accord with these. They present us with the melancholy portrayal of the fact that a Mennonite preacher can take a man, who played such a prominent role in our history, and employ him in the one-sided interest of a theological party within the state church. To put this kind of procedure in its proper perspective will have to await another analysis. Today, we must content ourselves with a closer look at Haake's concluding remarks which specifically address the conditions of our Palatine congregations.¹⁰¹

In the conclusion referred to, Haake, the liberal North German Mennonite, had termed South German Mennonite theologians "ignoramuses" whose lay preachers had been educated "in the Lutheran Mission Schools in Barmen and Basel!" Obviously, Haake was not aware that Dr. Friedrich Fabri had just resigned as the long-term director of the Barmen Mission Society in 1885 and was a close friend and mentor of Keller! Thus the South Germans had become Lutheran and pietistic—with the exception of adult baptism, which was indiscriminately administered to thirteen and fourteen year-old children after a brief catechization without confirmation—and it was no wonder that Denck had had no lasting influence on them. Perhaps drawing from Keller's own antipathy to Menno Simons, Haake also spoke of the South German Mennonites as followers of Menno. "These open words concerning the unfruitfulness of Anabaptism in its present form-there are, of course, exceptions for example in Holland and North Germany-have not been written to defend or offend anyone," Haake concluded. 103 And so Denck, now more clearly than ever before, had become a bone of contention between North and South German Mennonites.

¹⁰¹Christian Neff, "Zur Haake'schen Schrift: Hans Denck, eine Vorläufer der neueren Theologie," Mennonitische Blätter, XLV, #3 (1898): 20.
¹⁰²Haake, Hans Denck, p. 69. This is a very interesting and important

¹⁰²Haake, *Hans Denck*, p. 69. This is a very interesting and important accusation. In an attempt to verify the truth of it, I wrote to both institutions but was unable to have it verified by the archivists.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 72.

Haake's portrayal of Denck was even too much for Keller. He must have realized that Haake had simply gone him one better, but he could not let this slip by without indicating his displeasure with his "former pupil." Referring to the book under "Nachrichten" in his *Monatshefte*, Keller said simply that the title promised more than the book delivered, but did not indicate everything it did contain. After briefly describing the content, Keller observed:

Alongside the dogmatic discussion runs a lively but colored polemic against persons and conditions [especially among contemporary Mennonites] which one would not expect in such a work, especially not from the pen of a Mennonite pastor. As far as Denck is concerned, Haake demonstrates a warm enthusiasm, but the attempt to use Denck in the defense of a theological school can only contribute to blur the outlines of the man and his theology. Not from the perspective of a contemporary movement, but from out of his own age must the man's portrait be painted.¹⁰⁴

Keller failed to acknowledge, however, that Haake was one of his own chickens that had come home to roost.

The discussion of Denck versus Menno did not enter the pages of the *Mennonitische Blätter* until 1906 when the young German scholar, Walther Köhler, reviewed Ernst Weydmann's *History of the Mennonites*. Already under attack for some years, Köhler suggested that Keller's "old-evangelical" theory had not stood the test of historical time. Anabaptism, he stated quite categorically, 'has to be assessed as an original outgrowth of the Reformation;" there were no connections between Reformation radicals and Waldenses. He continued:

A truly historical study of Mennonite history must therefore begin with Menno Simons not the oldest Anabaptists. What were his goals? That is the first order of business. Then we must demonstrate the gradual growth of a fellowship around Menno. As soon as one can discern such a fellowship, one must then move backwards. Since when did the movement exist? What was its character? Why did Menno join it? What

 $^{^{104}}$ Ludwig Keller, "Nachrichten," Monatshefte der Comenius Gesellschaft, 7, #3 & 4 (1898): 135.

did it sacrifice in doing so, what did it adopt? In this fashion one must go forward until one comes to the present. 105

The Dutch Mennonite, C. E. ten Cate, was the first to respond to Köhler. Bernard Brons summarized his views for the German Mennonites in the *Mennonitische Blätter*. Truth demanded, ten Cate wrote, that Köhler's arguments be rejected, for Menno Simons had not played a central role in Mennonite history.

In no way was he a trailblazer of new ideas, a man representing a new beginning. He gave our fellowship neither a new character nor did his beliefs become its common currency. He is only the transmitter of a branch that had been present since the beginning of the movement. Michael Sattler was its typical representative in Germany. This tendency distinguished itself through its great sobriety, its belief that the Holy Gospel had to be interpreted literally as God's law, and in a strict application of the ban. ¹⁰⁶

But Menno had been unable to put a halt to

another and purer intellectual current in our fellowship. In the final analysis this one vanquished the one Menno represented. Denck and his spiritual comrades appealed to the inner Word without which the outer Word, the holy Scriptures, could not be understood, they took a more lenient view of the ban which they wished applied only in exceptional cases, and did not separate themselves as radically from the world.

Menno, therefore, had to step aside and "Denck and the Waterlanders [who had rejected Menno] must be accorded more room for it is these, much more than Menno Simons and his followers, who are the spiritual forebears of the present Mennonites, Anabaptists." ¹⁰⁷

This debate—Menno versus Denck—the legacy of Ludwig Keller who had by now given up on the Mennonites [writing in a memo of 1902 he observed: "The error of this fellowship lies in

107 Ibid.

¹⁰⁵Walther Köhler, "Weydmann's Geschichte der Mennoniten," Mennonitische Blätter, #3 (March, 1906): 18-19.

¹⁰⁶Bernard Brons, "Menno Simons und eine Geschichte der Taufgesinnten (Mennoniten)," Mennonitische Blätter, #4 (April, 1906): 27.

the spiritual ignorance that controls the majority. The pharisaism comes to the surface at every occasion"] was carried on for some time in the *Mennonitische Blätter* with Bernard Brons providing the blow-by-blow account. In a 1907 article he made clear why he and most Dutch and North German Mennonites preferred Denck to Menno. There, speaking for his party, he observed that Mennonites "are tied neither to a dogma nor to the letter of the Scriptures, but are of the opinion that the 'Word of God' lives in the hearts of men." Hans Denck, the mystic, had become the advocate of theological liberalism, the vindicator of the North German Mennonites.¹⁰⁸

As we have already seen, however, Christian Neff, representing the more pietistic South German Mennonites, had already rejected Denck. He had argued that Denck had had virtually no lasting impact on the early Anabaptist movement. The debate over Denck was only symptomatic of a more profound difference between the two Mennonite groups, and this became apparent in an article by Bernard Brons in the Mennonitische Blätter entitled: "Our South German Brothers and We." There Brons accused Ulrich Hege and Jakob Hege, his successor as editor of the Gemeindeblatt, together with the Council of Elders, of refusing to publish anything that "might endanger the faith of their readers which is tied to the literal interpretation of the Bible in its German translation." And then Brons proceeded to place the North German Mennonites into the great rationalist tradition emanating from the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment with the following words:

If we in the North go back a few generations in our families we will discover similar beliefs. The difference is that our forefathers have followed the scholarly research in religious matters with lively interest since the days of Lessing and Reimarus and, as free and independent thinking people, regarded the Bible as any other book. In this they shared the view of Anslo, the old Mennonite preacher made famous in Rembrandt's portrait, that the "Word of God" was, to be sure, to be found and contained in the Bible, but that it resided and lived in the hearts of men and would be retained there even if all the Bibles in the world were to be

¹⁰⁸Bernard Brons, "Die Theosophen und wir," Mennonitische Blätter, #2 (February, 1907): 13-14.

¹⁰⁹ Mennonitische Blätter, #7 (July, 1907): 54-55.

destroyed. Precisely this Word of God in the hearts of mankind is the touchstone of the content of the Bible: if a passage of the Bible resounds in a pure human heart—in the pages of this fine instrument—then it is a Word of God; or, to speak with [Immanuel] Kant, what we do we do not as slaves of some divine command, rather we sense and believe that what we do is in conformity with God's will if we feel ourselves bound to do it in our own heart and conscience. For "Christ has freed us to be truly free," and the word he so often directed against the "holy Scriptures" of his day: "but I say unto you" also applies to us. That is the spirit that makes alive in contrast to the letter that kills.¹¹⁰

The Bible was to be judged by the 'inner Word,' originally the Holy Spirit of the mystics but since Zimmermann and Hagen transformed into the divine spark of 'reason' by the Enlightenment. But as Brons himself argued in the same piece,

No man can withdraw himself from the spirit of the times, that ruling spirit common to mankind, just as the mighty Rhine propels even the swimmer, who tries to swim upstream towards the Bingen narrows, out to the open waters of the sea. To the open sea where there is an untrammelled view to the horizon and the sun is not hidden behind mountains either at sunrise or sunset.¹¹¹

The counter attack in the *Mennonitische Blätter* came from the South German Mennonites D. Lichti and Heinrich Hege. In an article entitled "Confessions of Faith and Religious Tolerance," Lichti argued that in order to avoid the relativity of a Brons and a Molenaar, who were arguing for "new divine revelations," one had always to rely on the one touchstone, the revelation contained in the Bible. In another essay entitled "The Confession of Faith of H. Boetje," Heinrich Hege rejected Brons' and Molenaar's rationalistic faith, claiming Christ alone as the initiator and perfecter of faith according to Hebrews 12; he rejected their argument that Christ was only "the highest self revelation and self communication of God to man." Christ was more—indeed he was the Lamb of God who had taken upon

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 55.

[&]quot;Ibid.

¹¹² Mennonitische Blätter, #2 (February, 1909): 12-14.

himself the sins of the world. Nor did Hege believe in the gradual advancement of humanity toward the kingdom of God on earth. Rather, mankind was moving inexorably towards its destruction.

Other articles followed, but a reconciliation of the two views could not be achieved. Indeed, the discussion that had been initiated by Keller with his biography of Hans Denck, and his subsequent attempt to renew and revitalize the German Mennonites by reviving their history-for him, the legacy of Hans Denck—had ended in his alienation from the Mennonites. more so from the North Germans than the South Germans, and in an accelerating conflict between North and South German Mennonites, all of which made inner spiritual renewal less likely than ever before. What had gone wrong?

First, there was in Fabri's and Keller's own theological position a kind of amalgam between conservative Christian teachings as they came from Pietism, and liberal teachings that were, so to speak, in the air. Kawerau noted this amalgam in Keller's biography of Hans Denck: he spoke of a "mixture of medieval Mysticism and modern Rationalism." Keller himself, like Fabri a member of the Union Church of Westphalia under Pietistic influence, deemphasized dogma and emphasized the "inner light." To a certain extent, however, Fabri and Keller could hold the Bible and the "inner light" together. Not so the North German Mennonites who also rejected the dogmas of the Bible and the orthodox churches, but transformed the Holy Spirit or "inner Word" into reason. They had no theology of inner renewal of the kind to be found in Tauler and the Pietists. Bernard Brons confirmed this when he remarked concerning the Baptists: "They require immersion [at baptism] and evidence of conversion from the baptizand, things which we disregard."113 Brons and the North German Mennonites therefore focused on those aspects of Keller's portrayal of Denck that fitted into their rationalistic, liberal theology. It was from this "Whiggish" or "modern" vantage point that they interpreted the past.

The South German Mennonites, however, had been influenced much more powerfully by Pietism, especially since many of their preachers had studied in the Barmen and Basel Mission Schools. Some had probably even been there during the time that Fabri, Keller's mentor, had been chief inspector. More than likely it was

¹¹³Bernard Brons, "Mennoniten und die Quäker," Mennonitische Blätter, #3 (March, 1908): 38.

from these schools—established by missionary minded Pietists—that they derived their biblicism and pietistic tendencies. But they had clearly not absorbed Fabri's concept of the sensus communis which Keller rediscovered in Denck's doctrine of the "inner Word." Was it the Lutheran influence on them, as a number of North German Mennonites argued, or the traditions of Menno that had influenced them in this direction? Whatever the case, it was this emphasis—as the subsequent debate made apparent—that was the barrier between Denck and themselves. As Christian Neff remarked after he had studied Denck's writings in the original: "The more I immersed myself in Denck's writings the more I sensed and realized the distance that existed between our views." The South German Mennonites could not accept Denck's mystical orientation which placed the "inner Word" above the revealed and written Scriptures. The disparate elements of Pietism and rationalism that had been joined in Fabri and Keller-and which found expression in Keller's Denck biography—unravelled in the confrontation between rationalist North German Mennonites and Pietist South Mennonites, and the rock around which the eddies swirled was Christ, the deus revelatus, and the infallibility-or fallibility-of his written revelation.

One final caveat. Keller's and the North German Mennonites' argument that Denck's was an "undogmatic" Christianity was an illusion or, should we say, a self-delusion. Every intellectual position known to man—and a few that are not!—are all based on some dogmatic position or other. Denck's mysticism had its own unique dogmas, as did the position of Keller and Fabri, and most certainly also the dogmas of North German Mennonite liberalism. Is not the idea of the "inner Word" a dogma, the concept of reason as a "divine spark" in man? If nothing else, the post-Denckian debate between North and South German Mennonites made plain enough that what fundamentally divided the two groups were two diametrically opposed dogmas regarding the nature of the Bible. The real quarrel was not about a dogmatic as opposed to an undogmatic Christianity; it was, after all, about "correct" Christian dogma.

Chapter 4

Ludwig Keller, the Dutch Mennonites, and the Theory of the Waldensian Origins of Anabaptism

It was in 1957, while still an undergraduate, that I first came to Germany to study. As it turned out, I came to the University of Göttingen. Through the good offices of my great uncle, Abraham Braun, I was introduced to among others-Ernst and Rosa Crous who were living there at the time. Ernst Crous, a retired Bibliotheksrat from Berlin where Ludwig Keller had been archivist from 1895 to his death in 1915, was in charge of the Mennonitische Forschungsstelle which he housed in his own apartment. Being a man of old world charm and grace, he invited me to dinner on a number of occasions, perhaps to gauge for himself at first hand the true barbarity of backwoods Canadians, perhaps to get a closer look at a "Mennonite Brethren," perhaps only out of affection for my great uncle. Whatever the reason, he took a great deal of pride showing me around the Forschungsstelle. Living with the Crous's at the time was a Russian Mennonite doctoral student at the university. During one of the evening conversations, the student revealed that he was working on a dissertation-or at least preparing to do so-that dealt with the Waldensian antecedents of the sixteenth-century Anabaptists. In essence, he seemed intent on vindicating the "Keller thesis." And, as I recall, there was talk of Keller. Did Crous, who received his doctorate at the University of Bonn in 1909—where both Fabri and Keller had close friends and allies in the faculty of theology-know Keller? Was he the link between the Russian Mennonite doctoral student and Keller's thesis? Or was P. M. Friesen and his 1911 history the link?

Keller, however, did not originate the thesis. Baptist historians had preceded him. Indeed, long before Baptist historians became aware of Keller's studies in the early 1880s, a quarrel had broken out in American Baptist circles over August Rauschenbusch's categorical rejection of any such medieval antecedents of sixteenth-century Anabaptism. That did not hinder Baptist historians like Albert Henry Newman, and especially E. H. Broadbent from enlisting Keller's *The Reformation and the older*

¹See Abraham Friesen, "Baptist Interpretations of Anabaptist History," in Paul Toews, ed., *Mennonites and Baptists: A Continuing Conversation* (Fresno: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1993), chapter II.

Reform Parties of 1885 to shore up their concept of a kind of Baptist apostolic succession from the apostolic church to Reformation Anabaptism and the English Baptists through the persecuted medieval sects, especially the Waldenses. As late as 1989, Jack Hoad in his book, The Baptists, could still affirm a slightly modified version of the thesis.

If the "Keller thesis" was present in Baptist historiography before Keller's studies appeared, where did it have its source and why did Keller develop it in such a fulsome fashion in his 1885

book?

There can be little doubt that the source of this interpretation lies in the Protestant martyrologies of the Reformation period in general,2 and Thieleman J. van Braght's Martyr's Mirror in particular. John Foxe, for example, in the very opening lines of his famous Acts and Monuments, cited Christ's promise, made in response to Peter's confession in Matthew 16:16, that he would build his church "on this rock . . . and the gates of hell will not prevail against it," implying the unbroken existence of Christ's true church here on earth. It was the same passage that served the Catholic Church for its doctrine of apostolic succession.3 In Chapter IV, however, Foxe arrived at what he called "papal persecutions." From that point onward, he could no longer consider the Catholic Church to be the true church. Hence he asserted:

Popery having brought various innovations into the Church, and overspread the Christian world with darkness and superstition, some few, who plainly perceived the pernicious tendency of such errors, determined to show the light of the Gospel in its real purity, and to disperse those clouds which artful priests had raised about it, in order to blind people, and obscure its real brightness.4

The few people who had perceived the Church's "pernicious tendency of ... errors," men like Berenger, Peter of Bruges, Henry of Toulouse, Peter Waldo, the Albigenses, John Wycliffe and the Lollards, became in Foxe's hands the forerunners of the

³Wm. Byron Forbusch, ed., Fox's Book of Martyrs (Philadelphia: John C. Winston, 1926), p. 43.

⁴Ibid.

Reformers and the carriers of the "true church" which would be fully restored in the Protestant Reformation.

A similar argument came from the pen of van Braght; only in his account those who represented the descent of the true church from antiquity to the Reformation were the Anabaptists:

some will not admit that the Anabaptists, or those who maintain such a confession as they do, have existed through every century, from the days of Christ up to the present time.5

And a little later he observed:

Now the question arises, whether our church of the present day, called the Anabaptists, has truly descended, and derived her succession from the aforementioned church of God which has existed from the beginning and kept the commandment of God in purity.6

In van Braght's apostolic succession the Waldenses, with whom Foxe had initiated his true church under the apostate papal church, became the crucial link to the sixteenth-century Anabaptists.⁷ No wonder that even the early eighteenth-century church historian Mosheim could write in his Ecclesiastical History:

The modern Mennonites not only consider themselves as the descendants of the Waldenses, who were so grievously oppressed and persecuted by the despotic heads of the Roman church, but pretend, moreover, to be the purest offspring of these respectable sufferers, being equally averse to all principles of rebellion, on the one hand, and all suggestions of fanaticism on the other.8

In the view of these martyrologists, the pope became the Antichrist and the Roman Catholic Church the "Babylonian Whore." It was a view that had its source in Martin Luther himself and was given great currency in England by no less a

⁵Thieleman J. Van Braght, The Bloody Theater of Martyrs Mirrors, translated by Joseph F. Sohm, 5th ed. (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1950), p. 16. 'Ibid., p. 26.

⁷Ibid., pp. 363-366.

⁸John Lawrence Mosheim, An Ecclesiastical History, 6 vols., translated by Archibald Maclain (Charlestown, Mass.: Samuel Etheridge, 1810), 4, pp. 427-428.

person than Sir Isaac Newton, the scientist, in 1733,9 and Richard Hurd, Bishop of Worcester, in 1772.10 It would therefore appear that the interpretation promulgated in the Protestant martyrologies, based on an impulse derived from Luther himself, is the most probable source for the Baptist interpretation, especially since all the earliest Baptist historians relied heavily on van Braght's Martyrs Mirror.11

Neither the martyrologies nor the Baptist histories appear to have been the source for Keller's virtually identical thesis in his *The Reformation*, however. Rather, the source for Keller would once more seem to have been Friedrich Fabri's dogmatic beliefs. For Fabri, as a young doctoral student at the University of Erlangen, already wrote to his fiancée on 2 April 1849:

Möttlingen [the home of Christoph Blumhardt] is in fact also just such a paradise, a small patch on God's wide earth, from which the curse has been removed and transformed into a blessing; there every day is a day of celebration, and life in the parsonage there a constant expectation of the appearance and return of the Lord. That's probably the way it was with the earliest Christians, they lived in constant readiness and awaited the return of Christ, be it either that they should experience the end of the world in their day or that God should remove them before that through death. The first, which even the apostles appear to have expected, did not take place and, in the very moment that the church of Jesus Christ on earth began to regress, as soon, that is, as great masses of the unregenerate began to press into the church [the church of the Lord ideally is to be a fellowship of the regeneratel, a new epoch began in church history, an age of God's forbearance began which pushed into the distant future that which was originally to have arrived quickly and soon. From that point onward the Christian church once again does everything on the basis of natural methods; together with the great enthusiasm for the faith

⁹See Frank E. Manuel, *Isaac Newton*, Historian (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 152.

¹⁰The Works of Richard Hurd, Lord Bishop of Worcester, V (London, 1811), pp. 297-332. John Henry Newman wrote: "The school of Hurd and Newton hold, as the only true view of history, that Christianity slept for centuries upon centuries, except among whom historians call heretics." J. H. Newman, An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine (New York: Longmans, Green, 1949), p. 84.

¹¹See my "Baptist Interpretations of Anabaptist History."

and death-defying love of Christ within the early church there died, or at least became less and less visible, those wonderful powers and gifts which we see universally disseminated in the apostolic church. The earlier rejection of the world, a common feature of all Christians of the time, gradually ceased, and became a caricature in later monasticism. In its place Christendom begins to become quite comfortable on earth, making long-term living arrangements; the most extreme forms of this secularization appeared in the papacy when it reached the zenith of its power. It is true that truth cannot be suppressed, she lives on in individual souls and in smaller, generally heavily persecuted associations and sects. Then, with the sixteenth century, the stream of truth once more flows more richly, the cardinal aspect of Christianity is once more proclaimed, loudly and joyfully, by many; the Word, long buried, this vardstick and guide of faith and life, is once more brought to light. But even the Reformation does not make the kind of progress that had at first been hoped for; no sooner had her heros and sustainers passed from the scene than the initial new life atrophied; in the eighteenth century there arose a disbelief that broke up and ate away at the heritage of the fathers, which it could do the more easily the more devoid of life and blood it had become in the previous century. And what about our century! Ah, much could be said here! But just this now, that we too still stand [or live] in that age of [God's] longsuffering and mercy, but that our age does differentiate itself from the previous one most decisively in that the rationalizing good-naturedness of previous centuries is gradually being replaced by an ever more conscious religious partisanship. The contradictions are beginning to separate and become apparent. This process also points, sooner or later, to a crisis, a crisis in the history of the kingdom of God, the consequences of which will be that the truly Christian will once more be filled with that heightened pulse of Christian life which we find in the earliest period of the church. Then those charismata, gifts and powers will become evident in the church once more. In this regard the appearance of Blumhardt is important; not only does it demonstrate how much we can and should achieve in the present age, it also makes possible the conjecture that that which he has begun in the faith and power of the Lord will soon find recognition and application in wider circles.12

Here we have in outline what Wolfgang R. Schmidt established on the basis of an extensive study of Fabri's life and writings in his Mission, Kirche und Reich Gottes bei Friedrich Fabri [Mission, Church and Kingdom of God in Friedrich Fabri].13

Since Otto zur Linden's letter to Keller of 15 October 1883 with its reference to Friedrich Fabri's apparent approval of Keller's biography of Hans Denck suggests a certain familiarity between the two men that we know to have become intimate, it does not seem far-fetched to suggest that Keller must have been at least fairly familiar with Fabri's theology and views regarding church history by the time he began his work on the Münster revolution. Certainly his Hans Denck was informed by Fabri's theology and so is his The Reformation and the older Reform Parties of 1885.14 Permit me therefore to suggest how I see the relationship between this, Fabri's interpretation, Keller's 1885 history, and the interpretation deriving from the Reformation martyrologies, especially that of Thieleman van Braght.

Keller repeatedly asserted in his correspondence that when he began his historical studies he was not pursuing any predetermined purpose or plan. He observed that he had followed the path he had "half unconsciously and half unwillingly." Often, he continued, when friendship, mistrust, and hatred had made his work difficult, only the firm faith that animated him had kept him going. Without this faith, he said, he should have become immobilized.15 In other letters he averred he had simply stumbled onto this material. How is this to be interpreted? What probably happened was that Keller approached his studies in Münster with Fabri's theological views and interpretation of church history already in mind. To what extent this may have been the case in his first book on the revolutionary Anabaptists may be debated; but not with his book on Hans Denck and even less so with his book on the Reformation and the older reform parties. Thus when he began to read van Braght, whom he was later to use repeatedly in

¹⁵Keller to the Bundesbote, 1 October 1887, Keller Correspondence,

¹²Timotheus Fabri. ed., Im Lenze der Liebe. Briefe aus dem Nachlaß von Friedrich Fabri (Berlin: Wilhelm Hertz, 1895), pp. 76-79.

¹³(Wuppertal-Barmen: Verlag der Rheinischen Mission, 1965). 14Ludwig Keller, Ein Apostel der Wiedertäufer (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1882); and Die Reformation und die älteren Reformparteien (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1885).

defense of his Waldensian thesis, imagine his surprise at finding there virtually complete and intact Fabri's interpretation of church history. In van Braght he found the strong Anabaptist emphasis on the apostolic church as model, the fall of the church with the conversion of Constantine, the emphasis on the church as the fellowship of the regenerate, its recovery through the Anabaptists and its survival through the dark ages of the papacy in the form of the Waldenses and other medieval dissidents. The one thing missing in Fabri that was present in van Braght was the emphasis on believer's baptism. And the one thing missing in van Braght but present in Fabri was the emphasis on the coming kingdom of God on earth-a much broader and more allinclusive, indeed alliance or ecumenical concept than could be contained in the believer's church of the Anabaptists.¹⁶ When this was combined—as it was in Keller's mind—with Fabri's emphasis on the separation of church and state in the ideal age of the apostolic church, and its revival in the age of the initiation of the kingdom of God on earth, we have in Keller's historical work a virtual confirmation of Fabri's interpretation of church history. Can this be accidental? Keller had discovered in the Anabaptists the confirmation of Fabri's theories. History and theory were therefore mutually reinforcing in his mind.

By the time Keller discovered the Anabaptist confirmation of Fabri's views, however, the Dutch Mennonites were in the process of scuttling van Braght's interpretation, an interpretation that had been forged in order to repulse the repeated accusation by outsiders of Menno's close ties to the Münsterites. This use of the argument can be seen from the following van Braght passage:

For more than a century up to the present day, people have been made to believe that the Anabaptists contemptuously so-called, have been recently sprung from some erring spirit—some say, from the Münsterites, etc.;

¹⁶See especially Friedrich Zündel, Pfarrer Johann Christoph Blumhardt. Ein Lebensbild, 4th ed. (Zürich: S. Höhr, 1883); Gerhard Sauter, Die Theologie des Reiches Gottes beim älteren und jüngeren Blumhardt (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1962); Friedrich Seebaß, Johann Christoph Blumhardt. Sein Leben und Wirken (Hamburg: Friedrich Wittig, 1949); Johann Christoph Blumhardt, Ausgewählte Schriften in drei Bänden (Zürich: Gotthelf Verlag, 1947); and Jörg Ohlemacher, Das Reich Gottes in Deutschland Bauen (Göttingen: Vandehoeck & Rupprecht, 1986). For a more specific comparison, see Fabri's first "Gnadauer" address: Alfred Roth, 50 Jahre Gnadauer Konferenz in ihrem Zusammenhang mit der Geschichte Gnadaus (Gießen: Brunnen Verlag, 1938), pp. 69-70.

whose fabulous faith, life and conduct, the true Anabaptists have never recognized;17

And in a footnote to the "Münsterites," van Braght wrote:

Aside from the fact, that the Anabaptists did not spring from the Münsterites, but have existed through all the times of the Gospel, as has been sufficiently shown, we should, moreover, state that the pernicious and evil proceedings which took place at Münster about the year 1534 . . . must be placed at the account of some Lutheran preachers, to whom a certain "Jan of Leyden" had recommended and taught Anabaptism.18

Somewhat later, citing Jacob Mehring's History of Baptism as authority, van Braght put names to this lineage in the sixteenth century by establishing the connection between Waldenses and Anabaptists.¹⁹ That this "apostolic succession" is established with specific reference to the charge of Münsterite origins, of which Menno already repeatedly complained, leads to the supposition that van Braght developed the thesis to disarm the charge that Menno had been tarnished with Münsterite connections. Gerhard Roosen used the argument in the same sense in his 1753 Unschuld und Gegen-Bericht der Evangelischen Tauffgesinnten Christen, so Mennoniten genannt werden, über die unverschuldete Beschuldigung, als ob sie von der aufrührischen Münsterschen Rotte entsprossen, und derselben Grund und Lehre führeten [A Counterattack and Declaration of Innocence of the Evangelical Anabaptist Christians, called Mennonites, against the undeserved Accusation that they derive from the Revolutionary Münsterites and adhere to their Principles and Teachings]. 20 Johannes Deknatel, in his Auszug der merkwürdigsten Abhandlungen aus den Werken Menno Simons [An Excerpt from the most Remarkable Discussions from the Writings of Menno Simons],21 went so far as to assert:

There were Anabaptists even before Menno's time, and it is clear that many improvements had already been made

¹⁷ Van Braght, Martyrs Mirror, p. 17.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 364-365.

²⁰⁽Hamburg, 1753), pp. 20-22.

²¹Translated from the Dutch (Königsberg, 1765), p. 21.

before the great Reformation, among the Waldenses, under Wycliffe, under Hus and their followers by means of which God prepared the work [of the Reformation]. In the same way there were, as Menno observes, groups of Waldenses who had been gathered into congregations under the cross, etc. But because of the severe persecutions there were scattered sheep, many of whom settled in the Netherlands; it was probably these, according to Menno's own testimony in his Departure from the Papacy, who asked Menno to be their chief overseer.²²

As late as 1872 Christian Sepp could still write that his Doopsgezinde forebears had been all but paranoid about accusations of a close relationship between Menno and Münster. This kept the issue alive and it was addressed anew by J. H. Halbertsma in his 1843 De Doopsgezinden en hunne Herkomst [The Anabaptists and their Origins].²³ He attempted to prove the connection by a comparison of their respective teachings.24 Halbertsma was answered in 1844 by A. M. Cramer and S. Blaupot ten Cate. As late as 1836, in his Het Leven en de Verrigtingen van Menno Simons [The Life and Deeds of Menno Simons], A. M. Cramer had still referred to Menno as the "Waldensian Menno."25 In his 1844 study, however, Cramer was more cautious, suggesting there were two problems with Halbertsma's theory specifically and the theory in general: first, the similarity in the teachings of the Waldenses and Anabaptists could simply derive from a similar reading of the Bible; second, Menno and other early Dutch Anabaptists knew absolutely nothing about the Waldenses and never spoke of them.²⁶ Blaupot ten Cate, while sketching the Waldenses in Europe in the late Middle Ages and the Reformation on a broad canvas, and arguing that they were indeed older than Waldo-being a continuation of the ancient apostolic faith—nevertheless had to concede that there was no direct link from the Waldenses to either Swiss Anabaptist leaders or those of the Netherlands, and that the similarity of views could easily be explained by a similar

²²Ibid.

²³⁽Deventer: J. de Lange, 1843).

²⁴Ibid., pp. 225-409.

²⁵⁽Amsterdam: Johannes Müller, 1836), pp. 1-41.

²⁶J. Boeke and A. M. Cramer, Twee Brieven ter Toelichting en Toetsing der Schets van J. H. Halbertsma, "De Doopsgezinden en hunne herkomst" (Amsterdam: J. D. Sijbrandi, 1844), pp. 70-80.

reading of the Bible.27 The missing link, the "smoking gun," had not yet been discovered.

Some forty years later, Ludwig Keller retrieved the thesis and developed it in his 1885 The Reformation and the older Reform Parties in a manner that had not been attempted before. Most interpreters of Keller's The Reformation have taken that study to be an attempt to revive and refurbish the old defense of Anabaptism, as did Elias Dosker when he wrote in 1909:

Since 1885 when Ludwig Keller published his Reformation und die älteren Reformparteien. In ihrem Zusammenhang dargestellt [Leipzig], the question of the true origin of the Anabaptists has been a matter of debate. With considerable ingenuity and show of reason, Keller argues for the historical genesis of the sect from the well-known medieval movements of the Petrobrusians, the Apostolic Brothers, the Arnoldists, the Moravian Brethren, and the German Mystics.28

Dosker refused to accept this theory, arguing that "sober historians," among whom he undoubtedly numbered himself, saw "a fanatical ultra reformatory movement" in Anabaptism "which revealed itself first in Germany in the so-called Wittenberg fanaticism' of 1521-1522 . . . [and] later associated itself with the atrocious Peasant War."29 Like other earlier historians and theologians, Dosker was not about to allow Mennonites an easy escape from their revolutionary past. Mennonites and Baptists, however, saw in Keller—the outsider, indeed a member of the German state church—an impartial vindicator of their position.

But there was more to Keller's thesis than met the eye. There was, already in the introduction, a direct attack on the "orthodox" state churches for their long-standing attempt to cover up the real history of these "old evangelical brotherhoods" by vilifying them as heretics and sectaries. Furthermore, Keller linked these brotherhoods closely to the guilds of masons in fourteenth-century Germany and suggested that they belonged

[∞]Ibid.

^{25.} Blaupot ten Cate, Gedachten over de Getals-Vermindering bij de Doopsgezinde in Nederland (Amsterdam: Frederick Muller, 1844), pp. 119-125.

²⁸Henry Elias Dosker, "Early Dutch Anabaptists," Papers of the American Society of Church History, 2nd Series, vol. II (New York, 1910), ed. by Samuel Macauley Jackson, p. 189.

to a tradition that went as far back as the apostolic church.³⁰ What tradition was this?

In his explication Keller clearly pitted Paul against Christ. The old evangelical tradition, he argued, adhered to Christ's teachings and had accepted those of Paul only insofar as they agreed with the Master's.³¹ It was this tradition the Waldenses had tenaciously adhered to; yet they were, for the sake of unity, liberal in their toleration of differing viewpoints.³² The ethical principles of the Sermon on the Mount,³³ discipleship,³⁴ freedom of the will,³⁵ a limited pacifism,³⁶ the acceptance of believer's as well as infant baptism, these had been their central beliefs. But their ideology had been the ideology of the medieval mystics. He called Meister Eckhart a Waldensian³⁷ and the exponent of a specifically "German theology,"³⁸ a mystical theology, and his followers "friends of God."³⁹ One of these had been John Tauler, ⁴⁰ and, Keller continued,

it was not unlikely that that famous fourteenth-century treatise, the *Deutsche Theologie*, belonged to the reworked products of Waldensian literature which exercised such an extraordinary influence in sixteenth-century Germany, a tract earlier attributed to John Tauler and which Luther had published under the title: *A German Theology*.⁴¹

Having already placed Hans Denck into this mystical tradition in his 1882 biography, Keller now also established Denck's Waldensian credentials, as well as his connections to the guilds of masons, asserting:

Denck's family, whether Wolfgang Denck was Hans Denck's father or uncle, was most intimately associated with the brotherhood of German stone masons. Here the idea of

³⁰ Ludwig Keller, Die Reformation, pp. 209-238.

³¹Ibid., p. 45.

³²Ibid., p. 41.

³³Ibid., p. 40.

³⁴Ibid., p. 43.

³⁵Ibid., p. 58.

³⁶Ibid., p. 52.

³⁷Ibid., p. 158.

³⁸Ibid., p. 162.

³⁹Ibid., p. 163.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 166.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 171.

the older "congregations" had been most faithfully preserved and now Providence determined that the faith stored in that place should come out of the guilds and be transplanted back into the life of the church. The mediator of this process was Hans Denck who therefore deserves our special interest.42

At this juncture, however, an even more important person entered the picture. In his letters, especially in those to John Horsch, Keller had drawn this mystical lineage from Tauler, the German Theology, by way of Hans Denck to Johann Arndt, Jacob Böhme, and others. He now also inserted Johann von Staupitz, the head of Luther's Augustinian order who had, according to Keller, mediated the Bible, Augustine, and the "mystics" to Luther. 43 It was a decisive insertion, for it allowed Keller to assert that

the literature of the old evangelical churches had gained [in Luther] another champion besides Staupitz who was far superior to the latter in energy and action. It was Luther who contributed most, between 1517 and 1520, to the renewal of the old evangelical theology.44

Unlike Staupitz, however, Luther had not remained true to this theology.45

In the same year Keller published his The Reformation [1885], he also published a shorter piece entitled "Johann von Staupitz und das Waldensertum" [John Staupitz and the Waldensians],46 where he developed the "Waldensian Staupitz" thesis more fully, focusing on Nuremberg as the center of Waldensian influence that had determined the religious outlook of Staupitz as well as of Denck. The monograph on Staupitz followed in 1888.47

Having anchored Denck firmly in the Waldensian and mystical tradition, Keller proceeded, on the authority of van Braght's Martyrs Mirror, to establish the Waldensian antecedents of the Anabaptists. Referring to the latter as "old evangelical

⁴²Ibid., pp. 333-334.

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 340-341.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 342.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 346-347.

⁴⁶Ludwig Keller, "Johann v. Staupitz und das Waldensertum," Historisches Taschenbuch, 6te Folge, IV (leipzig, 1885): 117-167.

⁴⁷Ludwig Keller, Johann v. Staupitz und die Reformation (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1888).

Anabaptists [Taufgesinnte],"⁴⁸ he sought to establish Conrad Grebel's and Ludwig Hätzer's Waldensian credentials.⁴⁹ Keller faced less serious obstacles when he came to Dutch Anabaptism, for from van Braght on to contemporary scholars like Galenus Abrahams, Gerhard Roosen, J. H. Halbertsma, Blaupot ten Cate, and A. M. Cramer, all agreed as to their "old evangelical" and Waldensian roots.⁵⁰ However, Keller failed to note the questions that had been raised with respect to the thesis by Cramer and ten Cate in the 1840s.⁵¹

Keller's study had hardly seen the light of day than an essay appeared in the prestigious Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte [The Journal of Church History] by the Lutheran church historian, Theodor Kolde,⁵² entitled: "Johann von Staupitz, a Waldensian and Anabaptist: a Church Historical Discovery." Calling Keller an "enthusiastic apostle of the Anabaptists," Kolde baldly accused him of being a propagandist for Waldenses and Anabaptists. In a frontal attack on his interpretation, Kolde proceeded to "unmask" Keller's "Waldensian" Staupitz, refuting virtually every one of Keller's assertions. He recognized clearly enough that Hans Denck was the linchpin of Keller's great "old evangelical" chain of being and proceeded to demonstrate that Nuremberg had had no Waldensian community that might have drawn both Staupitz and Denck into its intellectual orbit.53 Kolde concluded that only a man who had allowed himself to become ensnared in a kind of idée fixe, which made him incapable of historical judgment, could write such history.54 Other attacks followed: some en passant, others more directly, as Hermann Lüdemann's 1896 Reformation und Täufertum in ihrem Verhältnis zum christlichen Prinzip [Reformation and Anabaptism in its Relationship to Christian Principles].55

The response to Keller's The Reformation was much more positive from Baptists than from Mennonites, as Keller himself

⁴⁸Keller, Die Reformation, pp. 372ff.

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 381-382.

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 396-397.

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 397-398.

⁵²On Theodor Kolde, see D. Hermann Jordan, Theodor Kolde. Ein deutscher Kirchenhistoriker (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1914).

⁵³Theodor Kolde, "Johann v. Staupitz, ein Waldenser und Wiedertäufer. Eine kirchenhistorische Entdeckung," Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte, VII (1885): 426-447.

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 446-447.

⁵⁵⁽Bern: W. Kaiser, 1896).

noted on occasion.56 Already in 1883 A. M. Cramer had written to Keller: "I can now only look at the introduction to [my] Menno [Waldensian] with a smile!"57—obviously he no longer accepted the Waldensian argument. On 13 April 1885, a doctoral student of Carl Lamprecht wrote Keller, in the wake of a discussion of his book in a meeting of a history club:

Privatdozent [lecturer] Dr. Lamprecht, who just happened to be present, voiced various doubts: the establishment of the "Liebhaber des Handwerkes" was not to be found in the guilds of the masons only but in all guilds; he disputed that the wood carvers derived from the builders and doubted the Waldensian character of the Defensor Pacis. I, for my part, do not yet regard the connection between the great German Mystics of the Middle Ages and ... the Brethren of the Common Life as plausible.⁵⁸

Even Samuel Cramer wrote on 13 June 1885: "I have read Kolde's article: I feel very badly for you and for the cause. But did you not attempt to prove too much?"59 Even the German Mennonites had heard of Kolde's devastating attack. On 29 June 1885 H. van der Smissen wrote Keller: "I have already heard that Kolde treated you very severely; may I ask for a reference to the journal and the number in which the attack occurred?"60

Kolde's attack notwithstanding, Keller began to press the German Mennonites to change their name to "alt evangelische Taufgesinnte" in conformity with his thesis and to begin to form contacts with other descendants of his "old evangelical brotherhoods."61 But German Mennonites proved reluctant. On 28 November 1885 B. C. Roosen of Hamburg wrote Keller that, because of the long and official use of the Mennonite name, a change would be very difficult.⁶² And the establishment of outside contacts would have to await the prior arrival of Mennonite unity-even German Mennonite unity-before they could even begin to think of looking outward.

⁵⁶Keller to H. van der Smissen, 21 July 1886. Keller Correspondence.

⁵⁷A. M. Cramer to Keller, 7 January 1883. Keller Correspondence. 58 Rüdiger Kayser to Keller, 13 April 1885. Keller Correspondence.

⁵⁹S. Cramer to Keller, 13 June 1885. Keller Correspondence.

⁶⁰H. van der Smissen to Keller, 29 June 1885. Keller Correspondence.

⁶¹See the program of the Münster meeting of 29 May 1885 and Keller's notes of his address. Keller Correspondence.

⁶²B. C. Roosen to Keller, 28 November 1885. Keller Correspondence.

On 7 July 1886, Roosen wrote again, this time to inform Keller that he had just written a review of the latter's The Reformation for the Mennonitische Blätter, only to discover that van der Smissen had already requested a review from J. P. Müller of Emden. But the book had raised certain issues which he wished to direct to Keller. He was most appreciative, Roosen said, of this "mighty work and the conclusions presented which are of such importance for us." With some hesitancy, therefore, he enquired whether he had interpreted Keller's position on the central issue correctly: that Keller really believed the Anabaptists had descended directly from the ranks of the Waldenses even though the proof was still outstanding!⁶³ In direct response to this query—which clearly reflected Mennonite hesitancy to publicly applaud this latest piece of Keller research—it was arranged that Keller should state his position unequivocally in a public lecture. This he did in Berlin on 20 April 1887. Appearing in print nearly immediately after delivery, it was entitled: "Zur Geschichte der Altevangelischen Gemeinden" ["Toward a History of the Old Evangelical Congregations"].64

Reflecting his own commitment to an Christianity," Keller opened his address with the observation that the "wise founder of our religion" had revealed to his disciples only the great and general principles upon which Christianity was to be founded. As a consequence, Christianity had not developed uniformly, and in its history one could distinguish three basic forms of expression. The first form Keller discussed had emerged after Constantine. It had resurrected certain Old Testament concepts and practices, such as the priesthood and sacrifices, which had been developing in the church prior to the Constantinian transformation and which had enriched the church monetarily but enslaved her to the state. A second form had appeared in the sixteenth century. Rejecting the clerical church of the Middle Ages, the Reformation had proclaimed the priesthood of all believers and begun to reinstitute primitive practices. A thorough reform on these lines had not been accomplished, however, the majority of people quickly losing interest and settling for state churches in place of clerical churches. Instead of restoring the primitive church, the Reformation focused on dogma and orthodoxy, in the process separating moral renewal

⁶³B. C. Roosen to Keller, 7 July 1886. Keller Correspondence.

⁶⁴Ludwig Keller, Zur Geschichte der Altevangelischen Gemeinden (Berlin: Ernst Mittler & Sohn, 1887).

from salvation. The third form Keller labelled the "old Christian churches," the Christian congregation. A free union of brothers covenanting to live together in faith and obedience to Christ, it had known no forms of coercion, no minority membership, and was based on freedom of conscience. At the heart of its message stood Christ's teaching of the kingdom of God on earth and his call to discipleship.65

Beginning with St. Paul, Keller also developed the relationship between Christianity and the worker guilds more fully in this piece than he had in his The Reformation. Associations of all kinds, he asserted, had proliferated in the ancient world in which religion had been the unifying element. Outwardly they appeared to the state as guilds; secretly, however, they were religious confraternities. Christians in the Roman Empire adapted this institution to their needs. And as pagan guilds became Christian, the old pagan rituals and symbols gave way to Christian rites and symbols. Under Constantine, these Christian guilds came into opposition to the state church, and so it was in them that the "old evangelical" doctrines were maintained throughout the Middle Ages until the emergence of the Albigenses and Waldenses in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Followed by the Anabaptists in the sixteenth century, these groups were not identical in all respects but they did have elements common to all, especially their rejection of any connection with the state and their ancient congregational form. Their persecution by the established church under state control forced these ancient congregations to become secret societies and occasionally to rise in revolt—as in Münster. Having set the table, Keller proceeded to serve the main course of his meal.

Keller attacked the received interpretation of Anabaptism that postulated a beginning in Zwickau and a culmination in Münster as totally wrong. Such an interpretation, he charged, ignored the fact that the fundamental tenets of these old evangelical brotherhoods had "been transmitted to a number of very influential [religious] communities down to the present day,"66 while other ideas such as freedom of conscience, separation of church and state, had become the common property of entire countries. Not in Germany, of course, where Protestantism had sought to impose a uniformity cast in its own image and stamp out the Anabaptists. Certain "Anabaptist" aspects, however, had

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 14-15.

[&]quot;Ibid., pp. 30-39.

reappeared in Philip Jakob Spener and his followers; others had reappeared in such underground organizations as the Rosicrucians. And the theology that had informed all these groups—Waldenses, Anabaptists, Puritans, Quakers, Mennonites—had been that of mysticism.⁶⁷ The Mennonites, however, were their most faithful descendants.⁶⁸

Throughout the address, Keller's increasing preoccupation with secret societies is apparent. Rooted, perhaps, in Catholic Münster's renewed fervor in the wake of Vatican I and the consequent *Kulturkampf*, or in Keller's increasing contacts with Masons, it led Keller to develop a conspiracy theory of history that was to manifest itself more and more in his later work. In any case, as he remarked at the close of the speech: 'It is a most remarkable story.' At least on this count Keller was right; but with Theodor Kolde we should prefer to describe it as more fanciful than remarkable.

One year earlier, in 1886, Keller had turned to the history of Bible translations in the late Middle Ages and the Reformation in his *Die Waldenser und die deutschen Bibelübersetzungen* [The Waldenses and the German Bible Translations]⁶⁹ to demonstrate another aspect of the continuity between Waldenses and Anabaptists. Perhaps he did so because of A. M. Cramer's and Blaupot ten Cate's argument that the similarities between the two groups were simply the result of reading the Bible in similar ways. In the above study Keller laid out once more his familiar thesis, attacked his increasing number of critics, and sought to clinch his argument with an analysis of Waldensian Bible translations and their appropriation by Anabaptists. Arguing that every Bible translation is an interpretation and represents a party,⁷⁰ Keller proceeded to demonstrate that

within the Anabaptist congregations of the sixteenth century there was a very decided preference for the old German translations of the Waldenses, a preference that manifested itself simultaneously in a rejection of Luther's and Zwingli's translations and a preference for the older ones that had never wholly died out,

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 38-39.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 40.

⁶⁹Ludwig Keller, Die Waldenser und die deutschen Bibelübersetzungen (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1886).

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 66.

until the Reformation churches became all powerful and eliminated all competing translations.⁷¹ The continuity of ideas between Waldenses and Anabaptists could therefore be accounted for through the Anabaptist use of Waldensian Bible translations.

In the meantime Keller kept pressing the German Mennonites to accept his program and symbolize this with a name change to "alt evangelische Taufgesinnte." H. G. Mannhardt of Danzig was prepared to lead the way, writing to Keller on 10 November 1887 that he hoped to rename his Mennonite Yearbook to reflect such a name change. He informed Keller that it was not loyalty to Menno Simons that hindered the name change; Mennonites had simply not yet recognized what was to be accomplished by it.72 Whether or not they had done so, Mannhardt renamed his yearbook of 1888 "Jahrbuch der altevangelischen oder Mennoniten Gemeinden" [Yearbook of the Old Evangelical or Mennonite Congregations].

Another aspect of the name change was addressed in the 1 January 1888 issue of the Mennonitische Blätter by the Prussian Mennonite and Keller partisan, Carl Harder, in an essay entitled: 'Ist die mennonitische Gemeinschaft eine 'Sekte' oder ist sie die 'Fortsetzung der ursprünglichen christlichen Kirche'" [Is the Mennonite Fellowship a 'Sect' or the 'Continuation of the original Christian Church']. The very future of the Mennonite church, Harder asserted, turned on this question. Accepting all the negative connotations heaped on sects by the ruling churches, Harder, adopting Keller's old evangelical thesis, argued that "the Mennonite churches, with respect to their fundamental principles, were much older than the Reformation" and sought to leave the 'sectarian' ruling churches to join the persecuted church of believers. 73 Keller's thesis apparently transformed the 'sectarian' Anabaptists into the true church!

Only one month later J. P. Müller, pastor at Emden, published an essay in the Mennonitische Blätter focusing on the change of name in Mannhardt's 1888 Mennonite yearbook. After a brief review of the book's content, Müller observed that he had one more thing to say, and it referred to the label "old evangelical." It was high time, he said, "to discuss the admissibility of the

⁷¹Ibid., p. 136.

⁷²H. G. Mannhardt to Keller, 10 November 1887. Keller Correspondence.

⁷³ Carl Harder, "Ist die mennonitische Gemeinschaft eine 'Sekte' oder ist sie die 'Fortsetzung der ursprünglichen christlichen Kirche'?" Mennonitische Blätter, #1 (January, 1888): 3.

term from all sides, whether positively or negatively." To open such a discussion, Müller offered his opinion; it was decidedly negative. First, he noted that not all Mennonites shared Keller's views; hence a change should not be mandated. Second, Müller was not convinced the Mennonites had an historical right to the "old evangelical" name since a "valid proof for such a right had not—at least not conclusively—been supplied." In any case, there was nothing to be gained by the Mennonites even if Keller's thesis were proven on a massive scale. Third, the old name had served well, even in times of plunder and persecution, for over three hundred years. "For centuries," Müller continued, "we forgot all this and now, just as we are beginning to renew the memory of our forefathers, we are to sacrifice their name! The name they brought to honor!" Indeed, he asked, what was the purpose of such a name change? Unity? It had not brought the South German Mennonites any closer to the Vereinigung, perhaps had even alienated them from it. And renewal? "In order to make progress in [that direction]," he said, "... to increase in faith and love and to grow in the fear of God, in holiness where the need is, for this one obviously does not need a name change." Perhaps Keller had an ulterior motive, Müller suggested, for he seemed to have some public role for the Mennonites, a role outside the Mennonite community. Were they to join Keller's program they would no longer be in control of their own destiny but at the mercy of those who wished to use them. Müller concluded by observing "that, as a rule, one does not put conditions on favors rendered, especially on those not asked for. If one wishes to help us, fine, let him do so unhindered, but let him not require, even if he wishes for something in return, a favor like this which touches our most profound interests."74

No sooner had the first installment of Müller's essay appeared than Keller wrote both B. C. Roosen and van der Smissen regarding the *Namensfrage* [the question of the name change].

I have the worry [he remarked] that I have not always expressed myself as clearly as I would have liked on the issue; we are, after all, only weak humans. It never entered my mind to deny that the Mennonite name had acquired a

⁷⁴J. P. Müller, "Jahrbuch der Altevangelischen Taufgesinnten oder Mennoniten-Gemeinden," *Mennonitische Blätter*, #3 (1 February, 1888): 18-19; and #4 (15 February, 1888): 23-24. The quotation is from #4 (15 February, 1888): 24.

good historical justification, was held in honor and respected by the congregations, nor have I ever believed that a substitute for the name at present or in the foreseeable future would be possible. What I envisioned was always just this: that in Germany, America, etc., as has long been the case in Switzerland [well before I began to write] the name "old evangelical churches" would be placed on an equal footing, and that it would represent the broader concept [a value concept] and "Mennonite" the local entity.75

But Müller had already pressed the issue well beyond the mere discussion of a name change; he had questioned whether Keller's scholarship was not directed to some end, an end Mennonites might not welcome. Müller's query demanded a response, and H. G. Mannhardt took it upon himself to provide one in the 5 March 1888 issue of the Mennonitische Blätter. There he argued that Müller's fears were unfounded; but he also remarked that he wished the discussion of the Namensfrage closed.76 On 16 March 1888 Ernst Weydmann of Krefeld wrote to Keller directly suggesting that this might not be the time to press the issue."

Keller, however, had been offended, especially by that part of the essay in which Müller had questioned his motives. He wrote Mannhardt that Müller had "pelted him with dirt." As a consequence, in spite of Mannhardt's advice not to take Müller's insinuations too personally, Keller began to withdraw from the Mennonites.78

Müller's essay could not have appeared at a more critical time, for at the very moment he wrote, Dr. Fabri was visiting Roosen and other Mennonite leaders in Hamburg and Keller was planning his larger strategy with him. Perhaps an awareness of this lay behind the timing of Müller's attack, for he seems never to have been as strongly under Keller's influence as some of the other Mennonite leaders. And van der Smissen, editor of the Mennonitische Blätter, had voiced doubts about Keller's motives from the outset. Were the two collaborating to undermine Keller's influence among the German Mennonites? Whatever the

⁷⁵Keller to B. C. Roosen & H. van der Smissen, 2 February 1888. Keller Correspondence.

⁷⁶H. G. Mannhardt, "Notwendige Erklärung," Mennonitische Blätter, #5 (1

⁷⁷E. Weydmann to Keller, 16 March 1888. Keller Correspondence.

⁷⁵Quoted by Mannhardt in his letter to Keller, 28 May 1888. Keller Correspondence.

case, Mannhardt's use of the "old evangelical" name for his yearbook had given Müller an excuse to voice his concerns.

Other insinuations came from outside Mennonite circles. A reviewer of Mannhardt's yearbook in the *Theologische Literaturzeitung* [Journal of Theological Literature] wrote:

On p. 406 of the 1881 issue of this journal the concern was expressed, at the appearance of Dr. L. Keller's first notable study, that the channel on which Anabaptism navigated not continually be broadened by German scholarship. The subsequent publications of this scholar have only increased this concern. Dr. Keller is not only directly connected with the creation of the *Vereinigung*, but the goals that it pursues conform fully with the tendencies of his writings.⁷⁹

And so Mannhardt—though he wished the discussion ended—was forced to reopen it again in the 2 July 1888 issue of the *Mennonitische Blätter*. But he was himself uncertain as to Keller's motives and so wrote the latter on 29 November 1888,

When you and Dr. Fabri, honored Herr Archivist, hope to bring your plan to fruition, it would certainly be for the best if you were to present everyone, who is to be enlisted [in the cause], with a pretty clear program in which, above all else, you tell them who will deliver the speeches, where and before whom, and what higher purpose they are to serve.⁸⁰

Keller's response, dated 2 December 1888, remained characteristically vague. He said only, that from everything he knew of Mannhardt's writings, sermons, letters, and the like, they were in virtual agreement on all issues and he had therefore never entered into any greater detail.⁸¹ He did not do so in this letter either, however. Two days later Keller wrote van der Smissen; the contours of his *Gesellschaft* [society] were no clearer here, nor the role the Mennonites were to play in it.⁸²

In the 1 October 1890 issue of the Mennonitische Blätter Carl Harder sought to come to Keller's defense in an essay entitled "Zur Sache der Keller'schen Forschungen" [Concerning Keller's

⁷⁹H. G. Mannhardt, "Zur Abwehr," Mennonitische Blätter, #14 (2 July, 1888): 82.

⁸⁰Mannhardt to Keller, 29 November 1888. Keller Correspondence.

⁸¹ Keller to Mannhardt, 2 December 1888. Keller Correspondence.

⁶²Keller to H. van der Smissen, 4 December 1888. Keller Correspondence.

Research]. Some of his friends, he wrote, in a conversation dealing with Keller's scholarship, had observed "that until now it is still not clear what Keller's purpose is and what has driven him to his publications." Since others might be asking similar questions, Harder wished to provide an answer. Referring to Keller's own studies, Harder argued that the former, knowing how he would be persecuted by his fellow scholars, could only have pursued these studies as a matter of conscience: he wished finally to set the record straight and provide the descendants of the old evangelical churches with a sense of their own importance.

If a man [Harder argued], who was not born and raised in our church draws attention to the historical importance of these churches, then his coming forward must be accorded the greater importance, the more so since Keller, as a consequence of his profession, was in a position to test and investigate the original sources, and has defended his views and convictions for some ten years in spite of passionate attacks.⁸³

Harder argued that Keller did have another purpose, however. Though at first concerned only with historical research,

at present he obviously wishes to serve life as well as scholarship... As far as I can understand Keller's purpose, he wishes that every congregation, which has freed itself from dependence on, or the guardianship of, the state, and once more placed itself on the foundation of the original Christian Church... will structure itself on the principles of the Gospel and preserve its holy traditions.⁸⁴

Therefore, Harder concluded, it had to be Keller's intention that independent churches be recognized more and more in the Evangelical world.⁸⁵

By 1890, however, Keller was shifting his ground, distancing himself from the Mennonites more and more because of his growing conviction that they "could not be, or would not be

85 Ibid., p. 114.

⁸³Carl Harder, "Zur Sachen der Keller'schen Forschungen," Mennonitische Blätter, #19 (1 October, 1888): 113.

⁸⁴Ibid., pp. 113-114.

helped." On 20 December 1890 he wrote Anna Brons, thanking her for her contribution to the creation of his Comenius Gesellschaft [Comenius Society]. He informed her that this new organization was to concern itself especially "with the clarification of the history of the Anabaptists and their forerunners." However, if Mennonites did not contribute substantially to the financial costs of the enterprise, he would not be able to determine the direction of its activity.86 Three days later he wrote van der Smissen that the latter was correct in assuming that he, Keller, had this new venture very much at heart. The same motives, he said, that had led him to pursue the history of the Anabaptists without consideration of the consequences, were now leading him to these studies. He therefore requested that van der Smissen no longer list his name as a contributing editor of the Mennonitische Blätter, indeed that it was his intention to sever all relations with the paper.87 Keller had become embittered toward the German Mennonites.

With several notable exceptions, Keller's correspondence with the German Mennonites died out at this point. To be sure Mennonite university students still wrote him and Ernst Weydmann kept up an intermittent correspondence, as did Samuel Cramer. And then came the letters of Gerhard Haake beginning in April 1897. The latter wished, as we have seen, to write a thesis on Denck's theology and pleaded for Keller's assistance. The latter acquiesced. And although Haake repeatedly signed his name with 'Thr ergebener Schüler' [Your most devoted student], Keller was not enthusiastic about the final product. Just the year before, H. Lüdemann of the University of Bern had attacked Keller throughout his study on Reformation und Täufertum,88 and Keller had finally been compelled to confront his critics in his Grundfragen der Reformationsgeschichte. Eine Auseinandersetzung mit literarischen Gegnern [Fundamental Questions of Reformation History. A Debate with Literary Opponents]. 89 Under these circumstances, Haake had offered to defend Keller in a postscript to his work on Denck, but the defense must not have pleased Keller, nor did Haake's Hans Denck, a Precursor of the newer Theology. His notice in the Monatshefte der Comenius Gesellschaft, as we have seen, was less

⁸⁶Keller to Anna Brons, 20 December 1890. Keller Correspondence.

⁸⁷Keller to H. van der Smissen, 23 December 1890. Keller Correspondence.

⁸⁸⁽Bern: W. Kaiser, 1896).

⁸⁹⁽Berlin: Hermann Heyfelder, 1897).

than enthusiastic. In the same year Christian Neff's review appeared in the *Mennonitische Blätter* and made essentially the same point Keller had. Thus both Neff, who had supplied Haake with a good deal of Denck material, and Keller, who was the authority, had rejected Haake. Keller, the teacher, had spurned the overly ardent student. And Haake, in "good" Mennonite fashion, awaited his revenge. It came in 1900 when he was asked by van der Smissen to review Paul Burckhardt's book on the Basel Anabaptists for the *Mennonitische Blätter*.

That book, in its opening passages, impugned Keller's Waldensian thesis. It did so not on the basis of any new theory but on the basis of concrete evidence. Burckhardt argued, first, that Basel had not been the city where Swiss Anabaptism had arisen—all of Basel's Anabaptists had come from the outside. Therefore the connection posited by Keller between Basel Waldenses and Anabaptists was non-existent. Furthermore, as Haake wrote in his review:

there can be no talk of an ancient brotherhood in Basel because there was none and was first invented by Keller. For the "ancient guild of masons zum Himmel," of which Keller speaks, turns out to be a harmless guild of painters and barbers, which had nothing to do with heaven and its gospel but was called "zum Himmel" after the house, which already bore that name, before it became a guild hall.

Haake followed this up with a number of other examples where Burckhardt had exposed, on the basis of a thorough knowledge of the sources and local history, Keller's unfounded assumptions. Yet, Haake remained fairly restrained in his own criticism of Keller.⁹⁰

Keller was furious. He expressed his displeasure to Molenaar on 3 November, adding that the *Mennonitische Blätter*, which only a few weeks ago had assured him of its undying gratitude, had now allowed itself to become the vehicle of his vilification. On the 11th he wrote van der Smissen directly requesting that he be allowed to respond to the charges in his journal. Should van der Smissen refuse, said Keller, he would seek satisfaction in a more

⁹⁰Gerhard Haake, "Die Basler Täufer von Dr. Burckhardt," *Mennonitische Blätter*, #11 (1 November, 1900): 81-82.

⁹¹Keller to Willy Molenaar, 3 November 1900. Keller Correspondence.

pointed fashion elsewhere.⁹² His *Erklärung* [Explanation] appeared on 1 December 1900.⁹³ He attempted to defend himself, but the damage had been done and Haake was allowed to respond in his "Eine letzte Erklärung" [A Final Explanation] of 1 January 1901. And now the *enfant terrible*, as Willy Molenaar of Berlin had called Haake in a letter to Keller of 16 November 1900,⁹⁴ did his worst. Keller's attack on him was outside the pale, he said, for he had merely reported Burckhardt's criticisms. But since Keller had attacked the messenger rather than the message, he did wish to say a few words regarding Keller's historical method.

Anyone, who like Keller dares to trump the received interpretation of history, that the despised Anabaptists are not only the carriers of true Christianity but that they also stand in direct historical continuity with ancient Christianity, has the responsibility and duty to place his cards on the table for everyone to see. Whoever, like Keller, dares to transform the huts of the poor Anabaptists overnight into towering palaces must also show us the foundations upon which the building rests. If this is not forthcoming and if he satisfies himself with delicate allusions, every impartial observer will regard the edifice to be a house of cards. Only the documents in their original form are convincing; excerpts will not do. Where a researcher "only reproduces the words and sentences important for him, where certain words lose all importance for him, where one wishes to stress only a part," as Keller himself conceded in his Erklärung, there objective history ends and subjective caprice begins. 95

With that as opening salvo, Haake proceeded to defend Burckhardt and attack Keller in a much more fulsome manner than he had in the first review. Christian Neff probably had it right when he wrote Keller after reading Haake's review and Keller's defense:

⁹²Keller to the editor of the Mennonitische Blätter, 11 November 1900. Keller Correspondence.

⁹³Mennonitische Blätter, #12 (1 December, 1900): 92-93. It also appeared verbatim in the Monatshefte der Comenius-Gesellschaft, IX, #9 & 10 (1900): 324-326.

⁹⁴W. Molenaar to Keller, 16 November 1900. Keller Correspondence.

⁹⁵Gerhard Haake, "Eine letzte Erklärung," Mennonitische Blätter, #1 (1 January, 1901): 3-4.

At the time when I read your excellent critique of Haake's study of Hans Denck in the *Comenius Blätter*, which hit the nail squarely on the head in such an admirable manner, I shook your hand in spirit. Perhaps exactly this is the reason for Haake's, in my opinion, malicious evaluation of your highly regarded, meritorious scholarship.⁹⁶

B. C. Roosen came to Keller's defense in an article in the *Mennonitische Blätter* of 1 February 1901; Willy Molenaar of Berlin wrote another in the same issue.⁹⁷ And even though the *Curatorium* of the *Vereinigung* and its thirty-six representatives unanimously disagreed with Haake's assessment and vigorously decried the insult done the honor of a man who had contributed so much to research and clarify the history of the Mennonite past,⁹⁸ an irreparable damage had been done Keller and he had not been able adequately to defend himself. The *coup de grace* was delivered to Keller by Walther Köhler in his 1906 review of Weydmann's book on Mennonite history.⁹⁹

Why had Keller done history in this manner, and what had been his goal? Before we seek to answer that question, permit me just one more foray into Keller historiography. Already in his book, *The Reformation*, Keller had brought the medieval guilds of masons into the company of the old evangelical churches. No sooner had Keller done so than Karl Müller, another Lutheran Reformation scholar, wrote, in an anonymous review: "I wish to say it succinctly: the Waldensian and Anabaptist movements must, according to a predetermined plan, culminate in the Freemasons." Then on 26 June 1885 Keller received a letter from a certain von Alten in Berne, Indiana. It opened by saying:

If I am not mistaken, you are a member of some, what appears to you, harmless and convivial lodge of Freemasons. [In the margin Keller wrote: "Not true!"] From the preface, with which you introduced your information on the guilds

⁹⁶Christian Neff to Keller, 7 December 1900. Keller Correspondence.

⁹⁷B. C. Roosen, "Eine letzte Gegenerklärung," Mennonitische Blätter, #2 (1 February, 1901): 9. Willy Molenaar, "Audiatur et altera pars," Mennonitische Blätter, #2 (1 February, 1901): 10.

^{*}See the letter of E. Weydmann to Keller, 15 April 1902. Keller Correspondence.
*Walther Köhler, "Weydmann's Geschichte der Mennoniten," Mennonitische Blätter, #3 (1 March, 1906): 18-19.

¹⁰⁰Quoted by Keller himself in his "Zur Aufklärung über die Entstehung von Dr. Keller's Schriften," Gemeindeblatt, #11 (November, 1888): 89.

of masons, I believe I can conclude that you seek, earnestly and honestly, to further the cause of truth and do not entertain any secret, jesuitical mental reservations.¹⁰¹

Von Alten suggested that Keller read the book *Akazien-Blüthen* aus dem Freimaurer-orden [Acacia Flowers from the Order of Freemasons]¹⁰² by a former Mason of the higher ranks, the sole source of von Alten's information on the secret society. The book left no doubt, he argued, that the secret purpose of the Masons was to undermine Christianity, destroy the family, and to entice persons into membership through influential members who had never been initiated into its real secrets. He hoped Keller would change from a somewhat unwitting and unconscious champion of the Freemasons to a joyous confessor of Jesus Christ.¹⁰³ Keller's marginal notes on the letter make it clear he did not believe von Alten's accusations.

On 29 June 1885, Keller wrote a letter to a state official by the name of Puttkamer. He enclosed a copy of his *The Reformation* and added:

It cannot be denied that the subjects herein dealt with are not only of antiquarian interest, for many questions of a religious nature are touched upon that raise profound issues of principle.

When I, ten years ago, began my studies on the church history of Northwest Germany and especially Anabaptism, I only had in mind, as I openly admitted, the acquisition of antiquarian results. Half unwittingly I have, from year to year, been led to the astonishing manner in which these results, in their present form, have taken shape.

¹⁰¹ Von Alten to Keller, 26 June 1885. Keller Correspondence. In the above essay cited in footnote #100, Keller also declared: "Einer jener [heimliche und verdächtige] Gründe wird nun, wie ich gehört habe, von manchen Personen darin gesucht, daß ich Mitglied einer geheimen Gesellschaft, nämlich der Freimaurer, sei. Ich halte es für nothwendig, diese Behauptung, welche z.B. ein Herr von Alten aus Berne, Indiana, in einem seiner Briefe ausgesprochen hat, für eine ganz grundlose und willkürliche Erfindung zu erklären, die den deutlichen Zweck verfolgt, mich zu verdächtigen. Ich bin nicht Freimaurer und als ich die Geschichte der Wiedertäufer' zu schreiben begann, ahnte ich nicht, daß zwischen den Bauhütten und den altevangelischen ein Zusammenhang vorhanden sein könnte." "Zur Aufklärung," p. 90.

¹⁰²F. W. A. Riedel, Akazien-Blüthen aus dem Freimaurer-Orden (New Albany: Selbstverlag, 1872).

¹⁰³ Von Alten to Keller, 26 June 1885. Keller Correspondence.

For a time I hesitated to tell and publish what I believed I had found; the difficult local conditions in which I stand counselled strongly against doing so. But I finally took the risk and committed the consequences to God.¹⁰⁴

Was Keller referring here to his "findings" concerning the medieval guilds of masons and their relationship to the old evangelical churches? The recipient of the letter does not appear to have been a Mason.

On 9 January 1887 Keller received a letter from a Dr. Wilhelm Begemann of Rostock, a Mason himself and about to become Germany's foremost historian of the Freemasons. He had no desire to deny, said Begemann, that a connection had existed, during the Middle Ages and perhaps into the early modern period, between the "brothers" and the "stonemasons," but, from his own studies conducted over the years at the source of Freemasonry in London, he was forced to deny any connections of such "brothers" with the London Lodge established in 1717. The founders of that lodge, he argued, had been imbued with the rationalistic spirit of the Enlightenment.

Keller must have responded almost immediately to Begemann, for on 14 January 1887 Begemann wrote again, this time in answer, suggesting that the histories of the Freemasons Keller had used were untrustworthy and warning him not to repeat untenable arguments. He was not accusing Keller, Begemann asserted, only trying to be helpful.106 In his response, Keller asserted that the true story of the origin of the Freemasons would never be known until the history of medieval heresy had been fully clarified. He spoke of his attempt to do this and to expose the frightful inhumanity of the ruling churches to the heretics, only to be vilified by those churches in return. Under these circumstances one could make progress only by means of corporate cooperation. Unless such an organization to cover the backs of the researchers could be created one could hardly expect to achieve lasting results. He had therefore come to the conclusion that a society for the promotion of the history and literature of the old evangelical churches-modelled after the Society for Reformation Research—should be called into existence without the specific purpose of doing research in the history of

¹⁰⁴Keller to Puttkamer, 29 June 1885. Keller Correspondence.

¹⁰⁵Wilhelm Begemann to Keller, 9 January 1887. Keller Correspondence.

¹⁰⁶Wilhelm Begemann to Keller, 14 January 1887. Keller Correspondence.

Freemasonry. Nevertheless, such Freemasons with an interest in their history should join in support of the project. The society should have its base in Berlin and would undoubtedly attract those interested in such studies but at the moment feared the reprisals of the established churches.¹⁰⁷ Was the *Vereinigung* of the German Mennonites Keller had been promoting since at least 1883 to be a cover for researching the history of Freemasonry, or did Keller consider Freemasons a persecuted minority like the old evangelical churches of earlier times? And had his conviction that progress against the prejudices of a revived Lutheran, Reformed, and Catholic orthodoxy could only be made by corporate action caused him to attempt to unite the Waldenses and medieval guilds of masons?

On 13 March 1887, Begemann conceded, in a letter to Keller, that German lodges might have had connections with old evangelical Christians, but this had certainly not been the case with England. Only a few days later, on the 24th, Keller began discussing his research and Freemasonry with the Berlin Mennonite Freemason, Hermann Wiens. On 14 October 1888 Keller wrote him that, if his information was correct, the conviction was gradually spreading within the lodges that the long-sought-for origin of the Freemasons had been found. This was an oblique reference to the acceptance of Keller's own old evangelical thesis with its implication for the guilds of masons by the Freemasons of his day. He informed Wiens that he had presented more evidence to this effect in the preface to his new book.¹¹⁰ In a return letter, however, Wiens impressed upon Keller the fact that, whatever the origins of the Freemasons, only the Swedish and Danish mother lodges, and the Berlin lodge, still had a specifically Christian character.111 The rest were all irreligious.

In a letter to Wiens of 18 March 1889, Keller indicated his desire to establish closer ties with the Freemasons. Between 1882 and 1887, both with respect to Mennonites as well as Masons, said Keller, he had been groping largely in the dark. He had made contact with the Mennonites; it was high time that he now also do so with the Masons. He had even begun thinking seriously about joining a lodge, but as long as he remained in

¹⁰⁷ Keller to Begemann, 12 February 1887. Keller Correspondence.

 ¹⁰⁸Begemann to Keller, 13 March 1887. Keller Correspondence.
 ¹⁰⁹Keller to Hermann Wiens, 24 March 1887. Keller Correspondence.

¹¹⁰ Keller to Hermann Wiens, 14 October 1888. Keller Correspondence.

¹¹¹H. Wiens to Keller, 18 February 1889. Keller Correspondence.

Münster that would not be possible. 112 Not until 1897, after he had become archivist in Berlin, did Keller join the Freemasons.

By 1890, as we have seen, Keller had severed virtually all of his relations with the German Mennonites. By 1892 he had founded the Comenius Gesellschaft with the Monatshefte as its publication organ. Why Comenius? Already in his The Reformation of 1885 he had argued that Comenius was the "old evangelical" link to the London Mother Lodge; the latter's visit to England in 1642, he argued, had left its mark on the English Freemason constitution. At the time, Begemann had denounced this as nonsense; founding Masonic documents did make mention of Rosicrucians, but there was not even a whisper of Comenius. Nor could the German Freemasons be trusted on the matter, said Begemann. Keller persisted nonetheless. And now, in 1892, Comenius, the Bishop of the Bohemian Brethren and seventeenth-century educator, was to become the focus of Keller's research. What was more, he could publish his research in his own journal-what a prospect for a scholar! No more outside reviews!

At first Begemann joined Keller in this new venture, but by 1900 he had withdrawn because of the latter's insistence to do even Mason history in a manner Begemann could not condone. In an essay on "Comenius und die Freimaurer" [Comenius and the Freemasons] of 1906, Begemann for the first time attacked Keller openly—by now both were brother Masons in the Berlin lodge. Though Begemann did not yet mention Keller by name, anyone who knew the literature could not miss the allusions to his work. It was a lengthy, careful and thorough refutation. Three years later, in 1909, Begemann published his authoritative 2 volume Vorgeschichte und Anfänge der Freimaurerei in England [Prehistory and Beginnings of English Freemasonry]. His introduction was a frontal attack on Keller carried out in a series of acid footnotes that discussed Keller's historical methodology. Referring to Keller, he observed:

Only for the sake of completeness do I make mention in passing of the attempts, still being made in our time, of seeking the source or antecedents of the Freemasons in, among other things, the mysteries of the Ancients, the pyramids of the Egyptians, the Jewish Essenes, the Roman

¹¹²Keller to H. Wiens, 18 March 1889. Keller Correspondence.

¹¹³Wilhelm Begemann, Comenius und die Freimaurer (Berlin: Ernst Mittler & Sohn, 1906), pp. 3-56.

Collegia Artificium, the Italian Academies, the medieval heretics, the old-evangelical churches. [In all these attempts], as was unavoidable, the human fantasy played the decisive role in order to bridge the chasms [between the various groups]. 114

English historians of Freemasonry knew only too well, Begemann asserted, that the London lodge had been established in 1717 in order to create an island of convivial tranquility in a sea of religious and political conflict. But German historians could not conceive of such a mundane motive and had gone off looking for "profound" causes. As Begemann put it:

But our good German brothers wish to attribute the goals of a later development to our early days and continue imagining that everything has to be done consciously and with predetermination. As a consequence they are forced to seek a motivating force, for a society or group of men, who followed similar objectives; and when they have found one which their imagination tells them fits the bill, they strain every nerve to prove that it captivated the guilds with whose help they sought to realize their objectives.¹¹⁵

Even though Begemann attacked Keller openly once more in 1911,¹¹⁶ the latter proceeded to publish, in the same year, his *Die Geistigen Grundlagen der Freimaurerei und das öffentliche Leben* [The Intellectual Foundations of Freemasonry and Public Life].¹¹⁷ Despite Begemann's many criticisms, Keller developed his old thesis in this book on another grand scale: this time, however, in the service of Freemasonry. Once again he trotted out his "great chain of being," beginning with the medieval mystics, reaching back to the Gospel of John and forward to the Freemasons.¹¹⁸ In the process, Keller, like Zimmermann, Hagen, and Haake before him, transformed the "inner light" into reason

115 Ibid., pp. 15-16.

¹¹⁸Ibid., pp. 62-65.

¹¹⁴Wilhelm Begemann, Vorgeschichte und Anfänge der Freimaurerei in England (Berlin: Ernst Mittler & Sohn, 1909), I, p. 3.

¹¹⁶Wilhelm Begemann, Die Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft und Johann Valentin Andreä (Berlin: Ernst Mittler & Sohn, 1911), III, p. 79.

¹¹⁷Ludwig Keller, Die Geistigen Grundlagen der Freimaurerei und das öffentliche Leben (Jena: Eugen Diedrichs, 1911).

and then conscience.¹¹⁹ His book was awarded the highest prize by the organization of German Freemasons as the best work on the subject.

Now it was Begemann's turn to be furious. He attacked Keller in the public press anonymously and in person, even though he had taken a solemn vow in 1909 not to attack Keller in the future. He had him attacked by surrogates as the "literary pope of the Freemasons" in the Berliner Zeitung am Mittag, a widely read paper. There were demands that Begemann be disciplined, but it was generally conceded that "he held first rank among Mason historians."126 Recent scholarship on the Masons has vindicated Begemann, 121 and so Keller's Masonic edifice—like his oldevangelical theory—has collapsed like a house of cards. There was no glue to hold the disparate parts together despite Keller's best efforts. In a letter to Keller of 1888, H. G. Mannhardt had written: "Nicht Denck, nicht Staupitz-Comenius ist der geeignete Mann!" [Not Denck, not Staupitz-Comenius is the most suitable man!] "Geeignet" for what? What had Keller been up to?

Keller's great old-evangelical chain of being which he filled with the mystical theology of a John Tauler, Eckhart, *German Theology*, Hans Denck, and von Staupitz, and which centered on the Waldenses and Anabaptists in the transition from the Middle Ages to the Reformation, turned the tables on the received interpretation of the Reformation in Germany. No longer was Luther the hero and the initiator of the Protestant Reformation; he became, in Keller's hands, a turncoat, a man who, having begun in the mystical tradition with his editions of the *German Theology* in 1516 and 1518, had marginalized himself and his future church after 1521-1524 when he departed from that tradition. Luther and the churches of the Reformation were therefore the true sectarians; the Anabaptists heirs to the true church.¹²² Such a perspective legitimated Keller's counter-attack

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 70.

¹²⁰"Der Streit Begemann-Keller," Der Zirkel, #10 (10 December, 1911). Keller Correspondence.

¹²¹David Stevenson, *The Origins of Freemasonry. Scotland's Century, 1590-1710* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). However, the more one reads the literature on the Masons, the more one becomes convinced that there is a conscious and unconscious plot to obfuscate the issues!

¹²²See Carl Harder's essay, "Ist die mennonitische Gemeinschaft eine 'Sekte' oder ist sie die 'Fortsetzung der ursprünglichen christlichen Kirche'?" Mennonitische Blätter, #1 (1 January, 1888): 2-11.

on the established churches and their incestuous relationship with the state. And there can be no doubt that Keller, like Fabri his mentor, desired to disestablish the churches. To do so, however, he needed a counterweight to the established churches who benefitted from their connection to the state and used it to persecute and suppress their opponents. Just as the Evangelicals under Fabri, Keller sought to unite all these disparate groups into a larger organization, a kind of Alliance of Old-Evangelical Churches. In a letter to Emil de Greiff of Krefeld he wrote on 4 November 1887: "Just as the creation of an Evangelical Alliance did much good, so many advantages would accrue to a related union." This "related union" was to consist of Mennonites, Baptists, Quakers, Waldenses, Collegiants, General Schwenkfelders, and anyone else who could be made to feel at home under the old-evangelical canopy.¹²³ Such an organization was to constitute the third force between Catholic and Protestant state churches he had described in his 1887 Berlin address on the old-evangelical churches. He spoke of the same kind of a counterweight to these two state churches, who used state power to persecute their enemies, in his book on the Freemasons. In that context he spoke of the persecution being suffered by the Freemasons from these same churches as well as the "naturalistic currents" of the time. "It is quite right," he wrote; "the sooner the confessional partisans and those of the naturalists are able to neutralize any third power factor, the sooner each of them can hope to overpower the other and then force the state agencies to do their bidding."124 Keller was seeking to create a counterweight to Catholics, orthodox or confessional Protestants, and materialists. But the greater danger came from the resurgent and aggressive orthodoxy manifesting itself in both Protestantism and Catholicism in the wake of the 1870 decree on papal infallibility and the consequent Kulturkampf. Within this scheme, the German Mennonites would be but a minor cog on a much larger wheel over which they would have little or no control. We have heard them voice precisely this concern. They, on the contrary, wished to make their history meaningful for themselves in terms of renewal; they had little interest in working together with outsiders for goals that had never been fully explained to them. Keller himself observed on occasion that Lutherans and Catholics had a much better understanding of the import of his

¹²³ Keller to Emil de Greiff, 4 November 1887. Keller Correspondence.

¹²⁴Keller, Die Geistigen Grundlagen, p. VI.

studies than did the Mennonites; it was for that reason, he said, that they attacked him so mercilessly as the "apostle of the Anabaptists." ¹²⁵

This was the negative aspect of Keller's "plan." But there was also a positive aspect, and this had to do—as we asserted at the very outset-with Fabri's theology and his view of the restoration of the apostolic church in the end of the age, an apostolic church that would revive Christ's message of the kingdom of God on earth, as Fabri had written his fiancée already in 1849. In the sixteenth-century Anabaptists Keller discovered a group that had already attempted to do what Blumhardt and Fabri were now doing. They had proclaimed the message of the kingdom of God on earth; they had attempted to restore the apostolic church in the fullness of its power; they had sought to separate the church from the state; in Denck and the mystics they had presented the world with a theology by means of which everyone could be brought to the desired renewal of spiritual life. The only problem was that the original Anabaptist movement had lost its vitality and now also stood in need of renewal. It was precisely such a renewal that Keller sought to bring them through a return to the heroic age of their forebears and the resurrection of their history. The Mennonites, however, were not prepared for such a grand and all-inclusive program. They saw only with parochial eyes; and the ideology Keller presented to them in the person of Hans Denck shattered on the divisions between rationalist North German and Pietist South German Mennonites. Thus, by 1890, Keller gave up on them and turned to the Freemasons. But he did so only after Fabri's death in 1891. Is there a connection two events? Whatever these between the case. Freemasons—though a much more powerful secret organization, with members already in positions of power, than the Mennonites or any other loose organization of "old-evangelical churches"-were, as Keller well knew, overwhelmingly rationalistic and not Christian in outlook. Did he really believe he could convince them to go back to their "old-evangelical" roots in the medieval guilds of masons by presenting them-as he did in 1911—with a history of their supposed intellectual origins? If he did-and it does appear that he did-then Keller was more interested in realizing the "myth" of his and Fabri's view of the final age of the church than in doing objective historical research. For, no matter how much he might insist that he had stumbled

¹²⁵Keller to C. J. Hingst, the Hague, 24 November 1886. Keller Correspondence.

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on this interpretation accidentally, once his studies began to be dissected by cogent and factual argumentation—and his grand designs all disintegrated on him even before his death—should he not have given up his attempt to prove them? But he refused to do so. In many ways his approach to history was no better—perhaps even considerably worse—than that of many another nineteenth-century historian who sought to use history to prove his philosophical assumptions.

Chapter 5

Ludwig Keller, John Horsch, and the Bender Renewal of the "Anabaptist Vision"

On 10 May 1885, a seventeen-year-old Mennonite from Gelchsheim, Bavaria, named John Horsch, responded to Ludwig Keller's plea, in an 1885 essay, to help transcribe the writings of Hans Denck. To my knowledge he was the only person to do so. He wrote:

At the close of your description of the life of Hans Langenmantel in No. 5 of the *Mennonitische Blätter* you ask whether someone would be prepared to make copies of Denck's writings, etc. I would be prepared to do so if only I could acquire them from somewhere for this purpose. Were you to enlighten me on this matter I would be most grateful.¹

Here am I, send me! said young John Horsch. But this was Ludwig Keller, not God, calling! And so began a fateful relationship between an eager and impressionable Mennonite youth and the famous Reformation scholar and apparent Mennonite benefactor. Horsch's education under Keller, which lasted from May 1885 to late 1890, would gradually have to be undone. It was a slow process and, perhaps, a painful one. It was a process in which Horsch's future son-in-law, Harold S. Bender,

would play a role.

John Horsch, the second son and fourth child of Elder Jacob Horsch and his wife, Barbara Landes, was a frustrated young man when he first wrote Keller in May of 1885. His father had decided that one university-trained son in the family—John's older brother was studying medicine—was all the family could afford. And there was, after all, the farm. How many Mennonite sons have not heard that refrain! And so John was sent, in 1884, to study agriculture at the Bavarian State Agricultural School in Würzburg. Two years later, in 1886, he received his diploma. By this time, his interests already lay with the Mennonite people—their past and their future, not in agriculture. Even before his graduation he therefore offered his services to Ludwig Keller. Already he possessed and had read Keller's biography of

¹Keller, "Hans Langenmantel," p. 36.

Hans Denck and his 1885 The Reformation and the older Reform Parties.

Keller, on the other hand, cannot have known who John Horsch was. But a reading of Keller's letters to Horsch suggests that he was well aware that here was an impressionable mind with few predetermined prejudices ready to be molded, perhaps, in Keller's own image. And so Keller spoke more candidly of his program and plans for the Mennonites in his letters to Horsch than he did with any other correspondent, with the possible exception of his letters to his Evangelical friends.

Keller responded to Horsch's offer almost immediately, suggesting that since libraries would probably not loan out their Denck manuscripts to a private person, he would provide Horsch with transcriptions he had himself made, for periods of six to eight weeks, and he already enclosed Denck's "Von der wahren Liebe" [Concerning true Love]. It was, he wrote, "one of Denck's most important tracts and possesses a very special importance for the history of the old-evangelical churches." Not knowing that Horsch already possessed copies of his books, Keller also sent him copies of his *Hans Denck* and *The Reformation*, so that Horsch might acquire a context for a better understanding of the document. Denck was difficult to understand, Keller warned his young disciple, and Horsch would have to read him again and again.

In the letter Keller also spoke of the renewal already underway in many German Mennonite congregations, and of his hope of creating a unifying general conference structure with an appropriate constitution for the German Mennonites. He enclosed a copy of the latter for Horsch's perusal. Together with a projected Mennonite seminary, such an organization would once more enable Mennonite churches to mobilize their strength for action. No doubt, Keller continued, all this would require time and sacrifice, but

if today's Mennonites will recall with what sacrifice, in terms of life and limb, goods and property, their forefathers fought for the faith, and if everyone, no matter what his station in life, will, with God's help and in the spirit of Christ and the apostles, make every effort to renew the fellowship, the old powerful witness will be revived.²

²Elizabeth Horsch Bender, ed., "The Letters of Ludwig Keller to John Horsch, 1885-1893," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XXI (July, 1947): 176.

Horsch thanked for the books and the copy of the Vereinigung's constitution of 7 July 1885, remarking that he already possessed them all. In his turn, Horsch sent Keller a list of "books out of our Mennonite literature" as well as copies of a 1702 confession of faith and the 1878 "Christliches Lehrbüchlein" [Christian Instructional Booklet].3 A grateful Keller, always on the lookout for more grist for his Waldensian mill, immediately related the 1702 confession to the "catechism of the so-called Waldensians" of the fifteenth century discussed in his The Reformation. Were there still older catechisms among Horsch's South German brothers, he asked? The older the better. His opponents, Keller complained, denied that the Waldenses had had anything to do with the "old-evangelical Mennonites" of today. But that was certainly not true. Would Horsch help him establish the facts of the matter? Was Keller tacitly conceding he had not yet proven his case?

For several months Horsch searched for old Mennonite or Anabaptist confessions, but was forced to write Keller on 11 September that there were none to be found. What was to be found in the homes of South German Mennonites were occasional copies of Tauler's sermons,⁴ and Horsch suggested to Keller that he transcribe these sermons, perhaps even bring out a new edition of them. The Mennonites, especially those living in isolated areas where they were forced to meet in small house churches or attend local Lutheran churches, needed such edifying literature. And Tauler's sermons would be most beneficial in such a setting. Horsch himself did not possess a copy, so he enquired whether Keller could provide one.⁵

Keller favored such a publication; indeed, it was desirable, he wrote, to publish all of the fourteenth and fifteenth century literature written in the spirit of Tauler. It had been for this reason, he said, he had supported the publication of excerpts from the *German Theology* in the *Mennonitische Blätter*. However, existing editions of Tauler, Keller argued, had been reworked from a Lutheran and Catholic point of view and therefore, in order to publish a useful version, one would have to return to an original fourteenth century manuscript, and that would be

³Keller Correspondence.

⁴Horsch to Keller, 11 September 1885. Keller Correspondence.

⁵Ibid. Excerpts from Tauler's *Historia* appeared in the South German Mennonite *Gemeindeblatt*, #2 (February, 1886): 12-13, under the title: "Die Historia von Tauler's Bekehrung;" again in the #3 (March, 1886) issue, pp. 20-21; and the #4 (April, 1886) issue, pp. 26-29.

difficult to do. Rather than work on Tauler, Keller suggested that Horsch acquire a copy of an inexpensive edition of the *German Theology*. Indeed, he was prepared to provide Horsch with such a copy; and, if Horsch insisted on working on Tauler, he could also provide him with a copy of the latter's sermons. Keller concluded by returning to the organization of the *Vereinigung* and stressing its importance for a renewal of those ideas for which the old martyrs had died.⁶ Tauler, the *German Theology*, and Denck were to be regarded as the best exponents of these ideas.

When Horsch finally responded, it was 6 November 1885. He was pleased that Keller was willing to provide a copy of the *German Theology*. But aside from a few remarks about the South German Mennonite attitude toward the *Vereinigung*, the letter contained nothing of consequence. Nor did Horsch write again until 6 June 1886, after he had concluded his studies at the agricultural school in Würzburg. Then he apologized for the long delay and thanked Keller for the copy of the *German Theology*, saying that its contents "pleased him exceptionally well." Since he had meanwhile acquired his own copy, he returned Keller's and, as he asserted, was determined to print the work. At the age of nineteen, did young Horsch have any knowledge of German copyright laws, or anything else pertaining to publication? Whatever the case, he had great plans and he laid them out before Keller.

If Ulrich Hege, the editor of the *Gemeindeblatt*, Horsch said, would undertake to distribute the book, one would not even have to work through a publisher. For the moment, five hundred copies should do. And, if he could put his hands on an original version of Denck's *Hauptreden*, he would like to include them. Would it be worthwhile, he asked Keller, to include the prefaces of Luther and Johann Arndt—which he possessed in an edition by Steinkopf of Stuttgart? And would Keller like to write a preface to the whole? Perhaps he could use the Pfeiffer edition, a copy of which Keller had sent him, and simply print his text directly from this, modernizing the language where appropriate as he did so. In conclusion, young John Horsch, rising Mennonite

⁶Keller to Horsch, 15 October 1885. "Letters of Keller to Horsch," pp. 177-178.

⁷Horsch to Keller, 6 November 1885. *Keller Correspondence*. On the "Vereinigung" and the South German Mennonite attitude toward it, see the report by Ernst Göbel, director of the school on the Weierhof, in the *Gemeindeblatt*, #7 (July, 1885): 54-60.

publisher, invited Keller to come and visit the South German Mennonites; he would be warmly received.8

Instead of coming to Bavaria, Keller took the invitation as an opportunity to inform Horsch that many Mennonites from every part of Germany, the Palatinate, West Prussia, East Friesland, Neuwied, Krefeld, Hamburg-Altona, and Holland already sought him out in Münster. He spoke of trying, through confidential conversations, to get American, Dutch, Swiss, and German Mennonites to meet in Berlin in order to discuss a great general gathering of Mennonites-a kind of Mennonite World Conference. He was about to depart for the Netherlands where he wished to broach this subject and related matters, and he was doing all of this in the hope "that a new era would, with God's help, arrive for the old-evangelical churches, if only unity could be maintained and, through prayer and good will, all eyes could stay focused on the great goal of renewal." This renewal, Keller emphasized, "has to take place in the spirit of the old-evangelical theology and that of the 'Friends of God'"-in other words, the theology of the German mystics. It was for this reason he was so gratified, he said, at Horsch's decision to reprint the German Theology. Horsch should include Luther's and Arndt's prefaces as well as Denck's Hauptreden, but nothing more, certainly no introduction by him. And, as far as Pfeiffer's edition was concerned, it was already modernized enough and no further changes should be made. He could provide Horsch with an appropriate transcription from which he could print his text.9

Horsch hit the ground running. On 4 August he informed Keller that he had just ordered 2,000 copies of the *German Theology* to be printed in Gernsbach. He had been forced to order so many because otherwise the price per copy would have been too high. He hoped God would bless his undertaking.

This was only to be the beginning for Horsch. He wrote Keller enthusiastically that he was now inclined to publish other books or booklets written in the spirit of the *German Theology*. First and foremost he had in mind the *Imitation of Christ* [he thought it might be the product of Tauler's pen!]. Should his *German Theology* sell well, he would like to publish all the writings of the 'Friends of God.' An edition of Denck's writings would then follow. He would have to proceed gradually, he cautioned, in

⁸Horsch to Keller, 6 June 1886. Keller Correspondence.

⁹Keller to Horsch, 29 July 1886. "Letters of Keller to Horsch," pp. 178-179.

order to be able to defray the costs of the project over time. He had no wish to make money, he only hoped to break even.

In pursuit of this publication program, Horsch requested from Keller a copy of the *Imitation of Christ* and another of the writings of Meister Eckhart. He already had a copy of Tauler's sermons which included the "Historia of Tauler's conversion." Might one print some of these sermons? What would Keller recommend? Moving on to the topic of Mennonite circuit preachers, Horsch observed that South German Mennonite preachers and elders, as a rule, had little if any higher education. In his view, however, this was not a major hindrance. And when the teachings of the "Friends of God" and Denckian Anabaptism had once again been established in their congregations, a higher education would become even less mandatory. Since this was not yet the case, however, young Mennonite students destined for the ministry should attend Mennonite educational institutions where they would be taught this mystical theology. Present-day Mennonites were too Lutheran, Horsch opined, except for their practice of baptism, communion, and church discipline. In any case, pontificated the young student of Tauler's Historia, one could not acquire the true teachings of Christianity in institutions or from men. The "Holy Spirit, 'who leads us into all truth,' must instruct us." Then, quoting Hans Denck, Horsch asserted: "No one can truly know Christ except he follow him in life."10

Keller applauded his young disciple. He congratulated him for his decisive action with regard to the printing of the *German Theology*. For his part, he would do what he could to publicize and draw attention to it, for he, like Horsch, desired these ideas to become the common property of the Mennonites.

You have hit my conviction exactly when you say that the Mennonites of today are too far removed from the ideas of the "Friends of God" and have too closely approached Lutheranism. Therein lies the key to the frequently stressed and in your circles oft lamented phenomenon that for a century or more Mennonitism has grown no new shoots and has revealed no independent inner strength to propagate itself. If Mennonites do not care or are incapable of being anything but a mild variety of Lutheranism, which is distinguished from it only by adult baptism and the oath, they cannot be surprised if gradually one after the other

¹⁰Horsch to Keller, 4 August 1886. Keller Correspondence.

unites with the big church. That has actually been the situation. I rejoice, however, to note the endeavor in many places to recall to the Mennonites those times when the old congregations showed their greatest power for growth. One of the most respected teachers of North Germany wrote me recently, "Back to the times before 1535 must be our watchword," and that is also my conviction; I believe Mr. U. Hege is also in agreement.

You are exactly right in believing that the best way to get there is by renewal of the old literature. But I do not believe that it would be to the purpose to publish, as you suggest, the Imitation of the Poor Life of Christ or The Book of Spiritual Poverty [as the Imitation is also called] after the German Theology. Who would care to translate the book? Besides, it did not so much originate with the "Friends of God" as with the Franciscans; and there are other reasons. I would suggest rather that you seriously consider Johann von Staupitz's book "Von der wahren Liebe" or "Von dem h. Christl. Glauben" [see Keller, Waldenser: 29]. We still have time, of course, to reconsider, for we must first wait to see if the German Theology will win friends, something that will probably only happen gradually since Lutheran confessionalism is growing ever stronger. Have you not thought of translating the Historia of Tauler's conversion?11 Some of Tauler's sermons are also very suitable for mass distribution. Later on some things by Eckhart and Denck would have to be added. I am sending you today a manuscript copy of the Ordnung Gottes, which will surely interest you; please have a part of it printed in the Gemeindehlatt.13

In the meantime, someone-perhaps the printer-drew Horsch's attention to the fact that it might be wise to enquire of the Bertelsmann Verlag—still one of the largest in Germany—whether they might have any objection to Horsch reprinting their edition of the German Theology. On 29 September Horsch wrote to tell Keller that he had written the publisher only

12Keller to Horsch, 22 September 1886. "Letters of Keller to Horsch," pp. 179-

180.

¹¹On Tauler's Historia, see Abraham Friesen, Thomas Muentzer, pp. 10-32 and the literature cited there, especially Heinrich Denifle, "Taulers Bekehrung kritisch Untersucht," Quellen und Forschungen zur Sprach- und Culturgeschichte der Germanischen Völker, 34 (Strassburg, 1879): 1-147.

to discover that Bertelsmann himself had answered in the negative. The heirs to the translator, he had written, would not allow it. What was he to do now, Horsch asked? If the courts were to block the sale, he would, if allowed, give the copies away! He begged Keller for advice. Whatever happened, he assured Keller, he would not allow this problem to keep him from publishing other things.13 Keller responded the very next day, advising Horsch to stop the presses if printing had not yet commenced. Bertelsmann's "no" was unconditional. In the meantime, he had spoken with knowledgeable people about the matter and apologized for not having immediately drawn Horsch's attention to the possibility of trouble, but at the moment he had not had access to the law. In any case, the project should not be given up, nor would Keller leave Horsch in the lurch. If the worst happened, they could always prepare a new translation.14

But the advice came too late, the presses were already rolling. He had written the printer, Horsch said, but he feared the worst. Perhaps Bertelsmann would purchase the printed copies from him. Again he asked Keller for counsel. This letter was written on 4 October; on the 9th he informed Keller that the printer had written him explaining the copyright laws and indicating that one could retain the copyright for only thirty years, and the edition Horsch had used was older than that. But the law applied to the author or translator, not the edition. Since Pfeiffer had died in 1857, thirty years had not yet passed since his death. Therefore, if Bertelsmann refused permission there was nothing to do but to destroy all copies already printed. In the said of the said of

The next day Keller wrote suggesting that Horsch write Bertelsmann, asking whether he might purchase the publication rights from him. In case negotiations led nowhere, Keller would threaten to publish another edition elsewhere. He would inform Bertelsmann of this decision. Under this threat the latter would surely scale back his demands. Should Bertelsmann remain obdurate, Keller would suggest further measures, and he encouraged Horsch to write Bertelsmann along with him.¹⁷ But Bertelsmann held his ground, informing both Horsch and Keller

¹³Horsch to Keller, 29 September 1886. Keller Correspondence.

¹⁴Keller to Horsch, 30 September 1886. "Letters of Keller to Horsch," p. 181.

¹⁵Horsch to Keller, 4 October 1886. Keller Correspondence.

¹⁶Horsch to Keller, 9 October 1886. Keller Correspondence.

 $^{^{17}}$ Keller to Horsch, 10 October 1886. "Letters of Keller to Horsch," pp. 181-182.

that he could not allow another printing of the German Theology.¹⁸

On the 14th Keller informed Horsch that Pfeiffer had actually died in 1868, which only made matters worse. He would write Bertelsmann again, he said, and if nothing came of it one could always take the galley proofs of the German Theology and rework the language. As soon as the translation was substantially a new one in major sections, Bertelsmann would no longer have cause for complaint. He closed by enquiring as to the current state of the printing.19 Horsch answered on the 17th, describing the progress of the printing and indicating that he had, on the advice of U. Hege and others, scaled the printing back to 1,000 copies. Yet in the midst of these concerns, Horsch could still take the time to tell Keller of the purchase of a 1730 edition of Jacob Denner's sermons, many of which, he asserted, were reminiscent of Denck's ideas. And he enquired what Keller thought of the doctrine of nonresistance. Did he, for example, condone the emigration of Swiss Mennonites to America to avoid forced military service? Horsch wished to know since the confessional article concerning nonresistance was a dead letter. He, however, wished to live by it.20

By the 21st Keller could write Horsch that Bertelsmann objected to any new edition of the *German Theology* that would compete with his. But they could not allow these objections to be determinative for them. Indeed, he [Keller] was about to write Bertelsmann that he had long had a new edition of the *German Theology* in mind and was in fact planning a reprinting of the entire corpus of "old evangelical" literature. Horsch had written him just as he was about to implement his plan, and so he had stepped aside. If Horsch's edition of the *German Theology* was now to be aborted, he, Keller, would be forced to return to his original plan. In conclusion Keller observed that Bertelsmann

¹⁸Horsch to Keller, 12 October 1886. Keller Correspondence.

¹⁹Keller to Horsch, 14 October 1886. "Letters of Keller to Horsch," pp. 182-183.
²⁰Horsch to Keller, 17 October 1886. In the #5 (May, 1888) issue of the Gemeindeblatt, Keller addressed the topic of nonresistance in an essay entitled: "Vom Leiden des Anrechts und von der Wehrlosigkeit," pp. 35-37; 45-46. Like Luther, Keller advocated the personal refusal to seek revenge but not self-defense. And he concluded that those Mennonite congregations who observed the strict doctrine of nonresistance were in a state of decline. Keller was attacked in #9 (September, 1888) by a Herr Andres who accused him of trying to hide his identity by signing the article with a "K." Such "foreigners" should be rejected, said Andres. Other articles followed. Keller responded with "Offenes Schreiben an Herrn Andres" in #10 (October, 1888) of the Gemeindeblatt, pp. 79-81.

belonged to those confessional Lutherans who hated the "sects" with a centuries-old hatred. Men like him had tolerated Mennonites only in the hope that they would soon die out. However, as soon as these "sects" showed any signs of life, the old hatred flared up again. On the 26th Keller wrote Bertelsmann of his intentions to prepare such a new critical edition of the *German Theology*. No doubt, he wrote, such an edition would certainly force Pfeiffer's edition off the market. 22

In a letter of 1 November, Bertelsmann began to retreat. Writing to both Keller and Horsch, he suggested that they might reach a compromise if Horsch were to purchase the rest of his copies of the *German Theology*—some 600-650 volumes—at the price of 375 Deutsch Marks. But Horsch would also have to pay the Widow Pfeiffer 182 Deutsch Marks in royalties for his new printing. Horsch immediately wrote Keller, asking for advice. And Keller gave it, telling Horsch that even with the extra 600-650 copies, he would still have 400 less than he had originally ordered. If the Pfeiffer edition had already gone through three printings, it could probably tolerate a fourth; and Keller would help with sales and disbursement. Horsch still had to acquire the consent of Pfeiffer's widow; on 8 December he could write Keller that everyone had reached agreement on the terms of settlement.

By this time the printing had also been completed. Horsch informed Keller that he had even had an enquiry from a Leipzig Antiquariat concerning the number of copies he was to receive from Bertelsmann and what they might cost. He had written back, offering them for 480 Deutsch Marks so that he might recover some of the royalty money he had been forced to pay Pfeiffer's widow. The rest he was advertising in the Gemeindeblatt and hoped U. Hege would take care of the sales. Keller was elated; he expressed the hope that the German Theology would accomplish its purpose, but for this to happen it would have to get into the congregations. Perhaps, he suggested, the new

²¹Keller to Horsch, 21 October 1886. "Letters of Keller to Horsch," pp. 183-184.

²²Keller to Bertelsmann, 26 October 1886. Keller Correspondence.

²³Horsch to Keller, 1 November 1886. Keller Correspondence.

[™]Keller to Horsch, 2 November 1886. "Letters of Keller to Horsch," pp. 184-185.

²⁵Horsch to Keller, 10 November 1886. Keller Correspondence.

Mennonite circuit preachers could act as the means to accomplish this end. Others, like Mannhardt, might also help.26

When Horsch wrote again, it was from Halstead, Kansas, on the 1st day of April, but it was no April Fool's joke! He informed Keller he had already been in the United States for three months. That means Horsch must have left Germany almost immediately after the German Theology fiasco had been resolved. Was it his belief in the doctrine of nonresistance in the face of compulsory military service that led to his departure from Germany, or the just barely resolved mess with regard to the German Theology? All the volumes he had printed remained unsold; nor did he wait to recover his fiscal investment. Whatever the true reason, he did tell Keller that his departure had been prompted by the threat of imminent military conscription.27

From January to May of 1887 Horsch remained in Halstead attending the Indian Mission School in order to learn English. By early May he was working for John F. Funk in the Mennonite Publishing Company. On the 30th he wrote Keller from Elkhart that he had already been there three weeks and asked for permission to translate Keller's Die Reformation: A. B. Kolb would see to the translation and Funk would print it. He informed Keller that Funk was also prepared to print Denck's "Von der wahren Liebe," indeed to put out a complete edition of Denck's writings if the originals could be located. He was willing to do the same for other old-evangelical writings. Could Keller help them procure these, he wondered?28

As early as 1 June 1887 Horsch's first essay appeared in the Herold der Wahrheit [Herald of Truth]. Horsch, now the European Mennonite missionary to American brothers and sisters, informed them about the historical awakening taking place in Europe, and especially about the writings of Ludwig Keller. He encouraged his readers to recover the spirit of their forebears, and then he began to tell them about Hans Denck, especially his "Von der wahren Liebe." Keller, he said, believed the piece to be the confession of the 1527 Martyr Synod meeting in Augsburg, but it was attributed to Denck for strategic reasons and because he had been one of the most influential apostles of the Anabaptists. It taught discipleship, a fundamental tenet of the old-evangelical

²⁶ Keller to Horsch, 24 December 1886. "Letters of Keller to Horsch," pp. 185-186.

²⁷Horsch to Keller, 1 April 1886. Keller Correspondence.

²⁸Horsch to Keller, 30 May 1886. Keller Correspondence.

churches. Perhaps, Horsch suggested, Mennonites had fallen somewhat from these teachings and judged Christianity by externals, like baptism, communion, clothes. Was that the reason for all the divisions among them? In the same issue Horsch had a passage from Thomas à Kempis's *Imitatio Christi* printed and brought excerpts from Keller's biography of Hans Denck.²⁹

Horsch's emigration to America came as a shock to Keller. He was pleased, however, that Horsch wished to continue cooperating with him in the new world. He thanked for information about the American Mennonites and acknowledged Horsch's "warm intercession" for the *German Theology* and the many sacrifices he had made on behalf of the writings of the 'Friends of God." He reminded Horsch that his purpose was to bring the various confessions closer together and said he was sending him several copies of his Berlin address for circulation in the United States.

Throughout June and July 1887, Horsch continued to excerpt Keller's Hans Denck as well as Die Reformation in the Herold der Wahrheit. He also continued to bring parts of "Von der wahren Liebe" and the German Theology. He even reproduced passages from the Historia, the ostensible story of Tauler's conversion, as well as some of his sermons. Essays by Keller appeared, even one on "Johann von Staupitz und Doctor Martin Luther." Indeed, from 1 June 1887, to December of the same year, one piece followed another in the Herold der Wahrheit until young John Horsch had nearly fulfilled his desire to print all the "oldevangelical" literature at his disposal together with the most important interpretive passages from Keller's writings.³⁰

²⁶ John Horsch, "Nachfolge Christi," *Herold der Wahrheit*, 11 (1 June, 1887), #347: 161-162; 163-164; 179; 181-182.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 161-162. See also Horsch's "Hans Denck," ibid.: 163-164; 181-182; Denck's "Von der wahren Liebe," ibid., 24, #12 (15 June, 1887), #348: 179; sections from the Meisterbuch—Tauler's ostensible conversion—ibid., 182-183; (15 July, 1887): 221-222; (1 August, 1887): 225-226; excerpts from Keller's Die Reformation, (1 June, 1887): 170; (15 June, 1887): 187-188; (1 July, 1887): 197-198; "Hans Denck," continued in (1 July, 1887): 195-196: "Von der wahren Liebe," (1 July, 1887): 198; "Deutsche Theologie," (1 July, 1887): 201-202; from Keller's Hans Denck (1 July, 1887): 202; 211-212; 226-227; "Deutsche Theologie," (1 August, 1887): 229; "Das Glaubensbekenntnis der alt-evangelischen Gemeinden," (1 August, 1887): 228-229; Ludwig Keller, "Hans Schlaffer," (1 August, 1887): 230-231; "Erbauliche Stellen aus Johannes Tauler's Schriften," (1 August, 1887): 234; "Hans Denck," (15 August, 1887): 244-245; "Auszug aus dem Meisterbuch'," (15 August, 1887): 246; "Auszug aus der 'Deutschen Theologie'," (1 September, 1887): 258-259; "Auszug aus der 'Deutschen Theologie'," (1 September, 1887): 260-261; "Johann von Staupitz und Doctor Martin Luther," (1

All the while the epistolary exchange continued. On 1 July 1887 Horsch wrote Keller that he would do what he could to make his books, as well as his Berlin address, well-known among American Mennonites. And then, almost casually, he informed Keller of an interesting letter he had received from the Hutterites of Hutchinson County, Dakota, quoting passages from it for Keller's benefit, one of which stated that the initiators of the Anabaptists [our forefathers] were, "as I have read in our Geschichtsbuch [Keller's emphasis], first, the Lord Jesus Christ - - - - Felix Mantz, Conrad Raebel, Joerg Blaurock etc." The writer, a Br. Elias Walter, a Hutterite leader, had also said that they possessed many letters of this Hans Denck.31 Thus through his contact with the Hutterites, the famous Hutterite Chronicle was discovered for the larger Mennonite world and published for the scholarly world by Rudolf Wolkan. Was this letter with its emphasis on Felix Manz, Conrad Grebel, and George Blaurock the impetus for the gradually changing interpretation of Anabaptism that was to come from the pen of Horsch?

Keller read Horsch's letters with great interest. He also received the Herold der Wahrheit and congratulated Horsch on his "return to the old and beautiful writings of Tauler and the German Theology with a fixed plan." In Germany, he continued, they were just discussing the possibility of creating a Society for the Study of the Old Evangelical Churches which would have as its chief obligation the recovery of the total corpus of this literature from the archives and libraries. Not only was the time ripe for such a society, it was high time Mennonites in Europe began to evangelize, seek to expand, and begin to make contact with likeminded old evangelical heirs such as the Baptists and Methodists. In Germany they were planning for a great gathering for Berlin in 1890; could American Mennonites send representatives? Just as an "Evangelical Alliance" of Lutherans, Methodists, Baptists, etc. met together on occasion, the various Mennonites could meet together with Quakers, Schwenckfelders, Remonstrants, Dunkers, General Baptists, Hutterites, and some groups of Presbyterians, "in short, unite all the parties that have grown out of the old Anabaptists into an 'old-evangelical Alliance' or an 'old-evangelical Union'."32

September, 1887): 266-267; "Auszüge aus Denck's Büchlein: 'Die Ordnung Gottes'," (1 December, 1887): 357-358; "Johann Denck und die alten Märtyrerbrüder," (15 January, 1888): 19-20.

³¹Horsch to Keller, 1 July 1887. Keller Correspondence.

³²Keller to Horsch, 21 August 1887. "Letters of Keller to Horsch," pp. 187-188.

Once more, however, Keller was to experience what he came to believe was the narrow-mindedness of the Mennonites. On 20 August Horsch wrote that the translation of his Die Reformation. which had already begun, would have to be halted because someone had discovered "that many passages in it do not agree with the 'nonresistant position' to which these Mennonites cling so strongly." Some passages would still be excerpted for the Herold der Wahrheit, but only carefully selected ones. Once more Horsch made mention of the great Geschichtsbuch.33 On 18 September he wrote again; now he was attending North-Western College at Naperville, Illinois, a school run by a branch of the Methodist Church. The school was, said Horsch, run in a Christian sense but the Methodist way of doing things did not appeal to him. "If one attends one of their revival services, or prayer meetings," he wrote, "one could easily arrive at the conclusion that these people are mad. Many cry out on occasion as though they had been injured. Our professors are probably all 'converted'." Obviously, a dangerous place to study theology, as Keller warned him in his return letter. He began to fear that Horsch might drift away from his "old-evangelical" convictions for, he said, "their teaching with respect to justification and sanctification, in all branches of the Methodists, diverged most widely from the old-evangelical convictions." As tolerant as he was, Keller continued, he would nevertheless break off all contact with anyone who advocated such positions.35

On 1 December 1887 Horsch had the lead article in the Herold der Wahrheit. It was captioned: "Ist unsere Gemeine heute in gutem Zustande?" [Is our Present Church in a State of Health?]. It was a kind of "State of the Church" address. In it, Horsch presented Christ as exemplar, the period of Anabaptist history from 1519-1526 as the high point of the church. Decline came with persecution and the proliferation of factions. The chief error of present-day Mennonites, said Horsch, was disunity over trivial externals. One should forget human factions and their leaders—even Menno who erred—and unify under Christ who was alone infallible. "We are," Horsch proclaimed, "old-evangelical Christians, that is those who cling to the old gospel of Jesus Christ, which Denck and Menno also possessed and taught." Now was the time to unite.

³³Horsch to Keller, 20 August 1887. Keller Correspondence.

³⁴Horsch to Keller, 18 September 1887. Keller Correspondence.

³⁵Horsch to Keller, 4 October 1887. Keller Correspondence.

Our forefathers [he continued] aside from emphasizing baptism upon confession of faith, communion in accordance with Christ's instructions, church discipline, etc., placed the greatest emphasis on the imitation of Christ, the expression of love, the Christian life. The narrow gate, through which man must enter if he wishes to tread the narrow path, is called true 'repentance' or 'conversion' according to our fathers. The convert or believer is then to enter the congregation through baptism.36

Keller called it an "excellent" essay. "You are right," he wrote, "it will not get better in the old congregations until one ceases to see in Menno's teaching an infallible authority." But things were improving in Germany and, he hoped, also in America.³⁷ In the meantime Horsch continued his studies, saw Hans Denck's "Von der wahren Liebe" through Funk's press, and kept supplying Keller with information about the various Mennonite groups in America. And Keller, from time to time, encouraged him in his publications, supplied him with his own continuing literary products, encouraged him in his attempt to bring "renewal to the Mennonite Church through the [resurrection] revival of the traditions of their best times"—that is, 1517-1535.38 On 5 November 1888 Horsch reported, however, that the Denck pamphlet was not selling well; this meant that other publications would probably not follow.39 Keller wrote back on the 21st, not to give up but to continue to march forward in the knowledge that some of the seed sown would undoubtedly bear fruit. And Horsch should remember that it was always difficult to change the minds and ways of the older generation. Therefore "everything depends on winning those who are between the ages of 25 and 30." Horsch should nevertheless know that "a clear and fixed goal, such as a return to the best times of the oldevangelical Anabaptists [1517-1535], would certainly, over time, garner the Herold many friends."40

In the meantime, Horsch began writing essays of a more historical nature. He collected these in 1890 under the title:

³⁶John Horsch, "Ist unsere Gemeine heute in gutem Zustande," Herold der Wahrheit, 24, #23 (1 December, 1887), #360: 353-354.

³⁷Keller to Horsch, 21 December 1887. "Letters of Keller to Horsch," pp. 189-

³⁸Keller to Horsch, 21 July, 1888. "Letters of Keller to Horsch," pp. 192-193.

³⁹Horsch to Keller, 5 November 1888. Keller Correspondence.

⁴⁰Keller to Horsch, 21 November 1888, "Letters of Keller to Horsch," p. 194.

Kurzgefaßte Geschichte der Mennoniten-Gemeinden [A Short History of the Mennonite Church] and had Funk publish them in book form. The little booklet demonstrated that Horsch had been reading widely in church history although he still clung basically to Keller's outline: Waldensian origins; the rejection of revolutionary connections; the old-evangelical lineage; the importance of Hans Denck and the marginalizing of Menno Simons. Even Luther becomes, through the mediation of von Staupitz, a Waldensian in his early reform career.41 On 29 December 1890 Keller wrote that he had read the little book with interest. Certain things, however, needed to be corrected. For example, he wrote, it was incorrect to say that Staupitz had been a Waldensian; such an assertion could not be proven, indeed was unlikely even though he may have shared some of their views. Keller's interest had, however, been especially sparked by the manuscripts Horsch had discussed on pages 127ff.—the Geschichtsbuch being one of these. Apparently Horsch had acquired a manuscript copy of it.42

At this point, with the exception of a letter from Keller on 27 September 1893, the correspondence between Keller, the mentor, and Horsch, the pupil, ends. Perhaps the reason for this lies with Horsch. In 1900 he became associated with J. A. Sprunger, the owner and operator of the Light and Hope Publishing Co., a former missionary and current member of the Missionary Church Association. Perhaps it was in this context that Horsch was given an opportunity to rethink the position on "conversion" he had expressed earlier to Keller. In any case, there can be little doubt that Horsch came under the influence of American fundamentalism in the period between 1900 and 1908, for in May of the latter year he returned to the employ of the Mennonite Publishing House and on 20 June published an essay in The Gospel Herald entitled: "The Danger of Liberalism." Here, now, was a major shift in Horsch's focus from Nachfolge [Discipleship] to the "fundamentals of the Christian religion," and it would only be a matter of time before this shift would affect his Anabaptist scholarship. Precisely what Keller had opposed all of his life—the growing confessionalism in the "orthodox" Lutheran and Catholic churches of Germany-had taken hold of Horsch. "Rationalism," Horsch wrote in the article,

⁴¹John Horsch, Kurzgefaßte Geschichte der Mennoniten-Gemeinden (Elkhart: Mennonite Publishing House, 1890).

⁴²It was cited at the close of the above study.

which is but another name for modern unbelief, makes the claim that the Bible is not what it pretends to be, that it was not given by inspiration and is not infallible. Most rationalists believe in God, but as far as man's duty toward God is concerned, they hold that reason is an adequate guide to ascertain it, and that revelation—the Word of God—is not needed. Rationalism teaches the impossibility of a miracle. and therefore denies the greatest of all wonders, namely the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, as well as his resurrection and the atonement. The preaching of the cross of Christ and of redemption through the blood are stumbling blocks to the liberalist.

Horsch concluded his attack by assailing a Professor Foster of the University of Chicago whose "notorious work on Liberalism" had not only caused a storm of protest in the Baptist denomination, but also caused Professor Strong of Rochester to advocate a division of the denomination to eliminate the rationalist wing of the church. But liberals, said Horsch, opposed division.43

There can be little doubt that Horsch's conversion to fundamentalism turned him away from the "undogmatic" theology of Hans Denck to the more overtly dogmatic Menno Simons. It was not until 1916 that his biography of Menno Simons appeared, but already in 1911 he entered the lists on behalf of Menno and against the "Liberals" and "modernizers" of Anabaptist history among the Mennonites.

In an essay entitled "Die geschichtliche Stellung der Mennoniten zu der sog. modernen Theologie" [The Historic Position of the Mennonites toward the so-called Modern Theology], in the Mennonitische Blätter, Horsch attacked Dr. Appeldoorn, Mennonite pastor in Emden, who had, in a speech at the 8-10 August "World Congress of a Free Christianity," characterized the Mennonite church as "undogmatic." According to Appeldoorn, Horsch reported,

it contradicted Mennonite principles to demand belief in the authority of the Bible, the deity of Christ, indeed in the doctrine of salvation as presented in the Bible, as a condition of membership in the Church. Every Mennonite was

⁴³John Horsch, "The Danger of Liberalism," Gospel Herald, 1, #12 (20 June, 1908): 178-179.

supposed to have the right, as free thinker, to believe whatever he wished, and no congregation could call him to account. This attitude is praised as the only one representative of authentic Mennonitism, as the freedom of religion and tolerance sought after by our fathers

Appeldoorn's was not an isolated opinion, said Horsch; it was broadly representative of Dutch and North German Mennonites among whom the so-called "modern theology" was widely disseminated. Their spokespersons had asserted time and again that the adherents of this modern theology were the true spiritual descendants of the fathers of the Mennonite church and that those who believed in Christ did not follow in the footsteps of the old Anabaptists. It was timely, then, said Horsch, that the attitude of these fathers toward the Bible and the deity of Christ be investigated.

Horsch's new perspective left no room for Hans Denck at the source of the movement; instead the first congregation of Anabaptists had been that of the "Swiss Brethren" that had been organized in Zurich either in December 1524 or January 1525, Horsch was not quite certain which. Manz, Grebel and Blaurock [Horsch gives them in the same order he had received them in the letter from Elias Walter and the Hutterite Chroniclel had been its leaders, and these had originally been members of Zwingli's reform party. The reason for their break with Zwingli, Horsch asserted, had not been that Zwingli had, in their opinion, placed too much emphasis on correct biblical teachings. The exact reverse had been the case; they withdrew from him "because, according to their conviction, he did not take the practical application of the biblical teachings and requirements seriously enough." What was more, when Zwingli did proceed to implement biblical teachings, he did so only after the town council had granted him permission to do so. The "Brethren," on the other hand, were determined to implement these teachings irrespective of the attitude of the political authorities. They held Zwingli's position to be unbiblical; therefore they refused to go along with him. "There can be no doubt," proclaimed Horsch, "that they recognized the Bible as the Word of God and the sole

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authority in matters of faith, and that Zwingli's disregard of the biblical commands led to the rupture between them."44

What had happened to Hans Denck in the meantime? He was no longer Horsch's hero as he had been to 1890. Denck, Horsch said now, was not to be confused with the Swiss Brethren, for he represented a group that had deviated in significant ways from the founders of the movement. "It cannot be denied," he proclaimed, "that Denck advocated a rationalizing view of the Scriptures; above the written Word of God he placed the 'inner Word'; his doctrine of justification, too, can hardly be described as biblical. And before he died he recanted the necessity of baptism upon confession of faith and regretted that he had helped found a church."⁴⁵ Thank heaven, Denck's movement had been of relatively short duration!

In the Netherlands, Horsch continued, Adam Pastor had been the rationalist, and there could be no doubt that both Menno and Dirk Philips had participated in his excommunication. Pastor, indeed, had gone so far as to deny the deity of Christ. The assumption that the Swiss Brethren and Mennonites had condoned the rationalism of a Denck and Pastor, and were therefore at least to a certain degree responsible for it, Horsch argued, rested on the supposition that the Reformation Anabaptists formed a uniform party—a supposition rejected by both Menno and the Swiss Brethren as a calumny. Adam Pastor, Augustine Baader, Jakob Hutter, Hans Denck, Melchior Hoffmann, Jan van Leiden, and the Mennonites represented the most fundamental, irreconcilable differences.

Three groups, Horsch contended, had not allowed rationalistic tendencies into their midst: the Hutterites, whose theological position had been clearly enunciated in Peter Riedemann's "Rechenschaft unserer Religion" [Confession of Faith], which could be had from Elias Walter; the Swiss Brethren, whose Schleitheim Confession Walther Köhler had just published; and the Mennonites, whose position was exemplarily portrayed in the writings of Menno Simons. Menno and the martyrs had also made clear that they suffered persecution for the sake of God's Word, not for some concept of religious toleration.

⁴⁴John Horsch, "Die geschichtliche Stellung der Mennoniten in der sog. modernen Theologie," Mennonitische Blätter, #1 (January, 1911): 4-5. The essay had already appeared in the Friedensstimme, #95 (4 December, 1910): 2-4.
⁴⁵Ibid.

Horsch concluded by addressing the religious liberals yet once more. It was inconsistent, he charged, that our fathers were highly honored, on the one hand, while their religious convictions were condemned and rejected, on the other. If the new theology was correct and the Bible a mere human book, then the biblical doctrine of salvation was false and the position of the early Anabaptists useless fanaticism; their suffering to be pitied rather than admired. In the apostolic age the enemies of Christ had stood outside the Church; now they were donning Christian garb. And the assertion that such a position had an historical justification within the Mennonite church—in Denck and Pastor—was to be forcefully denied and rejected.⁴⁶

What must Keller have thought when he read Horsch's essay, as he surely must have? He had himself written Horsch that reform-in his sense-would probably come only from the younger generation. Yet in 1887 Christian Neff had quietly rejected Denck and discontinued his work on him. In 1900, Gerhard Haake, who as late as 1887 called himself Keller's most devoted pupil, turned viciously on him. And now, in 1911, after a lengthy silence, John Horsch, who had been most in tune with Keller's views and done the most to publicize his interpretation the Reformation and Anabaptism, broke with that interpretation in fundamental ways, at the same time rejecting the ideology from which it emanated.⁴⁷ In the meantime, Keller's old-evangelical empire had crumbled under scholarly attack and his work on the Freemasons was under assault from a fellow brother Mason. Is this the way a man's life-work should end? But we must move on, as Horsch himself did.

Horsch had clearly broken not only with Keller's interpretation of Hans Denck; he had also broken with the latter's theology. Would he also break with Keller's theory of the Waldensian origins of Anabaptism? To a certain extent he had already begun down that road when Elias Walter informed him about the statement on this issue in the *Hutterite Chronicle*. By 1911 he had fully adopted the position that the Anabaptist movement had begun with the Swiss Brethren who had originally been Zwingli's reform partners. But what about Menno? In the Dutch arena, the theory had always played into Menno's relationship with the

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 12-13; 19-20.

⁴⁷See Horsch's books against theological liberalism: Modern Religious Liberalism; The Higher Criticism and the New Theology; and The Mennonite Church and Modernism.

Münsterites. In March 1911 a remark by Samuel Cramer, a friend and frequent correspondent of Keller's, in Hauck's Encyclopedia of Religion forced Horsch to address that issue. In the Hauck article Cramer had asserted that Menno was supposed to have said of the Münster Anabaptists that they "had just erred a little."48 This sensation causing statement was to be found, Cramer had asserted, in the first edition of Menno's Fundamentboek, Horsch, as concerned as earlier Dutch Mennonites to free Menno from the Münsterite stigma, did not grasp for the Waldensian argument, however. Surely he must have known of Walther Köhler's review of Weydmann's 1905 history of the Mennonites where Köhler had told Mennonites to forget Keller's theory since it had not stood the test of historical scrutiny. Instead, Horsch sought to show that another Anabaptist group beside that of the Münsterites had existed in the Netherlands at this time—the Melchiorites at the Old Cloister—and that this comment referred to them. It was not a successful defense.49

When the Dutch Mennonite scholar, Karel Vos, used the same argument in his 1914 Menno biography,50 Horsch was again

⁴⁹John Horsch, "Menno Simons Verhältnis zu der Münsterischen Sekte," Deutsch-Amerikanische Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche, 22 (March-April, 1911), #2: 80-87. Reprinted in the Friedensstimme, 1X, #9 (2 February, 1911): 2-3; and #10 (5 February, 1911): 2-3.

50Karel Vos, Menno Simons 1496-1561. Zijn Leven en Werken en zijne Reformatorische Denkbeelden (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1914), pp. 37-40. In a letter to Bender of 30 July 1921, Horsch wrote: "A remarkable illustration of how far these people [the Dutch Mennonites] have departed from Mennonite standards is found in the biography of Menno Simons by Rev. K. Vos, a Mennonite minister of

⁴⁸ Samuel Cramer, "Menno Simons," Realencyclopädie für Protestantische Theologie und Kirche, D. Albert Hauck, ed., 3rd. ed., VII (Graz, Austria, 1971 reprint), pp. 586-594. In an essay "Ein freisinniges Urteil über die Mennoniten in Deutschland," Friedensstimme, 1X, #51 (5 July, 1911): 1, Horsch quoted from an Appeldoorn essay in the Doopsgezinde Jaarboekje, in which the latter had written: "Doch mag man immerhin hoffen, und es ist wohl auch um deswillen, daß auf der letzten allgemeinen Versammlung der mennonitischen Gemeinden des deutschen Reiches, die zu Danzig gehalten ward, beschlossen worden ist, in nähere Beziehungen zu treten mit liberalen Kreisen. Darum ward das Band mit der Comenius-Gesellschaft fester geknüpft; die Subsidie, welche der Comenius-Gesellschaft von der Vereinigung gewährt wird, ist erhöht worden; von dieser Gesellschaft ist einer aus unseren Kreisen in ihren Verwaltungsrat erwählt worden." This quotation, as far as I have been able to determine to date, is the only reference in Horsch's writings after 1900 about anything relating to Keller. Horsch also attacked what he believed to be the "liberal" concept of Christ, and Samuel Cramer who had apparently asserted that Menno had represented such a "Unitarian" view in the above essay on Menno Simons. See Horsch's "Menno Simons über die Gottheit Christi," Friedensstimme, 1X, #5 (19 January, 1911): 2-3.

forced to deal with it at length in his own 1916 biography. He devoted an entire chapter to demonstrate that Menno had denounced the Münsterites in fulsome terms well before the 1539 first edition of the Fundamentboek and that the term, "lieve broeders," therefore could not refer to the Münsterites. Instead he argued, once again, that the term must have referred to the revolutionaries at the Old Cloister who were probably Melchiorites, not Münsterites. He also pointed to Menno's virulent "Against the Blasphemy of Jan of Leiden," written around 1535, as a sign of Menno's early and consistent rejection of the revolutionaries. Even though the tract had not been published before 1627, Horsch argued that it must have circulated in manuscript form. But there is no evidence of this. Obviously, the discreditation of the Waldensian argument made defense of Menno against the charge of Münsterite sympathies once more a much more difficult matter.⁵¹ Not until 1937, however, did Horsch deal directly with Keller's Waldensian thesis.

In an essay in the Gospel Herald entitled simply "The Waldenses" Horsch argued that no direct connections could be established between the Swiss Brethren or Menno and the Waldenses. Nevertheless there could "scarcely be any doubt but that the rise of the Swiss Brethren Church is partly to be ascribed to Waldensian influences." At the same time, however, Horsch quoted passages from Menno's writings to the effect that the

Holland. C. H. Smith, in his recent book, speaks very highly of Vos' book. I have a suspicion that he never read Vos. His book is written, of course, in the Dutch language. The Mennonite, in a review, said it was a case of "being wounded in the house of a friend." The fact is that there are Roman Catholic biographies of Martin Luther, say for example the Jesuit Grisar, whose work on Luther comprises three large volumes, who understand Luther far better and are more sympathetic toward him than is that Mennonite minister toward Menno Simons. I do not believe that in all religious history there is a similar instance as this book affords. The "Mennonitische Blätter" of Germany have come out saying that this book has done not a little harm, in fact it has done a great deal of harm. I have a review of the book written by Professor Köhler of Zurich in which he rejoices over the fact that the Mennonite historian in Holland makes out Menno to be a brainless enthusiast. He also describes him as a person deficient of a good moral character. In short it is utterly impossible for him to understand Menno Simons.

[&]quot;By the way, the Mennonite professor Kühler in Amsterdam has published a good reply to the charge of Vos that Menno was of one mind with the Münsterites." The H. S. Bender Collection, *Mennonite Archives*, Goshen, Indiana. Hist. Mss. 1-278.

⁵¹John Horsch, *Menno Simons, His Life, Labors, and Teachings* (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1916), pp. 153-162.

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Church had died soon after the age of the apostles, and from that time to the Reformation no evangelical church had existed.⁵² He did not explain how Menno's position could be reconciled with the theory of Waldensian continuity and Anabaptist origins.

Two years before, in an essay entitled "Hans Denck, the Anabaptist Liberal," Horsch had been much more categorical in his rejection of the Denck portion of the Keller legacy, for Keller had been the first to enlist Denck in the defense of at least certain aspects of "modern theology." Horsch had concluded that essay by saying:

It is readily seen that the question of Hans Denck's relationship to the Swiss Brethren is of great practical importance. In the supposition that he is to be numbered with the early Mennonite Church fathers it is clearly implied that, historically considered, theological liberalism has a right to demand for itself a place in the Mennonite Church. Insistence on the profession of the old Bible faith by the Church would in that case be contrary to original Mennonite principle. In fact, Mennonite liberals, in their defence of liberalism, have invariably referred to Hans Denck as one of the Mennonite Church fathers, a supposition which is without any foundation in fact. Here, by the way, is an illustration showing the practical importance of reliable church history.⁵³

It must have been at least somewhat galling to Horsch that he had earlier, in his own enthusiasm for Denck and his propagation of the Keller program, contributed to the rise of liberalism, as he defined it, among the Mennonites.

There can be little doubt that John Horsch influenced Harold Bender, his son-in-law. But there can also be little doubt that Bender had an impact on his father-in-law. To what extent Horsch influenced his son-in-law with respect to the fundamentalist/modernist debate may be difficult to determine. But he certainly attempted to do so in no uncertain terms as in the following letter of 18 May 1924:

 $^{^{52}}$ John Horsch, "The Waldenses," $\it Gospel \, Herald. \, XXX, \#26$ (23 September, 1937): 546-548; 550.

⁵³John Horsch, "Hans Denck, the Anabaptist Liberal," 1935 Mennonite Year Book and Directory (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1935), p. 94.

I want to say a few plain words, Harold. It is clear to me that, though you may be inclined to think that the Church makes too much of certain regulations, your God-appointed course is to go to Goshen and take a position such that the Church can have all confidence. In all church history, it was the strong conservative men whose lives counted most for the Christian cause. The God-appointed way is always a difficult and unpopular one for us. There will be great obstacles to overcome. In your case the liberalists have counted on you and will use all means, to make you take sides with them. They need moderate liberals, not radical ones, to win the Mennonite Church. But it would be a mistake to suppose that at Bluffton or somewhere else there will not be more serious and difficult questions to meet than those which concern the regulations of the Church. To my mind there is no doubt but that Goshen College can be made a strong institution that will do a world of good if the faculty will take the proper stand. If I were a young man and felt it my calling to teach, I should take up the work at Goshen with enthusiasm. I am sure that this is what your father would advise you to do if his voice could still be heard.

I am convinced that the Mennonites from the very beginning were the most thorough-going fundamentalists and for the sake of their fundamentalism they forsook the dominant worldly churches and endured the severest persecutions. This I hope to fully establish in a book or large pamphlet to be published in memory of the 400th anniversary of the rise of the Church.⁵⁴

If Horsch was right, Bender's arrival at Goshen placed him in an emerging struggle between modernists and fundamentalists for control of the Mennonite soul. Horsch clearly wished his son-in-law to rally the standard of fundamentalism at Goshen and he probably assumed that Bender would use Anabaptism as a tool to do so. He had been doing this, and was to continue doing so, for some time. 55 Horsch's essay on "Hans Denck, the Anabaptist Liberal," is a classic example of this. On 6 September 1934

⁵⁴Horsch to Bender, 18 May 1924. Mennonite Archives, Hist. Mss. 1-278.

⁵⁵J. Gresham Machen, who was a leader of the fundamentalist movement, and Princeton, where he was located, were both highly recommended by Horsch from time to time in his correspondence. Perhaps Horsch also adopted Machen's advice to his students to promote fundamentalist principles within their own denominations. This is certainly what John Horsch attempted to do.

Horsch wrote Bender, now the editor of the Mennonite Quarterly Review, concerning it, saying it had appeared in the Gospel Herald, but that Bender probably "had in mind a more elaborate article" for the Review. 56 On 15 November of the same year Bender wrote:

I wonder whether you could not let me use the article on Hans Denck before the article on Obbe Philips. I believe that the article on Hans Denck would need very little modification and we could go ahead with that. I would suggest that you clip the article out of the Gospel Herald and add to it any modification you would propose and send it to me within a few days.57

On the 19th Horsch responded, saying he had partly rewritten the Denck article and it need retyping.⁵⁸ On 18 January 1935 he finally sent it, saying it would appear in the *Mennonite Year Book* as well.⁵⁹ But it never did appear in the Mennonite Quarterly Review. What happened?

Somewhere along the way Bender must have concluded that the polemical and ideological approach to Anabaptist studies was counterproductive. If anything was to be done in terms of the renewal of the Mennonite church through the study of the past, such study would have to be done in as scholarly a manner as possible. Not that Bender was liberal in his theological views—the exchange of letters with his father-in-law in which everything from Anabaptism to the rise of Nazism in Germany is discussed proves his essential agreement with Horsch-but Bender was at pains to remove the polemical tone even of those Horsch essays he did publish. The Denck essay must just have been too blatant, and nothing more was said of it in the correspondence. Perhaps Bender had arrived at the conclusion that the best way to navigate the ship of church between the Scylla of fundamentalism and the Charybdis modernism/liberalism was to return to the authentic traditions of the Mennonite church in as neutral and historical terms as the situation demanded. Keller had promoted a mixture of liberalism/rationalism and Pietism; his father-in-law, to a certain

⁵⁶Horsch to Bender, 6 September 1934. H. S. Bender Collection.

⁵⁷Bender to Horsch, 15 November 1934, H. S. Bender Collection.

⁵⁸ Horsch to Bender, 19 November 1934, H. S. Bender Collection.

⁵⁹Horsch to Bender, 18 January 1934. H. S. Bender Collection.

extent, at least, in reaction to his earlier admiration of Keller, promoted fundamentalism.

Nevertheless, Bender's agenda was essentially conservative and his interpretation of Anabaptism mirrors this. For years, beginning with his first reading of the *Hutterite Chronicle*, Horsch had been arguing that the "Swiss Brethren" had been the founders of the movement—they had been first on the scene. As Bender phrased it in his classic essay:

we know enough today to draw a clear line of demarcation between original evangelical and constructive Anabaptism on the one hand, which was born in the bosom of Zwinglianism in Zurich, Switzerland, in 1525, and established in the Low Countries in 1533, and the various mystical, spiritualistic, revolutionary, or even antinomian related and unrelated groups on the other hand, which came and went like the flowers of the field in those days of the great renovation. The former, *Anabaptism proper* [emphasis mine], maintained an unbroken course in Switzerland, South Germany, Austria, and Holland throughout the sixteenth century, and has continued until the present day in the Mennonite movement.⁶⁰

There was no longer any excuse, he continued, "for permitting our understanding of the distinct character of *genuine Anabaptism* [emphasis mine] to be obscured by Thomas Müntzer and the Peasants' War, the Münsterites, or any other *aberration of Protestantism* [emphasis mine] in the sixteenth century." Anabaptism, he had said earlier, was the "completion of Protestantism," the others were "aberrations of Protestantism." This is theological, not historical language.

Just as the liberal Karel Vos had, according to Horsch, attempted to blur the differences between Menno and the Münsterites, Horsch saw C. Henry Smith bringing Müntzer too close to Grebel. He wrote Bender on 15 October 1924:

Grebel's letters contain much that is of interest to serious students only and also not a little that needs explanation, as is shown, for example by the fact that C. H. Smith [of liberal

⁶⁰H. S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision," in Guy F. Hershberger, ed., The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1957), p. 35.
⁶¹Ibid., pp. 35-36.

Bluffton, of course] makes much of the circumstance that he addresses Thomas Müntzer as brother.62

On 26 May 1935 Bender wrote Horsch from Germany where he was writing his doctoral dissertation:

Quite a bit of additional material on Thomas Müntzer has been published since 1930, and the general trend seems to be to revise the estimate of Müntzer. A very interesting study by Dr. Lohmann on the "Geistliche [sic] Entwicklung Thomas Muenzers" [Spiritual [it should "geistige"—intellectual] Development of Thomas Muenzer] shows that before late summer 1524 Müntzer was peaceful and not revolutionary. I think my solution of the Grebel/Müntzer relationship will be two-fold, first denial of any personal acquaintance, and a proof that the Müntzer that Grebel knew through reading his writings, was not a revolutionary, but rather a fairly decent sort of a Lutheran preacher!63

When Bender wrote his essay on "The Zwickau Prophets, Thomas Müntzer and the Anabaptists" in 1953, Thomas Müntzer was no longer a "fairly decent sort of Lutheran preacher" and so Bender made a decisive effort to remove him completely from any association with the Swiss Brethren.64

Horsch had already sought to divorce Menno from the Münsterites for some time against the "modernizers" who sought to bring them together. But there was another aspect of this "Liberalism" that had to be divorced from the Anabaptists—and that was humanism. In the age of the Reformation this took the form of a recurring assertion that Desiderius Erasmus, the sixteenth-century "Prince of Humanists," had influenced the formation of Anabaptism. The most apparent form of this influence was of Erasmian pacifism on Anabaptist nonresistance. As early as 26 October 1926 Horsch wrote Bender on this subject:

Concerning Erasmus' influence on Grebel in the way of Pacifism it seems quite probable that reading Erasmus' book may have first caused him to give this question particular

⁶²Horsch to Bender, 15 October 1924. H. S. Bender Collection.

⁶³Bender to Horsch & Ernest Correll, 26 May 1935. H. S. Bender Collection.

⁶⁴The Mennonite Quarterly Review, 17, #1 (January, 1953): 3-16.

attention. Yet I believe Grebel's conception of this subject was rather founded on Scripture direct.⁶⁵

That this historical issue had contemporary relevance is made apparent in Bender's letter to Horsch of 30 January 1937. There he wrote:

There is a movement in Holland which goes by the name 'humanism' and a few Mennonites follow it. I know some of them. I think Van der Zijpp is associated with the movement. However it is a thoroughly theistic movement and has no relation what so ever to the atheistic American "humanism" of John Dewey and Edward Scribner Ames. The attempt to make out that Conrad Grebel and other early Mennonite leaders were humanists in the modern sense of the term is of course absurd. The author is extremely confused on this point. There is no evidence what so ever if you will say that Conrad Grebel or his associates were tainted with theological liberalism. Hans Denck of course had a weak side. We must insist that such ignorant, unlearned and mischievous articles be kept from the columns of our church papers. 66

Bender therefore denied humanistic influence on Grebel in his 1950 biography and again, more specifically, in his 1955 "The Pacifism of the Sixteenth-Century Anabaptists." ⁶⁷

Whereas John Horsch, even in his last piece on the Waldenses, sought to retain some ties between the latter and the Anabaptists, Bender broke decisively with this Keller legacy. Anabaptism grew out of the Reformation, indeed was the consistent completion of the Protestant Reformation. In defense he quoted Max Goebel's 1848 history of the church in Westphalia where the author had written: "That which the Reformation was originally intended to accomplish they aimed to bring into full immediate realization." The early Anabaptists had not been sectarians but thoroughly Protestant in their theology. Indeed, their goal had been to recover and reestablish the apostolic church.

⁶⁶Horsch to Bender, 26 October 1926. H. S. Bender Collection.

⁶⁶Horsch to Bender, 30 January 1937. H. S. Bender Collection.

⁶⁷H. S. Bender, Conrad Grebel c. 1498-1526. The Founder of the Swiss Brethren sometimes called Anabaptists (Scottdale, PA: The Herald Press, 1950); and "The Pacifism of Sixteenth-Century Anabaptists," Church History, 24 (June, 1955): 119-151.

[&]quot;Bender, "Anabaptist Vision," p. 37.

This "genuine Anabaptism," Bender continued, contained three major points of emphasis in its "vision": "first, a new conception of the essence of Christianity as discipleship"—an aspect that had been central to Keller's interpretation, just he had associated it with the "undogmatic Christianity" of a Hans Denck; "second, a new conception of the church as a brotherhood"-also one of Keller's emphasis; "and third, a new ethic of love and nonresistance"—here Bender broke with Keller as had his fatherin-law before him. 69 Of these three, however, the concept of the Nachfolge Christi was the one that united all the others. The Denck statement Keller had fastened upon was: 'No man can truly know Christ unless he follows him in life."70 Keller had argued that Denck had followed in the medieval tradition of the Imitatio Christi and the German Theology. Horsch and Bender rejected Denck and the medieval mystical tradition, but retained the concept. Indeed, it has been rumored about that Bender wrote his famous essay after having read Dietrich Bonhoeffer's The Cost of Discipleship. Not long ago, at a "primitivist" conference at Pepperdine University, Lawrence Burckholder asserted that Bonhoeffer's classic had been the single most important influence upon the collective lives of his generation. Studying Anabaptist history in the shadow of Keller and father-in-law Horsch, Bender could hardly have escaped this emphasis. When Bonhoeffer's book appeared some twenty years after Bender had commenced his studies, reading it must have acted as a catalyst, melding with half conscious and unconscious influences from his past, to crystallize the central theme of his essay. As so often happens on such occasions, everything else fell into place creating a most satisfying whole.

That this interpretation was to be used in the service of a Mennonite church renewal, there can be little doubt. Not only church renewal, but also insulation against liberal theological influences. In Bender's hands, perhaps, also against the excessive fundamentalism of his father-in-law. Whatever the case, he must have realized that only a polemically neutral Anabaptism could serve such a purpose. Keller's renewal efforts had shattered on the even greater theological liberalism—and absence of Pietism—of the North German Mennonites. And Horsch's efforts to use Anabaptism both as renewal and anti-liberal polemic threatened merely to polarize the Mennonite community more

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 42.

⁷⁰Keller, Hans Denck, p. 137.

than it already was. Under these circumstances, the liberal group could—with Keller—argue that Denck was the authentic Anabaptist; Horsch could argue that Menno and the Swiss Brethren were. A scholarly, polemically neutral investigation that established the latter as "authentic Anabaptism"—as "normative Anabaptism"—would carry much more weight than the older polemical approach. All of this raises the very interesting question: who speaks for the Anabaptists—and who decides? Scholars are debating that question still.

But we must finally confront the question that has hung over us from the beginning: how can history be enlisted to bring about spiritual renewal? Or can it? We have heard Keller argue repeatedly that if only Mennonites were to return to the "heroic" period of their Anabaptist history, the years from 1517-1535-that is, before Menno and the hardening of dogma-renewal would be inevitable. He chose Hans Denck as his hero and ideal type, arguing that Denck had emphasized the Nachfolge Christi from an undogmatic theological position. This appealed to the liberal/rationalist Mennonites but not the Pietistic South German Mennonites who, like Christian Neff, upon closer analysis saw a dogmatic position in Denck they could not condone. Though Fabri and Keller certainly knew that the mystical doctrine of the soul-the "abyss of the soul"-had its source in ancient Platonism that made possible the argument for the deification of man, few if any German Mennonites seem to have done so. It was on the basis of this doctrine that Fabri-like Denck before him-argued for the ultimate salvation of all mankind: Origen's ancient heresy.71 At times, however, one wonders what was more important to Keller, the spiritual renewal of the Mennonites or their mobilization in a kind of greater alliance of "oldevangelical" churches for an attack on the re-confessionalization of Lutheran and Catholic churches. In all his writings, Keller never spelled out with any clarity how this renewal was to take place. Perhaps he believed that the Holy Spirit would accomplish renewal in the same manner as he had with John Tauler in the Historia, the fictional story of the latter's conversion Keller apparently accepted as authentic. In that story, before his conversion, Tauler is called a great preacher of "correct doctrine" who did not possess the power to live what he taught. The "baptism of the Holy Spirit" empowered him to do so. In other

⁷¹See especially Friedhelm Groth, Die "Wiederbringung aller Dinge" im württembergischen Pietismus (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 1984).

words, conversion had empowered Tauler to live up to his dogmatic beliefs. But Keller took away dogma and left his Christianity "undogmatic." The "alliance" concept he promoted simply reinforced the emphasis on the undogmatic. Theology was to serve the purpose of building a coalition against his enemies. One is reminded of Erasmus' observation:

The sum of our religion is peace and unanimity, but these can scarcely stand unless we define as little as possible, and in many things leave each one free to follow his own judgment, because there is great obscurity in many matters, and man suffers from this almost congenital disease that he will not give in once a controversy has started.

Horsch's more fundamentalist approach to Anabaptism as means of renewal may have fared somewhat better than Keller's approach. But it too seems to have polarized the church rather than renewed it. Bender's more scholarly and more neutral approach—though not entirely so since he removed certain elements categorically from any association with Anabaptism and established an "authentic" or "normative" Anabaptism-has done better service in the Mennonite church. But has it really brought spiritual renewal? Certainly, it has helped many of us out of the inferiority complexes into which the establishment enemies of Anabaptism with their destructive venom and biased assertions had driven us. But does not a favorable interpretation of Luther do the same for Lutheranism, of Calvin for the Reformed, of Servetus for the Unitarians, of Archbishop Cranmer for the Anglicans, of Joseph Smith for the Mormons, of Buddha for the Buddhists? We have simply confirmed ourselves in our own-"best"?-traditions.

Going back to our roots—as Alex Haley's book would have it, and it, too, has done great things for many Afro-Americans—is probably not what the secular Machiavelli had in mind when he wrote—as we reported in our third chapter:

And because I am speaking of mixed bodies, such as republics and religion, I say that those changes are to their advantage that take them back to their beginnings. And therefore those are best organized and have longest life that by some accident outside their organization come to such renewal. And it is clearer than light that if these bodies are not renewed they cannot stand.

For Christians, of whatever stripe, this beginning must be the age of Christ and the apostolic church—as it was for the Anabaptists themselves. Anthony Collins, the English rationalist free-thinker, wrote in 1713:

Priests are not set apart to study Divinity, as Lawyers and Physicians are to study Law and Physick. The priests do not study Divinity properly so-called, but only how to maintain a certain System of Divinity. Thus the Popish, Mohametan, Lutheran, and Presbyterian Priests, study their several systems. Whereas Physicians are not ty'd down to Hippocrates, or Galen, or Paracelsus, but have all Nature and all Men's Observations before them, without any Obligation to subscribe implicitly to any one: nor have Lawyers any Rule, but the Law itself which lies before 'em, which they are at liberty to interpret according to its real Sense, being bound by no Articles or Subscriptions to interpret it otherwise.⁷²

There are a number of aspects of importance in these two passages for our discussion. To begin with Anthony Collins, returning only to our Anabaptist roots helps us "to maintain a certain system of Divinity." But Christianity may indeed be greater than Anabaptism. In any case, there is no substitute for going back to the "authentic" product itself—as the Reformation as such sought to do: sola scriptura, sola fide, sola Christus. There is no doubt that this is what Machiavelli had in mind, no matter what he may have thought early Christianity to have been. The third thing that is contained in these passages is Machiavelli's emphasis on a constant and ever-renewed returning to this point of origin for renewal. All institutions, he maintains, atrophy and decay, and if they are not renewed periodically they cannot maintain themselves. This is even true of the Church.

This emphasis on renewal by returning to the "Golden Age"—culturally to Graeco-Roman Antiquity and religiously to the apostolic church—is one of the hallmarks of the age of the Renaissance and Reformation. Renaissance humanists sought to resurrect and purify all the source documents of this Golden Age—Plato and the other "Classics," the Bible, and the church fathers. The Bible was deemed to be the purest source of this

⁷²Anthony Collins, A Discourse of Free Thinking, Occasion'd by the Rise and Growth of a Sect Call'd Free-Thinkers (London, 1713). Quoted in Peter Gay, ed., Deism. An Anthology (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand, 1968), pp. 95-96.

ideal primitive Christianity-hence the search began to discover the earliest biblical manuscripts and use them to check the accuracy of Jerome's Vulgate translation. Erasmus especially stressed this central importance of the Bible as the purest source of Christianity, and his 1516 edition was the direct result of this conviction. In his Annotations, which accompanied the Bible, he sought to interpret this book in the light of the best interpreters—the earliest church fathers. He, too, stressed the normative nature of the Bible for the Christian, as had Dante, Marsiglius of Padua, and a host of others before him. But he still read it with Platonic eyes. The Reformers and the Anabaptists no longer did so. They began to read the Bible in its historical-literal sense. As Walther Köhler observed already in 1925:

This independence of the Zurich [Anabaptists] rests on a solid basis at their disposal: the Bible. They have drawn everything from it; this is an emphasis that must be placed prior to the influence of Karlstadt and Müntzer and considered the decisive criterion. This factor makes the movement autochthonous and it is therefore proper to place Zurich at the source of the Anabaptist movement.73

But it was not merely the reading of the Bible and the derivation of correct doctrine from its pages that mattered for the Anabaptists. From Thomas Müntzer to the Swiss Brethren, radicals were agreed that one could be the best biblical scholar in the world and understand all doctrine and yet not be truly Christian. To become so, one had to be "reborn," a term even Machiavelli used. Teaching had to become effective in life, otherwise one remained at best a scribe and a Pharisee. The classic example of this is Menno Simons himself who, from 1525 to 1535, acquired an excellent knowledge of the Bible and the Reformers' writings, could debate all comers and especially vanguish the Münsterite emissaries, but it was not until his own brother was killed at the Old Cloister that God broke his will and pride and made him willing to take up the heavy cross of Christ, as he phrased it. Here was spiritual renewal, and it was brought about by Word and Spirit working together, not apart from each other as in mystical theology. Anabaptists, therefore, cited

⁷³Walther Köhler, "Die Zürcher Täufer," in Gedenkschrift zum 400 jährigen Jubiläum der Mennoniten oder Taufgesinnten, ed., Christian Neff (Ludwigshaffen, 1925), p. 53.

Romans 6:4 as symbolic: "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the father, we too may live a new life." Anabaptists would never have advised their descendants to study their history in order to be spiritually renewed; they would have pointed them to the Bible. Like Luther, they too would have wanted all their writings destroyed, so that people would not be distracted from their concentration on the Bible to the events of history.

This is not to say, however, that church history in general and Anabaptist history in particular is not useful to us as Mennonites. The Anabaptists themselves studied the history of the Church, especially the history of Eusebius, to learn why and where the Church had gone wrong, where infant baptism had originated, and many other things. Church history shows us abject failure as well as heroic sacrifice and victory. As Renaissance humanists would say, history is philosophy-in this case, Christianity-teaching by example. Many of us have been strengthened in our resolve, our commitment, by the examples of the Anabaptist martyrs. Many of us have been shamed by their fearless witness. Many of us have been forced back to the Bible as the source of faith by their example. Church history demonstrates, as well, how easily we can be influenced by the spirit of the age. Perhaps we should study subsequent Mennonite history more than the heroic age of Anabaptism. Both Renaissance humanists and Reformers pointed to the gradual but inevitable decline of the Church from the heroic apostolic age. The story of our failures is as important as the story of our successes.

And, may I ask in conclusion, why we need to remove with surgical precision all those elements from early Anabaptism not to our liking or our theological persuasion? However, let us not use the "polygenesis" thesis to locate a group—à la Keller—that will merely confirm our "modern" position. As some branches of Lutheranism moved away from Luther's position, their interpretation of Luther changed. It is easier for us heirs of the Radical Reformation: there is a person or party for nearly every modern theological persuasion. We do not necessarily have to change our interpretation of the Swiss Brethren; we just select a more appropriate theological hero! And so we ask again in conclusion: who speaks for the Anabaptists? The one who conforms to our position, as in the case of Keller? If not, how do we determine who speaks for them?





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