

MENNONITE LIFE

SEPTEMBER 1990



In this Issue

It is appropriate that this issue of *Mennonite Life*, the first after the death of our founder and long-term editor, Cornelius Krahn, celebrates the witness of the *Martyrs' Mirror*. Dr. Krahn was a highly respected authority on Dutch Anabaptism and had a special interest in the martyr tradition. He dedicated the entire issue of April 1967, to reproductions of the Jan Luyken etchings and accompanying text. That popular issue was reprinted several times.

The current revival of interest in the martyr heritage is marked by two additional events at Bethel College in the month of September. One is the opening of the museum exhibit, "The Mirror of the Martyrs," which features some surviving copper plate etchings created by the Dutch artist Jan Luyken for the 1660 edition. After its opening exhibition at Kauffman Museum, this exhibit will travel for showings at other Mennonite centers.

Another collateral event is the production of an original drama, "Dirk's Exodus," at the 1990 Fall Festival at Bethel College. The drama, written by James Juhnke with music by Harold Moyer, is a fictionalized recounting of the story of Dirk Willems, the *Martyrs' Mirror* hero who rescued his persecutor who had fallen through the ice. That same story is the basis for the reflections in this issue by Joseph Liechty, who works in Dublin, Ireland, sponsored by the Mennonite Board of Mission.

Robert Kreider, the primary initiator of the "Mirror of the Martyrs" exhibit, in this issue shares how his quest for the martyr stories opened new insights and new avenues for further research. Alan Kreider, Mennonite historian and missionary in London, suggests the ongoing relevance of the *Martyrs' Mirror* for our own day. An earlier version of Alan Kreider's essay appeared in the Dutch journal, *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen*, in 1984.

Keith Sprunger's article reflects upon the importance of printing for the Protestant Reformation. John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, a model and precursor of the Mennonite *Martyrs' Mirror*, expressed in vivid terms how the printed page had become an instrument for fulfillment of God's purposes. Keith Sprunger is on the history faculty at Bethel College. Mary Sprunger, Keith's daughter, is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Illinois. Her article in this issue is based on research of this past year in Amsterdam.

Jeni Umble has completed a Masters Thesis at Southern Methodist University on women in the *Martyrs' Mirror* and has published articles in Mennonite papers. She has taught English for two years in the People's Republic of China. James W. Lowry, who writes on the theme of nonresistance in the *Martyrs' Mirror* is a reference librarian in Frederick, Maryland. He has written a book of stories from the *Martyrs' Mirror* called *In the Whale's Belly*. The book has been translated and published in Spanish and in Telegu.

James C. Juhnke

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Front Cover

Detail from a Jan Luyken's etching from the 1685 edition of the *Martyrs' Mirror*.

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A Martyrs' Mirror Invitation

by Robert Kreider



"The Luyken plates"

"Robert, I have just learned that the Luyken plates are available for sale." This was the excited voice of Amos Hoover, Old Order Mennonite historian and friend, phoning from Denver, Pennsylvania, in late May 1988. He was reporting that the lost twenty-three copper plates of Jan Luyken, used to illustrate the 1685 *Martyrs' Mirror*, had reappeared. Hoover and I had been pursuing the twenty-three plates since 1977, when he and friends had purchased seven of the known thirty surviving plates. Unfortunately the remaining twenty-three had slipped into the hands of a non-communicative art collector near Cologne, Germany. One hundred and four of Luyken's copper etchings had been used to illustrate Thielemann van Braght's second edition of the *Martyrs' Mirror*. Some of the plates were seen in 1930 but were thought to have been destroyed in World War II. Thirty plates had briefly reappeared in 1975.

On a Saturday morning market day in early April 1989 in a bakery-cafe in Grünstadt, Palatinate, each of the copper plates—300-year-old artistic treasure—was carefully unwrapped and laid before us on the white linen table cloth. The aroma of coffee and freshly baked pastry enveloped this ritual of the unveiling. Here in our hands were Luyken etchings last used in printing the German edition of the *Martyrs' Mirror* at Pirmasens in 1780. A sense of awe.

On the flight back to the States I

cradled in my lap the package of twenty-three plates. In the name of a group of patrons, The Martyrs' Mirror Trust, we had taken possession of the plates, but I did not realize how these plates and the *Martyrs' Mirror* would soon take possession of us. I can now understand an academic friend who recently commented that he had almost decided to devote the rest of his scholarly life to the study of the *Martyrs' Mirror*.

Long ago I had purchased a 1950 English edition but through the years I only dipped into it occasionally to harvest illustrations. Often I had brought it to a class or lecture and placed it alongside the Bible, the *Ausbund* and Menno Simons' *Fundament Buch*, and then pointed to the four as foundational to our Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. I admired the *Martyrs' Mirror*, praised it but neglected to read it systematically. Like most Mennonites, I viewed it with respect but from afar.

In the months since the acquisition of the plates we have been preparing an exhibit, "Mirror of the Martyrs," to feature the Luyken plates and to tell the story of Anabaptist martyrdom. This exhibit opens September 21, 1990, at the Kauffman Museum, North Newton, Kansas, and then moves on in May 1991 to Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana. The exhibit is designed to be readily transportable to other Mennonite centers in North America, even overseas, and to university, church and art centers elsewhere.

Since the receipt of that phone call in May 1988, our planning has been shaped by three concerns. First, the surviving Luyken plates should be kept together, neither the prideful possession of one institution nor scattered among many owners. The collection is to be held as an inter-Mennonite trust. Second, these Luyken etchings should be viewed as more than intriguing, aging artifacts to be savored by the few. They can be carriers of a collective memory. The plates offer an opportunity to tell in innovative ways the dramatic story of faithfulness under test. Third, these old plates carry not a parochial tale but a universal story. Anabaptist martyrs are kin to a host of martyrs past and present. Today more prisoners of conscience languish in cells than in the 1500s. The age of the martyrs is not ancient history.

John S. Oyer of Goshen College and I have worked with Robert Regier and

the Kauffman Museum staff in the preparation of the exhibit and with Merle and Phyllis Good of Good Books in the publication of a catalog-storybook. In this research and writing we have been drawn into intriguing avenues of inquiry. I wish now to reflect on what could be a lifetime agenda for the study of the *Martyrs' Mirror*—an agenda calling for research papers and even doctoral dissertations.

The Martyrs—Follow Their Example

John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* is said to have been, next to the Bible, the most widely read and influential book in seventeenth century England. The *Martyrs' Mirror* in particular periods and places has influenced Mennonites and their spiritual associates in similar ways. We need to assess the impact of the *Martyrs' Mirror* on the life and faith of the church. Has it shaped and changed lives? Among us are those who have been profoundly affected by this book with its high call to discipleship. A leading peacemaker tells of how his father on Sunday afternoons gathered his children and read to them stories from the *Martyrs' Mirror*. An industrialist friend recounts how he took this big unread book with him on a trip to South America and soon was so captivated that he seized spare moments to read the book in its entirety. A Mennonite historian relates how an older cousin told him stories from the *Martyrs' Mirror* and kindled in him a lifelong fascination with his Anabaptist heritage. A Central American brother declares: "These stories in the *Martyrs' Mirror* are our stories, El Salvadoran stories."

One wonders how many Mennonite pastors have drawn from the *Martyrs' Mirror* in their preaching. In Christian education in our churches have these stories been used and with what effect? Are they remote, inspirational epic tales or do they have a true-to-life contemporary bite? We need to know more how Old Order peoples, with their deep and continuing affection for the book, have used the martyr memories in Christian nurture. It would be interesting to survey new congregational members of non-Mennonite backgrounds to learn whether these martyr memories are repulsive or invitational.

Thieleman van Braght, editor of the 1660 first edition, saw the *Martyrs' Mirror* as his contribution to help his

people, softened by affluence and neglectful of their heritage, to recover a virile, biblical faith. "Read it again and again," he wrote. "Above all, fix your eyes upon the martyrs themselves . . . and follow their example." The story is told how he gave a copy of the *Martyrs' Mirror* to his seven-year-old niece who was beginning to read. "We want to know whether the telling of martyr stories really help in passing on and renewing the faith."

Those who have pressed for the republication of the *Martyrs' Mirror* have invariably been motivated by concerns for renewal and recovery of a nonresistant commitment: in the 1740s the Pennsylvania Mennonites anticipating colonial conflicts on the frontier and in the 1770s Palatine Mennonites sensing imminent warfare among the great powers. Certainly renewal is one of our expectations in this recovery of the Luyken plates and in the telling of their story. Deep within us we long to find the purity of a movement at its source. Van Braght and Luyken can help us in that quest because they are closer to the source.

The Martyrs' Mirror Compared

Mennonites have viewed Thieleman van Braght's *Martyrs' Mirror* as a unique work of a unique people. It, however, is a member of an extended family. Its ancestry dates back to writers of the early church—Eusebius, Tertullian and Origen—and the many medieval chroniclers. It has immediate parentage in *Het Offer des Herren* and accompanying hymnbook (*Lietboeckken*) of 1562 and Hans de Ries' *History of the Martyrs* of 1615. Van Braght's *Martyrs' Mirror* relates to the sister volumes, *Ausbund* of 1564 and the *Hutterian Chronicle*. Beyond these are martyrologies of other traditions: Rabus (1552), Crespin (1554), Haemstede (1559), Foxe (1559) and many more. Comparative studies of van Braght's volume in the context of other martyrologies would shed light on Anabaptist perspectives.

**Thieleman van Braght the Historian,
1625-1664**

In the catalog for the exhibit, "Mirror of the Martyrs," John S. Oyer examines twenty-nine of the martyr stories told by van Braght and illustrated by Luyken. This account by account review of supporting data, context and plausibility could be extended to the remaining stories. It would provide a basis for evaluating van Braght's historical care and judgment. We must ask how van Braght's selection and exclusion of martyrs shaped subsequent perceptions of the normative Anabaptist. Although van Braght as historian has had his critics, measured by seventeenth century criteria, he can probably be judged a credible and superior historian. He must be compared to other martyrologists, observing in each level of historical skill, archival diligence, interpretive gifts and the propensity for embellishment. Such studies could lead to a reassessment of van Braght as a third or fourth generation communicator of the Anabaptist legacy.

**Jan Luyken the Printmaker,
1649-1712**

Clearly Jan Luyken was gifted as a printmaker with superb technical skill. He designed more than 3,000 copper plates to illustrate histories, Bibles and his eleven books of religious verse. When he was commissioned to illustrate the 1685 edition of the *Martyrs' Mirror*, he had already illustrated more than ninety books. As one studies the 104 etchings in the *Martyrs' Mirror*, one marvels at his sensitivity to detail and his portrayal of the serenity of martyrs on the threshold of death. His artistic works have been neglected by keepers of artistic taste. Now we encounter a gifted artist whose time for study and recognition has again come. A first step would be to publish an annotated edition of the best of his more than 300 etchings of biblical scenes.

A State-of-the-Art Publication

The prospering Mennonites of Amsterdam and Haarlem published in 1685

a two-volume *Martyrs' Mirror* which may be considered a state-of-the-art work in seventeenth century printing: quality of paper, care in printing, typographical style, use of etchings, craftsmanship in bookbinding. Amsterdam was then a distinguished center of printing. If one were to compare the 1685 edition with other illustrated books published in The Netherlands in the 1680s one could test the above affirmation: "a state-of-the-art" publication. Of particular interest is this early Mennonite use of image to amplify the power of text. Here is evidence of Mennonites embracing modernity.

On the Wings of Song

First was the martyr event. Then came the telling of the story, passed on from person to person, congregation to congregation. Some stories were early recorded in broadsides and distributed widely, these martyr tales were even embraced by the wider Protestant community. From the very beginning the martyr stories were carried on the wings of song. Prisoners composed martyr ballads of their trials and faith. The *Ausbund* is a collection of martyr hymns. *Het Offer des Heren* was published with accompanying martyr hymns. Entries of a martyr's death in the *Hutterian Chronicle* often carry a notation such as this, "A song was written about him, which is still sung by us." In song the Anabaptists made their "good witness."

This role of song as a bridge between the event and the oral, between the oral and the written is analogous to the springtime of other movements: American slaves and the Negro spiritual, the Civil Rights Movement and "We Shall Overcome," the protest movements of the Sixties and ballads. Today we may gain better insight into a people's theology by listening to the hymns they sing than by reading their creeds. Those who select the hymns shape theology. Anabaptist studies would be enriched by a comprehensive examination of martyr hymns in their genesis, content, circulation and influence.

Execution as Theater

Authorities staged the execution of Anabaptists as a ritual of civil religion and public drama. A spectacle-hungry citizenry was offered entertainment and a morality play: God's wrath and warn-





ing visited on Anabaptist dissenters thought to be destroying the unity of the churchly community. Van Braght named his book, "Bloody Theatre." In staging the execution of a martyr the rulers offered all the elements of high drama: stage, script, director, cast, stage hands, props, choreographed movements, spectators and reporters. Peter Spierenberg in the *Spectacle of Suffering*¹ and Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*² describe the role of ritual and spectacle in early modern European patterns of punishment. The intransigence of Anabaptists under torture and their joyful acceptance of death subverted the climax of the morality play. In time, torture and public execution became counterproductive. A thorough study of Anabaptist martyrdom in the context of sixteenth century penology could provide insight on the effectiveness and limitations of persecution today. We would also probably find a trail of influence from martyr steadfastness under torture to modern legal protections against self-incrimination.

Quest for Respectability

We have observed in efforts to recover the martyr memory a desire for

renewal and a concern for faith transmission. The strands of people's motivation in the distant past elude the historian. And yet I am haunted by a suspicion that the elegantly printed and illustrated 1685 edition of the *Martyrs' Mirror* was offered to the public by the affluent Amsterdam and Haarlem Mennonite patrons as evidence of their eminently respectable Dutch character.

Dutch identity had been shaped in the eighty-year struggle against Spanish domination. Dutch historians celebrated the liberation movement in biblical terms as the chosen Israelites escaping Egyptian tyranny. The conflict produced its martyr heroes—Egmont, Hoorn and William of Orange—and an arch villain, the Duke of Alva. The stories of the Council of Blood, the Spanish Fury at Antwerp and the Siege of Leiden were told and retold in picture and word. The Dutch story was a glorious account of good pitted against evil. Then in 1685 the Mennonites, living on the margins of Dutch respectability but increasingly prosperous and well-positioned, came forward with the 1685 volume, perhaps intimating that they, too, had a glorious story of a liberation struggle against oppression. In their cultivated modesty the Mennonites were not so

brash as to assert such intentions. This hypothesis could be tested by comparing the depiction of the Dutch liberation experience with that of the Dutch Anabaptist martyrs.

A Search for Meaning

Many excellent articles have been written about biblical and theological motifs in the *Martyrs' Mirror*. One finds here a rich lode of themes: God's lordship of history, the meaning of salvation, Christology, discipleship, the two kingdoms, hermeneutics, eschatology, the church under the Cross, the nurturing community, apologetics under pressure and many more. Scholars have been plucking out significant single themes for study. Now a composite theological picture needs to be sketched from the martyr books, including the *Ausbund* and the *Hutterian Chronicle*.

The *Martyrs' Mirror* may be at its best as a sourcebook of case studies in Christian ethics. What beliefs are worth dying for? Do any persons have the right to abuse another's body? Why do good people torture and kill? Why do modern governments torture and kill? Why do the powerful fear the weak? What would you do if? . . . And then there are those haunting stories to ponder such as Dirk Willems rescuing his pursuer.

If we would understand the *Martyrs' Mirror*, we must read it antiphonally: a *Martyrs' Mirror* story and a contemporary story of martyrdom: El Salvador, the Gulag, Robben Island, West Bank, Chile, Uganda, Cambodia, Leavenworth 1918. . . . The *Martyrs' Mirror* is as current as the annual report of Amnesty International. The age of the martyrs is not past.

ENDNOTES

¹Peter Spierenburg, *The Spectacle of Suffering* (Cambridge University Press, 1984).

²Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish—the Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).



The Relevance of *Martyrs' Mirror* to our Time

by Alan Kreider

*Martyrs' Mirror*¹ is arguably the most important book produced by the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. Its importance, despite the way it lovingly records the names of thousands of sixteenth-century Anabaptists, is not filiopietistic or antiquarian. Nor is *Martyrs' Mirror* merely a uniquely informative compilation of historical documents. It is a tool, a tool for renewal.

Renewal was the aim of its author. From the perspective of Thieleman Jansz van Braght, the Dutch *Doopsgezinde* of the mid-seventeenth century were losing their way. Through security and prosperity his contemporaries were "being overcome by the world."² Van Braght, revolted by this process, sought to counteract it by recalling them to their roots. Repeatedly he admonished his brothers and sisters to remember the faith and life of their great-grandparents. "Fix your eyes upon the martyrs themselves," he admonished, "note the steadfastness of their faith, and follow their example."³

Van Braght was convinced that, for the *Doopsgezinde*, the way forward would be the way back; it would be a recovery of their roots. Their progenitors were martyrs—"this bloody army of the spiritual champions"—who had realized with crystalline clarity a cardinal Christian truth: faith and life must go together.⁴ The power of the Anabaptists' witness lay in their resolute commitment to express their

faith in a transformed quality of living. "Faith without the corresponding life," he contended, "or the life without the faith, can, will, and may not avail before God."⁵

I would like, however, to focus our attention, not on Van Braght, but on the Anabaptists of the Netherlands whose witness and experience he was concerned to record.⁶ Each generation must write its own history. In the light of its own experience and its life situation, it must reevaluate its relationship to its origins. Spiritually perceptive though Van Braght was, his was inevitably a mid-seventeenth-century perspective. It is our task to do in our era what he did in his. Looking at the martyrs, listening to their convictions and hearing their hymns, we must assess their relevance for our time.

Relevance for our time, I am convinced, the martyrs have in abundance. The sixteenth-century Anabaptists were struggling with issues which are not parochial in time or place, but which are of universal significance. When Van Braght talked about the Anabaptist's life and faith which, "like two witnesses . . . must agree," he saw the general shape of things.⁷ I would put it slightly differently. From my perspective, the genius of these Anabaptists—and the heart of their challenge to their time and ours—lay in their resolute holding together of two realities which Jesus held together but which Christians, especially since the fourth cen-

tury, have tended to drive apart. These realities can be expressed in many ways: spirituality and social nonconformity; renewal and radicalism; intense verticality and transformed horizontality.⁸ When either of these realities is divorced from its counterpart, familiar frustrations result. When spirituality is abstracted from ethics and hymn-writing is removed from social experience, calcification sets in. And religion becomes a conservative force providing validation for prevailing patterns of culture and authority. On the other hand, when radicality supercedes religious experience and political action displaces prayer, exhaustion sets in. And society, which does not change, learns to live with its fringe of tired radicals who, through their colorful impotence, have become an acceptable part of the "system."

With Jesus it was different. His life was a perfect integration of a relationship with Abba and of a lifestyle that was socially scandalous. The result of this integration was a challenge to the religious and political leaders of his day that was so profound that they had to do away with him. So also, sixteen centuries later, with the Anabaptists, who rejected—sometimes instinctively, sometimes self-consciously—the patterns of disintegration which they had inherited from Christendom. They experienced joy in worship, but never as an end in itself; it was an empowering for a new way of living. Their day-to-day exper-

ience, in turn, shaped their piety and theology. Like Jesus, they found that their integration of spirituality and social nonconformity led to a collision with society and its rulers. In the extremity of their political, economic and personal vulnerability, they were unusually conscious of their practical dependence upon God. Without an encounter with God through worship, prayer and hymn-singing, they simply could not have coped. Their experience of conflict and vulnerability also shaped their theology, enabling them, as one Anabaptist commented, to look at salvation "through quite different eyes."⁹ The elements of this integration—of both spirituality and social non-conformity—were thus mutually reinforcing.

CONVERSION

All aspects of the piety and lifestyle of the Anabaptists were marked by an

integration of the sort that I have been describing. Let us consider four sample areas. The first of these is conversion. Like members of other Christian traditions, many Anabaptists testified to their experience of joy in turning to God. "Always remember the days when you were illuminated," Hans Symons of Antwerp admonished his friends in 1567. "[Remember] how zealous we all were when we came together, to speak of the great benefits which God has bestowed upon us, in that he has called us from the power of darkness into his marvellous light."¹⁰ Illumination, turning from darkness to light—these were two characteristic Anabaptist ways of describing conversion. There were many others: rebirth; new creation; enlightenment; renewal; coming to Christ.¹¹

The Anabaptists found it unthinkable, however, that one could have a spiritual U-turn without a corresponding U-turn

in lifestyle. At the most basic level, conversion meant moving from one world to another; it meant entering a new society of the underprivileged and powerless. "Where you hear of a poor, simple, cast-off little flock, which is despised and rejected by the world," Anneken of Rotterdam wrote to her son, "join them; for where you do hear of the cross, there is Christ."¹² Being converted and reborn thus meant joining a group of people who were experiencing a far-reaching and progressive "amendment of life."¹³ For these people, being saved through Christ meant listening to his commands and obeying him; among sixteenth-century groups the Anabaptists were unusually inclined to use biblical phrases such as "obedience to the gospel" and "obedience to the truth."¹⁴ Being saved through Christ also meant walking, along with other disciples, as he had walked. "Join these cross-bearers," Jan Wouters ad-



monished his daughter, "that you may come to Christ, who bore the cross for us; for we must follow his footsteps, and be like our Lord."¹⁵ In the Anabaptist subculture it was assumed that spiritual illumination would lead to socially deviant behavior, such as refusing to carry a defensive rapier, redistributing one's possessions in order to "do much good to the poor," or telling a provincial judge who the Ultimate Judge was.¹⁶ Given their integrated view of the Christian life, conversion was the beginning of a social process that led to resistance, conflict, and the cross.

USE OF SCRIPTURE

A second sample of integration is the Anabaptists' use of scripture. Their knowledge of it was amazing; many of their letters from prison, especially in the early days of the movement, are virtual medleys of biblical quotations, joined by clauses such as "Therefore, my dear brethren." In a letter to his wife, Jerome Segers disarmingly stated this as normal procedure: "I have written you a little from the Word of the Lord."¹⁷ The Anabaptists were biblically knowledgeable because the Bible was their source of consolation and delight; it was also their ultimate criterion of authority—"You cannot satisfy me with arguments; show it to me in the book."¹⁸ When they were under pressure or in prison, it was their source of nourishment and safety: "Brethren, be not cast down; let the seed in you get and retain moisture; sit under the shadow of the Scriptures, and they will be a glorious protection unto you."¹⁹

There was, however, something socially revolutionary about the Anabaptists' use of scripture. It was partly that they insisted that ordinary people—even women—could understand it. Their inquisitors tried to overawe them with superior educational credentials: "Lauwerens, you must suffer yourself to be instructed; it will not do for you to depend on a few lay men, who have made stockings for thirty or forty years."²⁰ The Anabaptists were rarely intimidated. Ordinary people were confident that they could understand the Scripture because understanding was a gift of the Holy Spirit.²¹ They seem also to have sensed that life experience is at least as important in interpreting Scripture as academic learning. In this, they anticipated insights from the liberation theologians.²² They would also be sympa-

thetic to the argument which Professor W. R. Farmer has advanced, that the New Testament is a "martyr's canon" whose books were chosen because they "had special meaning for certain known churches that had experienced persecution."²³ If this is indeed true, then the vulnerability, poverty, and persecution which the Anabaptists encountered as daily realities gave them a privileged position from which to read the New Testament. How much harder it was for scholars, comfortably theologizing in universities allied with privilege and power, to enter the thought world of Jesus and the early Christians.

Biblical passages about the cross, and about the principalities and powers, therefore instinctively made sense to the Anabaptists. They had encountered these as existential realities; and their biblical understandings, in turn, reinforced the radicality of their life. Comfort and confrontation—the texts most frequently cited by the martyrs kept these together. "Can a woman forget her suckling child? . . . Truth is lacking." (Isa. 49:15; 59:15).²⁴ It was an integration which made for resistance and conflict.

HYMNS

A third sample of the Anabaptists' integration of spirituality and social nonconformity is their hymns. Like many renewal groups throughout Church history, the Anabaptists produced a surge of hymn-writing. Written for the most part by untrained persons, these hymns were bound on occasion to have a rough-hewn quality. One prisoner in 1568 sent three hymns to his friends. "Though they are simple," he said somewhat apologetically, "receive them in good part, for it has been done in love."²⁵ Anabaptists sang in prison; they sang on the way to the stake; they sang to express their joy and their trust. When a Bruges woman who was a gifted singer was imprisoned in 1568, people gathered outside to listen. As the death sentence was pronounced, she was resolute, "with a clear strong voice" singing Psalm 27. Van Braght adds, "And the people firmly believed that if they had not gagged her when they brought her to the place of execution, she would have departed life singing and praising God."²⁶

There was thus something socially unsettling about Anabaptist hymn-singing. Anabaptists tended to sing at

the wrong times, in the wrong places. As one inquisitor exclaimed in his irritation, "The apostles did not sing, as you do; nor do I want to dance; why then do you sing?"²⁷ They also offended through what they sang. Many of their hymns were narrations of their torture and imprisonment; some were pedagogical devices, passing on the contents of their interrogations. And these hymns, quite alarmingly, were infused by a critical perspective. At times this could get out of hand. In 1565 the imprisoned pastor Matthias Servaes, concerned that some recent hymns had become dangerously topical, felt compelled to admonish a brother to concentrate in his hymn-writing on "thanks-giving, through Christ, to the God of heaven." He went on: "but leave out the Count [of Cologne] and everything else, as much as possible, for he says that he has been vilified in the hymn of Thomas the printer, which was certainly not the intention, though it is taken thus."²⁸ In Leiden another believer reported that, after a particularly heated exchange with a bailiff, he was put in solitary confinement. Whereupon—a typical Anabaptist response—"I immediately began to sing a hymn."²⁹ This sounds innocuous enough, until one reads the text (Isaiah 59:14) on which it is based: "Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands afar off; for truth has fallen in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter." This is strong stuff. It is hymn-writing as an act of resistance, in which spirituality and social nonconformity are thoroughly integrated.

EXPERIENCE OF GOD

The final sample of the Anabaptists' integration of spirituality and social nonconformity is their experience of God. The Anabaptists had a few words which, in the sixteenth century, were distinctively their own. "Patience," for example, and "resignation" were often on their lips, for they seemed to express something central to their life under pressure.³⁰ "Patience," commented Jan Wouters, "is a special gift of God. [It] is the Christian's strength."³¹ There were other words which they shared with countless believers across the centuries—love, joy and comfort. But even these took on a special meaning in Anabaptist usage, for they could never exist in a vacuum; they always had social consequences. For example,

when Jan Claess spoke of his "burning love to God," he characteristically added "and our neighbor."³² Similarly, Hans van Overdam's encounter with the Holy Spirit made him "bold and joyful," but for a purpose: "that we may bear reproach for his name."³³ The Spirit was also the source of comfort for Christians who were in trouble with the authorities. "He does not leave his children comfortless. He will with his Spirit defend us before kings and princes."³⁴

The Anabaptists' experience of God also enabled them to recognize the *ersatz* gods of their time. At every turn they encountered customs, institutions, and public officials whose place in the world appeared to be so self-evidently right, so much a part of "the way things are," that they were morally autonomous. Although to many people these therefore seemed sacred and beyond criticism, to the Anabaptists they became the subjects of a vigorous critique. As they challenged "the way things are" with their life and words, the Anabaptists became iconoclasts, dethroners of idols.

They did this in part by the prophetic intuitions in areas of militarism and materialism. Because the main challenge which they confronted was a direct denial of their right to exist, they rarely had the opportunity fully to work out their theory and practice in these areas. But their instincts were clear. Their very existence, they realized, was a participation in spiritual violence for the kingdom of God; and their weapons were unconventional ones—prayer, patience, and the "sword of the Spirit."³⁵ Similarly, their economic biases were generally clear—against large-scale accumulation, in favor of redistribution, towards the poor. Symbolic of these instincts is Gerrit Hasepoot, a Nijmegen tailor. When tied to the stake in 1556, suddenly Gerrit kicked his slippers off his feet, saying, "It would be a pity to burn them, for they can still be of service to some poor person."³⁶ Other Anabaptists articulated a fear of the corrupting possibilities of wealth. Economic inequality, they sensed, was not only depriving the poor; it could also cause alienation in their congregations.³⁷ Martyr parents advised their children to beware of the life of a merchant; Jan Woutersse counselled his wife that "if you continue in any business, see that it does not get too large, lest your heart become surcharged, so that you can ill

perform your prayers."³⁸ Economics, like warfare, had spiritual dimensions to which the Anabaptists repeatedly pointed.³⁹

But the idols of their time which the Anabaptists were keenest to dethrone were the authorities—both political and religious—who were responsible for maintaining coerced religious consensus. Even when under extreme pressure, the Anabaptists generally behaved respectfully. But by work and gesture, they relativized the authority of humorless, absolutizing officialdom. There was, they kept pointing out, a higher authority—a Supreme Emperor; a Judge of judges; a just law.⁴⁰ According to Claes de Praet, "there are two mandates, the one from the supreme King, the other from the mortal emperor, and these two run counter to each other."⁴¹ When the Anabaptists had to choose, they gave precedence to "the commands of God more than that of the Emperor."⁴² This could, to be sure, lead to execution, but that was a sign of the authorities' impotence—"when they have killed the body, there is no more that they can do."⁴³ And, they confessed, a Day is coming—the Day of the Lord—when there will be reversals. The meek will be vindicated. "You fight against the Lamb, but the Lamb shall overcome you!"⁴⁴ The Anabaptists' experience of God was thus the mainspring of their understanding of the world—and of their social nonconformity.

Conversion, Bible-reading, hymn-singing, the experience of God—to these one could add other samples of the Anabaptists' approach to the Christian life: evangelism; prayer; baptism; the Lord's Supper. All of these were characterized by an integration that appears, to me, to bear the stamp of Jesus. Their spirituality, like his, was fervent; and it was the source of, and the sustaining power behind, a social nonconformity that challenged the governing assumptions of the society of their day. It was a piety for transformation, for non-violent revolution. And, in the sixteenth century as in the first, the princes of church and state felt profoundly threatened.

SUFFERING

Conflict and repression ensued. The Anabaptists persisted in viewing this as the normal consequence of following Jesus. "All servants of God," Walter

Stoelwijk claimed, "all godly men, all disciples of Jesus Christ, must suffer persecution for his name's sake."⁴⁵ The Anabaptists pointed to a host of New Testament passages which indicated this, from the eighth Beatitude (Matt. 5:10) ("What a beautiful consolation it is to us")⁴⁶ to the terrifyingly categorical assertion in 2 Timothy (3:12) which in *Martyr's Mirror* they cited twenty-seven times, more often than any other biblical passage: "All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." In doing so, the Anabaptists were claiming a heritage, a heritage of innocent suffering going back to Abel. It was "the way of the prophets, apostles and martyrs."⁴⁷ Supremely it was the way of their Savior himself.

The Anabaptists knew the arguments of those who said that public suffering was unnecessary. They were not convinced. They refused, unlike one of their inquisitors, to limit cross-bearing to the realm of interior piety ("We are persecuted by the devil").⁴⁸ Nor could they limit it to pre-Constantinian Europe; in Jesus' somber warning that "if they have persecuted me, they will persecute you" (Jn. 15:20) they heard no chronological limitation.⁴⁹ Their statements are as sweeping as his: "there is no other way to eternal life than this way. If they laid hands on his blessed body, they will do the same to us."⁵⁰

Fired by such convictions, the Anabaptists faced persecution—torture, imprisonment and execution—with what a Belgian scholar has called "superhuman courage."⁵¹ To describe this fidelity under pressure, they used traditional Christian terminology—confession, witness, testimony. Many of them hoped to be able to give verbal account of their faith: "I felt very gloomy," Claes de Praet commented concerning his time with the inquisitors, "for they had not asked me concerning my faith."⁵² Others cautioned that verbal testimony is not everyone's gift. "It is not given to everyone to dispute, but to confess the truth."⁵³ Typically for the Anabaptists, confession was a matter of life and death. Janneken Munstorp, an Anabaptist who was about to be burned in Antwerp, wrote a last testament to the daughter to whom she had given birth in prison: "Follow me and your father, and be not ashamed to confess us before the world, for we were not ashamed to confess our faith before the world; hence, I pray you, that you be not ashamed to confess our faith, since

it is the true evangelical faith.”⁵⁴ By their words and their sufferings, the Anabaptists made it clear that theirs was a *confessing church*.

But did confession necessitate conflict with the authorities, at the price of imprisonment and execution? By the 1540s this question was a lively one for many Anabaptists. Nearby, they discovered, there were places of relative security. In the Germanic principalities, it was rumored, it was safer to be an Anabaptist than it was in the Netherlands.⁵⁵ After the victory of the first William of Orange in the 1570s, executions of Anabaptists still took place in the southern Netherlands; but in the north, only a few miles away, even for Anabaptists there was religious toleration. Were these havens of safety a divine provision or a satanic trap? Some Anabaptists, such as Adriaen Corneliss of Leiden, were of the latter opinion. “Seek not to escape the cross,” Adriaen warned, “so that you go into other countries, to obtain great liberty. Oh, no, my dear friends, always submit to the cross.”⁵⁶ Other Anabaptists—anticipating a great theme in Mennonite history—were sure that cross-bearing was consistent with a migratory search for safety.

Typical of these was an Amsterdam martyr, who in 1544 counselled his children, “If they do not tolerate you in this city, remove into another.”⁵⁷ Some martyrs were understandably of two minds on the matter. Shortly before his death the Bruges candle-maker Jacob de Roore stated, “I go now before you the way which Jesus Christ and all the saints went before us.”⁵⁸ But he had just urged his wife to “move to the country of C., where there is much tranquility” and where there would be brothers and sisters to welcome her.⁵⁹ Does this mean that Jacob did not wish his wife to follow him along the way of Jesus and the saints? I doubt it. More probably it meant that for Jacob there were various means of cross-bearing discipleship, some of which required lethal confrontation with the state and some of which—thankfully for his beloved wife—did not.

In the centuries since then, the latter course, understandably enough, has been more attractive to the descendants of the Anabaptists than the former. In seventeenth-century Holland, the Doopsgezinde flourished economically and culturally, and became a respected part of Dutch society. Other Mennonites

migrated—from Northern Europe to Russia, and from Central Europe to the New World—in order to be able to pursue a pattern of “separate development” by establishing flourishing communities on the edge of society. Despite inevitable fluctuations, these two patterns—of acculturation and withdrawal, of collusion and coexistence—have continued to characterize worldwide Mennonite life. Both, from my perspective, are spiritually problematic. Both are in danger of legitimizing the dominant values in society, either by espousing them openly or by agreeing not to challenge them. Both are consistent

with the amassing of wealth and power. And (I shall say this quite dogmatically) when people possess earthly power they do not need God’s power and will not experience it. It is only among the vulnerable people that God can work; it is the poor who are blessed and inherit God’s kingdom. In the 1650s Van Braght was worried enough by the cultural accommodation of the Doopsgezinde—and by its inevitable concomitant, “the absence of the Lord”—to write *Martyrs’ Mirror*. If it didn’t arrest the slide in his period, what hope can we have that it will have relevance to our consumerist age?



The *Martyrs' Mirror* does still have relevance, I believe. This is not because Van Braght, or the Anabaptists whose witness he records, have answers to all our questions. Nor do they provide models of behavior that we would invariably want to copy. They were people of their time, with the narrowness of perspective and hostility to tradition that were then all too common. As victims of persecution, for example, they were often bitterly antagonistic to Roman Catholics. When one of them emits the sizzling judgement that "the customs of the priests and of all the 'shaved' are the broad way to damnation," I, thinking of the prayer and witness and friendship that I have shared with Catholics who are sisters and brothers in Christ, squirm in discomfort.⁶⁰

But, to some people in our day, the Anabaptist martyrs speak with immediacy. If we allow ourselves for a moment to think, not just as North Americans but as global citizens, we must realize that for many people our century has been a dangerous time to be a Christian. Two writers, after having surveyed the Christian martyr stories from the twentieth century, have concluded that "more believers have died for Christ in this century than in all the previous centuries combined."⁶¹ For the countless Christians who have undergone and will undergo persecution—whether in the Soviet Union or South Africa or El Salvador—the message of the Anabaptist martyrs will be both familiar and comforting.

Can we, in North America, also listen to the martyrs' message? At times I wonder. When I first gave this talk six years ago to a Doopsgezinde gathering in the Netherlands, I sensed that the nuclear arms race might enable us to hear them. For the threat of nuclear destruction, over which we seemed to have so little control, had the beneficent spiritual byproduct of letting us realize our powerlessness. It is powerless people, I sensed then and sense now, that can distance themselves from the human quest for security enough to open themselves to God's power.

Since then the nuclear threat has, for North Americans if not for people in the Middle East, receded. And other crises seem distant. How can we truly enter into the experience of people in South America or Sub-Saharan Africa whose living standards have dropped, in the 1980s, by over a quarter? How can we

internalize the effect that debt continues to have upon the education and health of billions of people in the debtor nations? And as we thoughtlessly buy the latest because it's there and the poor nations burn rainforests to meet IMF payments, how can we realize that we and they are co-participants in a developing ecological crisis that is as life-threatening as the nuclear arms race? What North American politician, for the sake of global justice or the joy of contented living (1 Tim. 6.6), would dare to propose curtailing our economic growth? "Read my lips" means consumption, not contentment.

Deep down, I think, most people know that this process can't go on forever. So, like looters on a rampage, we consume today as if there will be no tomorrow. This is a sign not just of helplessness; it is a sign of hopelessness—a terrible spiritual malaise. We are trapped, trapped by forces beyond our control, by good and attractive things, by Satan masquerading as an "angel of light" (2 Cor. 11.14).

Van Braght, I sense, could have written these last paragraphs. He sensed that it was the asphyxiation of affluence that prevented the Doopsgezinde of his day from hearing the Good News of Jesus and responding in faithful discipleship. But the Anabaptist martyrs, he believed, could call his contemporaries back to proper priorities. I believe that they can do so today as well. Let's stop a bit to look at their lives and deaths. Then, if we can bear to do that, let's look at our lives and deaths as well. Let's ponder the priorities of our families and congregations and nations. Let's ask, "What's the point of it all? Is this what God really wants?" If we begin to ask questions, there is a way forward for us. We will recognize that, through Jesus, there are other ways of thinking and living. This realization will no doubt make us feel our weakness. But we will no longer be trapped. In our vulnerability there will be opportunity. As we learn to view our weakness with faith, God can work through us. As the Lord reminded the apostle Paul, "My power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12.9).

In this setting, we will find other people, both scattered and in clusters, who are rediscovering the integration which Jesus and his Anabaptist disciples knew—of spirituality and social non-conformity. This often begins to happen through what the Anabaptists called

"enlightenment" or conversion. An experience, a picture, a turn of phrase, a prophetic word, a parable of Jesus that hits home, someone's word or gesture—any of these can give us a burst of insight, and enable us to see the world and ourselves through "quite different eyes." Suddenly the world's wares—which are peddled so relentlessly on television and in the press—appear shoddy, falsely advertised.

The fundamental values of our civilization, we begin to realize, don't do what they promise. *Individualism* produces not freedom but isolation, competition, and an insatiable craving for self-fulfillment. *Materialism* produces not enjoyment of God's material creation but an unending escalation of accumulating and hoarding. *Rationalism* produces not certainty but a life-cauterizing desperation that is capable of neither rational affirmation nor genuine experience of the non-rational and numinous. These values guide America's academic institutions; they pervade its world of work and pleasure; we even meet them in our churches, to which substantial numbers of Canadians and Americans dutifully go in countries which still view themselves as "Christian." Nothing is a more typical product of these values than the nuclear bomb; nothing is more alien to them than the Cross.

Miraculously, repeatedly, in this dark situation God gives men and women "illumination." Conversion is God's gift. The person and message of Jesus come alive for us, relativizing the most confident forms of human wisdom. The apocalyptic agony of the world begins to dawn upon us. And we also discover ourselves to be sinners, complicit in violence and injustice, people whose minds and lives need healing. In response, we are invited to turn away from our conventional sources of security and in our helplessness to turn to God.

This spiritual U-turn of necessity leads to social U-turns. Turning to God means taking risks. It can mean leaving our well-paid conventional jobs for ventures which more immediately express God's Kingdom. It can mean learning, despite our Mennonite reticence, to share the hope that we have in Jesus with friends who are not yet Christian. It can mean beginning a new chapter in the history of Mennonite migration, moving from our farms and suburbs to new locations where we can begin to

share the lot and the outlook of poor people.

These ways of turning to God cannot be done by isolated individuals. As the Anabaptists knew, they must be done corporately, together with brothers and sisters in Christ, in new expressions of freedom, healing and integration. These cells of corporate renewal—whether prayer groups or churches—are not places of pious escape from everyday “reality.” They are places where the false gods of our time are discerned and unmasked. They also are organisms of living relationships within which a *new reality*—of “justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14. 17)—is experienced and celebrated. And thus empowered, they are communities of resistance that are challenging the world, not by coercion or control, but by witness and new being.

All of these ways of living in the hopefulness of “illumination” are difficult. Anabaptists of every era have known that there is no discipleship that does not lead to conflict. The Cross was the destiny of Jesus. And if the Anabaptists of the *Martyrs’ Mirror* were dogmatic about anything it was this: the Cross will also be the way of those who follow him. The Cross comes in many forms, from a plethora of petty obstacles, through misunderstanding and snide comment, to exclusion and physical danger. When conversion expresses itself in socially transformed living, there is always suffering. But there also is life, liberation from the false gods that are trying to choke us and enslave the world. It is in faithful risk-taking, and not in the American Way, that there is life.

How can we stay on course? How can we experience conversion, not simply as an initial turning to Jesus, but as an ongoing orientation of ourselves to him and his Kingdom? To do so, we today—like the Anabaptists four centuries ago—must draw upon the full resources of Christian spirituality. Let me list three areas which, as I have already indicated, were important to the Anabaptists and in which, I believe, we can grow.

First, the Scriptures. We—all of us, lay and learned alike—can, as the Anabaptists never tired of saying, “search the Scriptures.”⁶² I sense that for many of us this is difficult. The Bible may seem an “old old story,” overfamiliar and reeking of the primary department in Sunday School. Our parents may

have used the Bible against us as a tool of social control. To those of us with university education, the Bible may seem archaic in language and prescientific in worldview. And yet, as the Anabaptists confessed and many people today are discovering, the Bible is a source of sustenance for deviant living. When read by groups or individuals in light of the pain of the world, the Bible can address us with alarming directness. Thirty years ago the Trappist monk Thomas Merton warned that the person “who has meditated on the Passion of Christ but has not meditated on the extermination camps of Dachau and Auschwitz has not fully entered into the experience of Christianity in our time.”⁶³ Today we can meditate on the Scriptures in light of Chernobyl and of the cocaine/coffee crisis, of stealth bombers and of automobile graveyards, and upon these in light of the Scriptures. Overcoming the petty apartheid which divide rich from poor in our societies will help us read the Bible with new empathy. So will the experience of exclusion and marginalization “for justice’s sake” (Mt. 5:10). When read in these settings, the Scriptures will unlock secrets. It is my hunch that the real breakthroughs in our understanding of the Bible will take place not in scholars’ studies nor in plush pews; they will rather take place in situations of tension and vulnerability in which God calls us to live and work.

Where lay people and pastors (and even theologians) read the Bible for practical sustenance and ask life-and-death questions of it, there God will speak through it. It is not accidental, I am convinced that the recent discovery of the role of the Jubilee in Jesus’ proclamation (Luke 4. 18-19) was not made by an academic. It was made by a pastor, André Trocmé, who in the 1940s was feverishly organizing his French Protestant parish into Bible study/action groups to provide shelter for over two thousand Jewish refugees.⁶⁴ These new understandings, as well as older understandings which have ceased to be clichés and have taken on a deeply personal meaning, will not leave us unchanged. They will impel us to worship, prayer, and action. When this leads to conflict and suffering, the Scriptures will—in their own idiom—speak much-needed words of consolation. The New Testament may well be, after all, a “martyrs’ canon.” And when we go astray, God will use the

Scriptures to provide a critique of our endeavors which will drive us, in repentance, to seek his forgiveness and healing.

Second, hymns. The Anabaptists had topical hymns which expressed their experience and which fortified them for their struggle. They had these because they wrote them themselves. Of course, many of their hymns were crude; they were timely—timely to their own time, not universal. But they stand in judgment upon us, who have largely ceased to write hymns, and who persist in singing “classic” hymns, with fine music and refined poetry, which are unrelated to our daily life and work—and to the richness of biblical truth. How many hymns do you know that, as Jesus did in the “Lord’s Prayer,” link our reception of God’s forgiveness with our forgiveness of those who have sinned against us? Or that call people to share their wealth and pain? I know a few, but they are exceptional. In general, our hymns appear to be statements of people at home in society as it is and not concerned to change it. These may be appropriate for “religious” use, but they are of no use at the wrong times in the wrong places. As our congregation has discovered on peace demonstrations, conventional hymnody is largely useless; and we have found ourselves singing, ad infinitum, a few songs coming out of two renewal movements—the 1960s civil rights movement and the more recent charismatic movement.

We must pray for new bursts of creativity—and for lower standards! As the Anabaptists knew, many of us can write hymns. The quality can be humble, and we should expect to throw away much of what we write, but the hymns will be *ours*, expressing our experience of God in the world. A sample of what is possible is “Stop Fighting, and Know that I am God,” written by my son Andrew Kreider, based upon a correct translation of Psalm 46.10 (TEV), and appropriate for worship by a peace church in its normal place of worship or outside a nuclear base.⁶⁵ This song, based on a psalm text, has a chance to last. And it speaks now. It is an example of something that must become more common among us: hymn-writing as an act of resistance.

Third, experiencing God. The Anabaptists in their vulnerability knew that they could stand only if God upheld them. They talked repeatedly of God as their comforter; for good reason 2 Cor-



inthians 1.5 was one of their favorite verses. "The righteous God," they knew, "does not stop at mere words, but is present with us in his Spirit."⁶⁶ And the Spirit made them radiantly deviant—"bold and joyful, that we may bear reproach for his name."⁶⁷

Like the Anabaptists, we are beginning to recover the sense of the momentousness of worship. When we gather for corporate praise, God is present with us. Our thanksgiving is a retelling of his acts of concrete grace in our lives. As we confess our sin and fear, God binds our wounds, directs us toward his future, and gives us joy. In our intercessions we bring before God the agonies of the world, and of our selves and our communities. As we acknowledge God to be the Supreme King over all other authorities, the Holy Spirit exposes the alien spirits, the proud beasts, and the rebellious principalities and powers of our time. And who knows? If we're silent in God's presence and expect God to speak, we may hear living words that challenge our complacency and point ways forward in hopeful discipleship.

Like the Anabaptists who worshipped in prison, our church in London has found it possible to worship God in special ways in places where his authority is contradicted. Our Sunday services take place in a room which, during the week, is used by a bingo club and the Royal British Legion. Not many Mennonite churches are watched, as they worship, by the framed faces of

Lord Kitchener and Queen Elizabeth II! On several occasions we also have worshipped at nuclear bomber bases. What better place to get a vision of the spiritual conflict in the world, of our powerlessness save in God's power, and of God's restraining grace in giving us each day. Such an experience of worshipping God "on location," even if only occasionally, can transform the rest of our worship, both in and out of the church. It may even help to change the world. Our propagandists tell us that recent reductions in international tensions have come about because the West's nuclear forces have deterred Soviet aggression. This is unprovable. The world's nuclear arsenals may just as well seem less threatening today because God's people in many places were praying and worshipping, confessing as the Anabaptists did that "Jesus Christ is Lord."

Conversion, Scripture-reading, hymn-writing, worship—in all of these areas the Anabaptists hold out a vision for us. It is, I believe, a vision of utmost relevance for our time. It is a vision of integration, bringing back together elements that were perfectly fused in Jesus but which later generations of Christians have torn apart; it is a reintegration of spirituality and social nonconformity. What we need today, I am convinced, is not just a new encounter with God in worship and prayer; nor is it just a new form of radical obedience in the world. It is rather a new experience of

God producing communities of changed people in the world, to transform the world. This integration leads to struggle; it also leads to life. And people are drawn to it. Not in vast numbers, to be sure. Jesus himself knew what it was like to be abandoned by people who were interested in softer things, not the hard "words of eternal life" (Jn. 6.60-68). Similarly, the Anabaptists were conscious that theirs was "not so easy a faith, that they flock to us in crowds."⁶⁸ Nevertheless, men and women came to them and as we rediscover this integration they will come to us. People today are longing to hear Good News and to experience transcendence. They are hungry for hope; they are worried about their world. In Jesus they meet the one who brings worship and the world together, the one who can save them from sin and from disintegration. And Jesus is in our midst!

Not only in the midst of those of us who are lineal descendants of the Anabaptists, of course. In the 1990s this integration will be the common property of Christians from many traditions. Believers with charismatic and contemplative experiences of God, for example, will find that their piety becomes stale unless it is an empowering for obedient involvement in the world. Christian social activists, on the other hand, will discover that without a genuine encounter with God they cannot handle the despair that is within and around them. Believers from the "great traditions" will continue to appreciate the spiritual dynamite that is present in their liturgies. Take the Anglican liturgy, for example. A friend of mine, who was recently arrested for worshipping on the wrong side of the barbed-wire fence at an American nuclear base near Oxford, quoted at her trial from the eucharistic prayer in the *Book of Common Prayer*: "It is very meet, right, and our bounden duty, that we should *at all times and in all places* give thanks unto thee, O Lord . . ." A similar radicalism is implicit in the great *Te Deum*, a canticle sung every morning at Matins, in which Anglicans add their praises to those of their predecessors:

The glorious company of the Apostles
praise thee.

The goodly fellowship of the Prophets
praise thee.

The noble army of Martyrs praise thee.

Anglicans, as much as Anneken of Rotterdam, as much as any of us, can choose to mean what they sing, imitate

their forbears, and become a confessing church. The movement for radical integration is ecumenical.

By God's grace we Mennonites, in the Anabaptist tradition, may join this movement, too. If I am at all right in my reading of *Martyrs' Mirror*, the reality of a renewed discipleship, integrating spirituality and social nonconformity, is central to the Anabaptist witness. It is a vision that can be recaptured, and many are recapturing it. At times this happens when we humbly learn—and accept correction—from Christians in other traditions. At times it also happens when we reaffirm our own heritage.

Professor Willard Swartley of AMBS tells the following story.⁶⁹ At a recent meeting of the Society for Biblical Literature, Herald Press displayed a selection of its books. Among these was the English translation of *Martyrs' Mirror*. Professor Farmer, the New Testament scholar whom I mentioned earlier, approached the display. Swartley recalls, "His eyes roved over the various books and fell upon the *Martyrs' Mirror*. Thereupon he picked it up, began to look through it and then began reading extensively." After looking at the other books and conversing about martyrdom in the Early Church, Farmer told Swartley, "You stand in the right tradition." "I took this to mean," Swartley reported, "that he made an explicit connection between the Anabaptist tradition and the experience of the early Christians that lay behind the New Testament writings."

"You stand within the right tradition." As we in this issue re-examine the *Martyr's Mirror*, let us accept that pronouncement, not as a commendation, but as a call to renewal.

ENDNOTES

¹Thieleman Jansz van Braght, *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians who Baptized Only upon Confession of Faith*, trans. Joseph F. Sohm (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1951; henceforth *MM*), 10. The pagination in the second edition in the original Dutch language (*Het bloedigh Toneel of Martelaars-Spiegel der Doops-Gesinde of weerloose Christenen* [Amsterdam: Hieronymus Sweerts, et al., 1685]; henceforth *MS*) is in parentheses.

²*MM*, 10 (*MS*, I, A4). For additional comment, see Alan Kreider, "'The Servant is not Greater Than His Master': The Anabaptists and the Suffering Church," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 58 (1984): p. 5-29.

³*MM*, 8 (*MS*, I, A3).

⁴*MM*, 12 (*MS*, I, A4v).

⁵*MM*, 10-11 (*MS*, I, A4).

⁶In this paper I use the term Anabaptist to refer to the sixteenth-century radicals of the Reformation; for their seventeenth century heirs I use the

term Doopsgezinde. I have consciously limited myself to the Anabaptists of the Netherlands, and have excluded reference to materials which Van Braght includes dealing with Swiss and Central European Anabaptism.

⁷*MM*, 11 (*MS*, I, A4).

⁸I first encountered the idea that "spirituality" and "social nonconformity" are complementary realities in the renewal of the Church in conversation with Larry Miller of Strasbourg, France, in August 1981.

⁹*MM*, 852 (*MS*, II, 514).

¹⁰*MM*, 711 (*MS*, II, 354).

¹¹*MM*, 566 (*MS*, II, 181); 895 (II, 564); 613 (II, 239); 661 (II, 294); 915 (II, 587).

¹²*MM*, 454 (*MS*, II, 49).

¹³*MM*, 593 (*MS*, II, 214).

¹⁴*MM*, 614 (*MS*, II, 240); 659 (II, 292).

¹⁵*MM*, 915 (*MS*, II, 587).

¹⁶*MM*, 531 (*MS*, II, 138); 449 (II, 44); 926 (II, 599).

¹⁷*MM*, 511 (*MS*, II, 115).

¹⁸*MM*, 545 (*MS*, II, 155).

¹⁹*MM*, 567 (*MS*, II, 182).

²⁰*MM*, 634 (*MS*, II, 263).

²¹*MM*, 600 (*MS*, II, 223).

²²E.g., Carlos Mesters, "The Use of the Bible in Christian Communities of the Common People," in N. K. Gottwald, ed., *The Bible and Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983), 131.

²³W. R. Farmer, *Jesus and the Gospel: Tradition, Scripture and Canon* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 214. If this is true, Van Braght's intuition that "the whole volume of holy Scripture seems to be nothing else than a book of martyrs" was a shrewd one (*MM*, 12 [*MS*, I, A4v]).

²⁴Using *Biblical References in Anabaptist Writings* (compiled by E. T. Yoder and M. D. Hochstetler; Aylmer, Ontario: Pathway Publishers, n.d.) I have (with the assistance of Dr. Jocelyn Murray) totalled the scriptural quotations and allusions in the English translation (Sohm) of *Martyrs' Mirror*. The two Old Testament passages cited most frequently (which I list above in the text) were referred to 15 and 14 times respectively. The most frequently cited New Testament texts (Romans 8:18 and 2 Timothy 3:12, referred to 23 and 27 times respectively) similarly reflect the themes of comfort and confrontation.

²⁵*MM*, 724 (*MS*, II, 369).

²⁶*MM*, 738 (*MS*, II, 384).

²⁷*MM*, 653 (*MS*, II, 285).

²⁸*MM*, 692-693 (*MS*, II, 332).

²⁹*MM*, 531 (*MS*, II, 138).

³⁰*MM*, 772 (*MS*, II, 422); 986 (II, 668).

³¹*MM*, 913 (*MS*, II, 584).

³²*MM*, 469 (*MS*, II, 68).

³³*MM*, 486 (*MS*, II, 87).

³⁴*MM*, 743 (*MS*, II, 390).

³⁵*MM*, 505 (*MS*, II, 108).

³⁶*MM*, 560 (*MS*, II, 174).

³⁷*MM*, 712 (*MS*, II, 354).

³⁸*MM*, 911 (*MS*, II, 582).

³⁹For the Anabaptists' suspicion of *koopmanschap*, see also *MM*, 647 (*MS*, II, 278); 696 (II, 336); 813 (II, 469).

⁴⁰*MM*, 532 (*MS*, II, 139); 750 (II, 398); 942 (II, 618).

⁴¹*MM*, 559 (*MS*, II, 173).

⁴²*MM*, 522 (*MS*, II, 128).

⁴³*MM*, 715 (*MS*, II, 359).

⁴⁴*MM*, 493 (*MS*, II, 94).

⁴⁵*MM*, 456 (*MS*, II, 52).

⁴⁶*MM*, 837 (*MS*, II, 497).

⁴⁷*MM*, 453 (*MS*, II, 48).

⁴⁸*MM*, 534 (*MS*, II, 141).

⁴⁹*MM*, 602-604 (*MS*, II, 224-226); 747 (II, 394).

⁵⁰*MM*, 549 (*MS*, II, 160).

⁵¹A. L. E. Verheyden, *Anabaptism in Flanders, 1530-1650: A Century of Struggle*, Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History, 9 (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1961), 1.

⁵²*MM*, 555 (*MS*, II, 168).

⁵³*MM*, 487 (*MS*, II, 87).

⁵⁴*MM*, 987 (*MS*, II, 669).

⁵⁵*MM*, 594 (*MS*, II, 215).

⁵⁶*MM*, 529 (*MS*, II, 136).

⁵⁷*MM*, 469 (*MS*, II, 68).

⁵⁸*MM*, 804 (*MS*, II, 459).

⁵⁹*MM*, 798 (*MS*, II, 453).

⁶⁰*MM*, 925 (*MS*, II, 598).

⁶¹James and Marti Hefley, *By Their Blood: Christian Martyrs of the Twentieth Century* (Milford, Mi.: Mott Media, 1979), 589.

⁶²*MM*, 516 (*MS*, II, 120); 613-614 (II, 239).

⁶³Thomas Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation* (Minneapolis: The Liturgical Press, 1960), 88-89 cited by Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 28.

⁶⁴André Trocmé, *Jesus and the Nonviolent Revolution* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1973), chaps. 2-3. For the setting in which Trocmé developed his ideas, see Philip Hallie, *Leviathan Blood Be Shed* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979). Trocmé's thinking about the jubilee has been expanded and popularized by John H. Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), and has been tested and largely confirmed by two doctoral theses: R. B. Sloan, *The Favorable Year of the Lord: A Study of Jubiliary Theology in the Gospel of Luke* (Austin, Texas: Schola Press, 1977); D. W. Blosser, *Jesus and the Jubilee* (Unpub. Ph.D. thesis, University of St. Andrews, 1979).

⁶⁵In Andrew Kreider, *Let the Shout Go Up in Zion* (London, 1989), available from Metanoia Book Service, 14 Shepherds Hill, London N6 5AQ England.

⁶⁶*MM*, 463 (*MS*, II, 60).

⁶⁷*MM*, 486 (*MS*, II, 87).

⁶⁸*MM*, 1016 (*MS*, II, 703).

⁶⁹Letter from Willard Swartley to Alan Kreider, 26 March 1984.

A Meditation on Dirk Willems

by Joseph Liechty

When I was growing up, a visit to my grandmother's house sometimes included pulling out the *Martyrs' Mirror* and leafing through the heavy volume. A picture being worth a thousand words, and a gory picture worth even more to a pre-teen boy, I mostly turned from one to another of the fifty-five vivid etchings that illustrate the book: Stephen's look of horror as he was stoned to death to become the first Christian martyr; Matthew, the gospel writer, spread-eagled and staked to the ground through feet and hands, looking up at the cleaver-wielding executioner about to chop off his head; several men feeding an already roaring fire set under a brazen ox, and inside the ox a blurred glimpse of faithful Antipas, hands bound together or clasped in prayer; Geleyn Corneliss, a Dutch Anabaptist, suspended from the rafters by a rope around his right wrist with a bell-shaped weight dangling from his left ankle, while his three torturers enjoy a game of cards, their whips and burning irons momentarily laid aside; two boys, a baby and a teenager, searching through a pile of ashes—the ashes are the remains of their Anabaptist mother, Maeyken Wens, and they are looking for the screw her jailers had driven through her tongue and palate to silence her.

By these gruesome pictorial standards, however, the illustration that most captivated me was tame indeed. In it two men stretch toward each other,

one man almost kneeling on an ice-covered body of water as he reaches down, the other struggling in the water and reaching up. "Dirk Willems Saving His Captor's Life," said the caption.

* * * * *

Apart from the story behind this one illustration, we know very little about Dirk Willems. He was an Anabaptist who lived in the Netherlands in the middle of the 1500s, which was a dangerous place and time to be an Anabaptist, because Anabaptism was illegal and all too frequently the penalty was death. Dirk was baptized in an Anabaptist home in Rotterdam sometime between the ages of fifteen and twenty; later other people were baptized in his own home in Asperen, where he held secret Anabaptist meetings. Beyond this all is conjecture, the most reasonable one being that Dirk was probably single, because we have no mention of a spouse or children as is the case in so many other stories from the *Martyrs' Mirror*. Paltry as these few facts are, however, we are more than compensated by the richness of the one story that has come down to us.

In 1569, late in the winter, Dirk found himself discovered as an Anabaptist, with a thief-catcher coming to arrest him. When Dirk realized what was happening, he ran for his life. Pursued by the thief-catcher, Dirk came to a body of water still coated with ice. After making his way across in great

peril, he realized that the thief-catcher had fallen through the ice. Dirk then set out back across the ice to drag the thief-catcher safely to shore.

Naturally enough, the thief-catcher wanted to release Dirk. But the local burgomaster, who seems to have appeared on the scene, reminded the thief-catcher of his oath, that he would faithfully deliver criminals to justice. As much as the thief-catcher may have wanted to release him, Dirk was a criminal and to break an oath was a great crime, so the thief-catcher reluctantly bound Dirk in prison.

There Dirk was interrogated and tortured in an effort to make him renounce his faith. But he steadfastly endured, and in May he was tried and found guilty of having been rebaptized, of holding secret meetings in his home, and of allowing baptisms there, all of which he freely confessed, and "all of which," read the court sentence,

is contrary to our holy Christian faith, and to the decrees of his royal majesty, and ought not to be tolerated, but severely punished, for an example to others; therefore, we the aforesaid judges, having, with mature deliberation of council, examined and considered all that was to be considered in this matter, have condemned and do condemn . . . in the behalf, of his royal majesty, as Count of Holland, the aforesaid Dirk Willems, prisoner, persisting obstinately in his opinion, [to] be executed with fire, until death ensues; and declare all his property confiscated, for the benefit of his royal majesty.

Dirk's death was exceptionally painful. As he stood in the fire, a strong east wind blew the flames away from his upper body so that his death was long delayed. The same wind carried his voice to the next town, where the people heard him cry more than seventy times, "O my Lord; my God." As Dirk lingered in the fire, the judge or bailiff present was finally "filled with sorrow and regret." Wheeling his horse around so that he saw no more, he ordered the executioner, "Dispatch the man with a quick death," although how this command was fulfilled, our chronicler was never able to learn. He knew only that Dirk's "life was consumed by the fire, and that he passed through the conflict with great steadfastness, having commended his soul into the hands of God."

* * * * *

When I first encountered this story almost thirty years ago, my attention was riveted on what happened to Dirk: for his great goodness he received in return imprisonment, torture, and death! That he should suffer such a fate utterly violated my childish sense of justice and fair play. My notion of how the world worked was undone, and I would need to find a new understanding. For many children of other times and places, perhaps Dirk's fate would have seemed no great surprise, maybe even predictable, but for a middle-class North American child, it was a stunning revelation.

The story that moved me long ago has continued to haunt me. In the absence of Dirk's own reflections, my quest for elusive understanding has taken the form of attempting an imaginary reconstruction of his inner life: what thoughts

and feelings, convictions and impulses, could have led Dirk to act as he did? Of course this involves venturing far into the realm of conjecture—another imagination could yield a quite different reconstruction. And yet the conjecture is not unbounded, because I have tried to keep my reflections faithful to what I know of Anabaptism and of human motivations.

While trying to understand Dirk's story, I have come to make some strong claims about its significance. I believe that in the *Martyrs' Mirror*, a book filled with heroic examples of Christian obedience and conformity to Christ, the story of Dirk Willems saving his pursuer's life stands on a higher plane; I believe that Dirk's simple action is the perfect fulfillment and embodiment of some of the great strengths of Anabaptism; I believe that in the perfection of



his fulfillment he transcended and healed some great weaknesses of Anabaptism; and I believe that in this action he obeyed Jesus' commandment to be perfect as his heavenly father is perfect—that is, to love fully and indiscriminately—more completely than any other person of whom I am aware.

This last phrase, "of whom I am aware," bears some emphasizing, my awareness in these matters being very imperfect. My purpose for making such bold claims and sharp distinctions is to establish clearly the contours and landmarks of the realm in which Dirk travelled. Having accomplished this, however, I have no desire to set Dirk up on some kind of heavenly throne and then to defend his reign against all pretenders. Instead I hope to discover that others have walked the same way, and I hope that knowledge of the way and its pilgrims will help to raise the sights of other Christians, also.

* * * * *

1569 was a bad year to be an Anabaptist. The *Martyrs' Mirror* lists quite a number of martyrs, some of whom lived close enough to Dirk's home that he would surely have known of their deaths. I imagine that the prospect of death was constantly with him, a steady part of his inner life, and I imagine that he frequently asked himself, "What would I do if . . . ?" or, more likely in his circumstances, "What will I do when . . . ?" His ruminations must have been shaped to a great extent by the teaching of the little Anabaptist communities, one of which met in his home. With arrest and death ever-present dangers, the Anabaptists spent considerable time preparing one another to meet them. Another source of instruction was letters from prison. Just as Paul had encouraged the early Christians with his prison epistles, so the jailed Anabaptists wrote letters, chiefly trying to make sense of their experience in biblical terms and to comfort and exhort their fellow believers.

Steadfastly enduring trials for the faith was one constant theme of the prison writers. A young purse-maker and minister of the word named Hendrik Alewijns, after his arrest late in 1568, wrote many letters to his wife, his three small children, and "the beloved children of God in Zeeland." "And since God is so faithful in all His promises," he reminded them, "we press straight on with righteousness, as

though we beheld God and saw no adversaries; as though we saw no decree, fire, water, or sword." He alerted his readers to a passage from John: "There is no fear in love." By this he meant them to understand, "such fear as departs from the way of rectitude. Yea, such fearless ones run through patience . . . not out of, but into the conflict that is set before us, and look not at the dreadful tyranny, but unto Jesus, the Captain, the Author and Finisher of our faith."

If Dirk did not read Hendrik Alewijns's letter, he likely read the same teaching in some other letter; and if he did not read it in another letter, then he certainly heard much the same teaching in Anabaptist meetings, for these teachings marked an Anabaptist consensus. They did not seek to escape conflict, or to skirt around it; instead they simply did not look "at the dreadful tyranny, but unto Jesus."

Such words applied mostly to those who were already prisoners, not to the free. Alewijns and other Anabaptists did not mean that they sought persecution, nor did they deny themselves the right to flee from it. Menno Simons himself had slipped away from capture on many occasions, sometimes by most ingenious methods that had nothing whatsoever to do with running "not out of, but into the conflict that is set before us." So I imagine that when Dirk considered how he might respond to capture, he conjured up an array of options, ranging from fleeing at one extreme to calm acceptance of arrest at the other. But however he may have anticipated responding to attempted capture, I imagine he prayed that once captured he would be granted the strength of faith to endure interrogation and torture steadfastly and to die with as much dignity and grace as circumstances allowed.

Regardless of what Dirk may have envisioned, when arrest was imminent the very simple, very basic desire to live asserted itself and he ran for his life. And now I try to imagine what thoughts filled his mind as he ran, followed closely by the thief-catcher. Did fear and danger dull his mind or make it keen? In either case his thoughts must have been dominated by the effort to save his life. But I imagine that at least in some small corner of his consciousness, he was considering what he had done in fleeing and what he might do if caught. If he ran now from fear of

capture, would he be able to brave torture? Such doubts could only have heightened his desire to escape, because whatever about the right to flee, if these Anabaptists had an unforgivable sin, it was to renounce the faith, even under torture.

Such tormenting thoughts must have reduced him to a state of great fear, so great that when he came to a body of water, he ran across the thin ice, risking immediate death by drowning rather than submitting to the prospect of capture, imprisonment, interrogation, torture, and death by fire. But having saved his own life, Dirk turned back across the ice to save his drowning pursuer.

I said earlier that as a child my attention seized first on Dirk's sad fate, death as the reward for virtue. But that shock faded, and soon my focus turned to this earlier point, less dramatic but more mysterious, when Dirk turned back across the ice. Even now it is this action that I can hardly comprehend, that I return to time and time again.

I am almost surprised that Dirk even noticed his pursuer had fallen through the ice. Given that his fear and his desire to live were great enough to propel him across crumbling ice, I would have expected these same forces to drive him forward, ears closed and eyes fixed ahead. And if he heard cracking ice or a cry for help, or if from the corner of his eye he glimpsed the thief-catcher disappearing through the ice, even so I would have expected the desire to live to send him fleeing on to safety.

But Dirk did notice, and now we must ask ourselves, why did he turn back? I believe that turning back was not a rational ethical decision, it was an intuitive response. In fact the properties of thin ice may almost have dictated intuitive action by leaving him only a very short time to respond. Often when a person falls through the ice, each effort to cling to the edge only breaks off another piece, and this is never more true than with the weak and crumbling ice of late winter. But let us imagine that the thief-catcher somehow caught hold of a piece of solid ice and that Dirk had at least a few moments to ask himself, what should I do? I still imagine that his decision was more intuitive than rational: I believe that no combination of mental calculations was likely to take Dirk back across that ice.

No religious or ethical system would

require Dirk to do what he did. We have recent examples of Islam as conceived by the Ayatollah Khomeini requiring Iranian soldiers to engage in suicidal attacks on the enemy, and many other ideologies, including Christian ones, have required or at least honored similar actions. But most religious systems and ideologies, so far from requiring what Dirk did, scarcely have at hand the concepts necessary to understand it.

Perhaps Christianity, with its teaching on loving the enemy, comes closest to requiring Dirk's behavior. But let us consider "love your enemies" understood as an ethical command. Where would this have led Dirk? He had no reason to believe he could save the thief-catcher—the more likely conclusion would have been two deaths, his own and the thief-catcher's, and loving the enemy does not demand futile suicide. In those places where Jesus discusses loving the enemy, none of his examples come close to requiring that one die for the enemy. Furthermore, if the etching that accompanies Dirk's story in the *Martyrs' Mirror* is at all historically correct (as it may or may not be), there were others on hand, the thief-catcher's compatriots, to save him. Who could condemn Dirk if he had seen the thief-catcher's plight as their business?

So considered in a general way, ethical reflection seems unlikely to have led Dirk back across the ice. It seems even less likely when we consider the particular ideas and images that would likely have come to his mind. Perhaps chief among these would have been the doctrine of two kingdoms, one of the basic motifs of the Anabaptist world view. One Anabaptist martyr put it this way:

There were from the beginning of the world two classes of people, a people of God and a people of the devil. But the children of God have always been persecuted and dispersed, so that they have always been in a minority, and sometimes very few in number, so that they had to hide themselves in caves and dens . . . but the ungodly have always been powerful, and have prevailed.

Some version of this idea was the common mental property of all Anabaptists, which they conveyed by many images: light and dark, lambs and wolves, people of God and people of the devil, and so on. What is crucial here is to understand what Dirk saw when he looked back on the thief-catcher in the water. He saw not just a man near death, but

a devouring, ravening wolf; he saw not just an individual, but a manifestation of the kingdom of darkness, an agent of the devil himself.

Anabaptists took another of their common images from the book of Revelation. The martyrs, slain for the word of God and for their testimony, wait now under God's altar in heaven, crying out, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" These words re-echoed in the hearts of waiting and suffering Anabaptists. So when Dirk looked back, what did he see? He saw the answer, or at least one answer, to the martyrs' question—God was delivering justice here and now.

Or Dirk could have sought another biblical image, this one from the very heart of salvation history, the story of God delivering his people from bondage in Egypt. Dirk was himself the people of Egypt; the water he had crossed was his Red Sea; his miraculous path across the ice was the parting of the waters for him; and the floundering thief-catcher was horse and rider thrown into the sea. Dirk, standing free on the bank and watching the waters close around his pursuer, might have sung with Moses and the people of Israel,

I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;
the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.

The Lord is my strength and my song,
and he has become my salvation

In brief, Dirk had available to him sound biblical images to explain what had happened and to more than justify his running on and leaving the thief-catcher to his fate. Ethical reflection was most unlikely to have sent Dirk back across the ice. Nor would running on to safety have lessened his stature among his Anabaptist brothers and sisters—they might very well have repeated his story as a cautionary tale against their persecutors, as they did with the story of a judge who was stricken down after sentencing some Anabaptists. And if Dirk had escaped that day but later suffered the same martyr's death, I am confident that his story would still have been told in the *Martyrs' Mirror* with the same reverence and for the same reason: "as an instructive example to all pious Christians of this time, and to the everlasting disgrace of the tyrannous papists."

One other possible motivation needs to be considered. Could Dirk have cal-

culated this action as a way to save his life? After all, it was by no means certain that capture meant death. Not all Anabaptists were sentenced to death, and even when they were, at least some escaped, sometimes by measures as simple as pushing down the prison walls. Perhaps Dirk calculated that an act of mercy could further increase the possibility that he would not die.

If the course of justice can be harsh and capricious today, however, it is as nothing when compared to the justice of those days. Dirk knew that absolutely nothing he could do would ensure his safety. He could make a perfectly grovelling recantation, he could become to the best of his ability the very person his inquisitors wished him to be, and for his pains he might well receive nothing more than a bag of gunpowder around his neck to hasten his death in the fire. One prominent Anabaptist leader, Gillis van Aachen, collapsed completely under interrogation, recanted all that he had believed, and even volunteered to go back to the places he had preached to confess his errors publicly. He was executed anyway. A Dutch Anabaptist, a skillful painter, complied with the request of the bailiff who was torturing him to paint the bailiff assuming "the attitude of Solomon." He too was executed. Dirk knew that no act of mercy, however great, could guarantee his life.

In any case, as Dirk stood on the far shore from his pursuers, his situation did not require any maneuvering for advantage. He was free now, and given the thief-catcher's plight, no one else would be following him across the water immediately. With the time he had gained and with the absence of centralized computer files of criminals and universal means of identification, recapture was far from inevitable. His crime in the Netherlands was not crime everywhere; Dirk could have fled for other territories and reasonably hoped for a long and peaceful life. All considerations of self-interest dictated that he leave the thief-catcher and flee onwards.

By such reasoning I am led to conclude that Dirk's decision to go back across the ice was more intuitive than rational. It was more an expression of his character, of who he truly was, than of what he believed he ought to be. It was an expression of those ideas that had come to form his deepest character.

Examining the usual range of sacrificial actions can take us some distance

in the direction of Dirk's action. Perhaps the most common form of sacrifice is that of a parent for a child, and moving examples abound. Another common form of sacrifice is a friend dying for a friend. I recall a news story from the Vietnam War in which an American soldier threw his body on a grenade, thus saving the lives of his comrades, and war has frequently inspired such heroism. A less populated level of sacrificial action would include people who have given their lives for someone unknown to them. A justly celebrated example is Father Maximilian Kolb, who chose to die in place of another innocent man in a Nazi concentration camp.

But when we move on to search for examples of people risking their lives for enemies, our findings become scarce indeed. A few years ago the South African Anglican bishop, Desmond Tutu, risked his life to save a suspected police informer from an angry mob. That is remarkable, but it is still a case of the powerful acting to save the weak, and it leaves us a long way from what Dirk Willems did.

We may understand better just how radical was Dirk's action if we transpose the Tutu and Vietnam stories into parallels of Dirk's story. In the Tutu story, Tutu himself would have no place, and we must imagine instead that the suspected informer, running from the mob intent on taking his life, almost reaches safety, but then turns back to save one of his pursuers; and we must imagine that our American soldier is deep inside Viet Cong territory, fleeing what he expects to be torture in a POW camp, when he risks his life to save a Viet Cong soldier. These transpositions are difficult even to imagine, and in real life I am aware of no example equivalent to the story of Dirk Willems.

If Dirk's behavior is best accounted for as intuitive, and if his behavior falls well outside the usual range of sacrificial actions, then how can we explain what he did? I am convinced that the only force strong enough to take Dirk back across that ice was an extraordinary outpouring of love. And the only kind of love I know that extends to enemies is the love taught and lived by Jesus.

"Greater love has no man than this," said Jesus, "that a man lay down his life for his friends." But when his earliest followers struggled to understand the power and mystery of his death they found themselves extending

his definition of love's limits, for they believed that Jesus had died for them "when we were God's enemies." If we are to account for Dirk's action in meaningful terms, as other than a random impulse, we must allow that precisely this definition of love—a love that reaches so far as to die for enemies—had shaped Dirk's character to such an extent that in circumstances of the gravest personal danger he was able to express his love in an intuitive response.

But how had this notion of love so formed Dirk? If his action was truly so singular as I am arguing, then we can never finally know, in the absence of similar incidents for comparison, if his action was the product of forces and internal processes unique to him, or if he built on a bedrock of experience and character shared with others, unique as his personal creative action may have been. One possibility we must always hold open, then, is that although we can identify the love that was the source of his action, how he came to love in this way must remain an impenetrable mystery. With this in mind, the other possibility is to search beneath Dirk's action for possible foundations of his love.

In a broad way Dirk stood on common ground with all who have ever risked their lives for truth or for another. In addition to the variety of sacrificial behaviors already discussed, a whole range of principled actions also merit attention. Here we must include revolutionaries and state soldiers, conscientious objectors in times of war, political dissidents in many regimes, missionaries in hostile cultures—in fact, almost everyone who has ever taken a definite stance in dangerous times. The ground narrows when we include only those who have acted from love, but if we allow that some have acted with love as no part of their motivation and that many have acted from a complex mix of motives, we can still affirm that many of these people have acted in ways they truly believed would best serve the common good.

The ground on which Dirk stands contracts dramatically when we include only those who taught the love of enemies. But even here Dirk stood in both a tradition and a community. Since the community was the mediator of the tradition to Dirk, we may safely confine our examination to Dirk's Anabaptist brothers and sisters.

As a starting point, we need to ask a difficult question: did the Anabaptists

love their enemies? We may be sure they taught it. They were never ones to shirk Jesus' hard sayings, so if Jesus taught the love of enemies, they did, too. They had also the example of Jesus in the way of the cross, which the Anabaptists generally understood as requiring the willing, nonviolent acceptance of suffering, as Jesus had done. But voluntary suffering was not the most remarkable aspect of the cross—in fact by this standard Jesus, praying so fiercely that God would "remove this cup from me" that the sweat fell from him "like great drops of blood," perhaps comes off second best to the calm of Socrates. What is unparalleled in the way of the cross is that Jesus died for his enemies, so here was another pointer for the Anabaptists toward the love of enemies. In an intimate and inward way, their frequently cited experience of having been loved by God before they loved him must also have reinforced the teaching and example of Jesus. At very least they had thrown away their swords, so they could not respond to their enemies in the conventional ways.

But did they really love their enemies? To move closer to an answer we must understand that "enemies" was no mere spiritual figure of speech for the Anabaptists, because they were a people at war. It was spiritual warfare, but warfare nonetheless, and as with physical warfare, there is a price to be paid. If the cost of spiritual warfare is not exactly the same as in physical warfare, it is at least analogous.

Like a nation at war, Anabaptists needed to ask themselves, how can we maintain our identity and bind ourselves together in unity through the stresses of conflict? To this question the Anabaptists had some strong and positive answers. Community, discipleship, and pacifism, themes central to the genius of Anabaptism, shaped the Anabaptists into communities united in their desire to follow Jesus in the way of the cross.

But the Anabaptists also had a negative way of maintaining group cohesion. Warfare compels us to regard our enemies as less than human. One force uniting civilians behind the war effort is shared revulsion at the barbarous enemy, a feeling often nurtured by the state; soldiers cannot kill efficiently if they see the enemy as ordinary people, not too different from you and me, so military training is arranged in brutal accordance. In a very similar way the Anabaptists, engaged in spiritual war-

fare, were inclined to dehumanize their enemies by identifying them as entirely evil. The means by which they did this was their doctrine of two kingdoms: they were children of light, their enemies children of darkness; they were lambs, their enemies wolves.

In our age, when dualistic thinking is condemned as the root of many evils, the doctrine of two kingdoms has neglected merits. I would argue that without some form of a two kingdoms doctrine we are unlikely to understand fully Jesus' teachings or actions, the New Testament world view, the nature of the struggle between good and evil, or the demands of discipleship. More to the point, the Anabaptists certainly required the doctrine to make sense of their world.

But the two kingdoms doctrine on its own makes a sorely deficient world view. Christians in the Anabaptists' position are called to do the nearly impossible: to see their persecutors as both wolves and lost lambs, as both servants of evil and confused neighbors. That the Anabaptists, or anyone else in a similar situation, could have maintained such a posture consistently seems impossible. The contempt for enemies inherent in two kingdom thinking, coupled with their bitter experience, must have stained their souls.

Warfare exacts another price, also. We are rarely in control of our own destinies, but never less so than in times of war. The forces humans have unleashed now defy human control; the average person is simply swept along in a chaotic torrent of events, while even those who believe themselves to be in control can have no sure knowledge that the results they intend will be the ones produced. Opportunities for considered, decisive action are rare, and soldiers and civilians alike can do little more than react to ever shifting circumstances.

This was precisely the situation of the Anabaptists. It must have seemed that all the terms of life were being dictated to them, and they must simply respond as well and faithfully as they could. The battle could hardly have been less equal as the Anabaptists struggled against the combined forces of Church and State with nothing more than spiritual weapons. When the weak attempt to love their powerful enemies, the results must be primarily passive and internal—the Anabaptists would not take up the sword, and they could only pray that

they might maintain their freedom from their oppressors by refusing to hate them. Always hunted and sometimes on the run, they had no leisure to ask themselves, what can we do to express enemy-love in a positive way? If they could resist taking up the sword, if they could resist the spirit-deforming influence of hatred, they had accomplished much.

In these circumstances, the moment when Dirk stands poised between running on and turning back holds a more than personal significance. The opportunity before him is a rare one, and the choice he makes will reflect not only on him but on his brothers and sisters; he is choosing for all the Anabaptists who never had a choice, either to run to freedom or to act on love for their enemies, who never had a chance to do more with their love than to resist the urge to hate, the desire to take up the sword. The path Dirk takes will be the testimony for a whole community of how deeply they have been penetrated by the love for enemies inherent in the cross they have chosen to bear.

In the next moment, when Dirk has chosen to turn back, he stands on high and holy ground, where the things we normally hold apart are bound together. In this moment Dirk has accomplished the almost impossible, he has seen the thief-catcher as both an agent of the devil *and* a helpless human brother. Only now is he free to fulfill the call to love his enemy—after all, lambs do not save wolves. He stands alone, and yet in the company of a great cloud of witnesses; he has acted on his own, and yet, perhaps, for his Anabaptist brothers and sisters, also.

But even with the scene clearly before our eyes, when we have understood as well as we are able, a veil remains drawn around the heart of what has happened, for we can never know what to Dirk would have mattered most, the mystery of what has transpired between him and his God. I expect that if we could ask Dirk we would hear, "Not I, but Christ in me," and yet if Dirk was simply obeying what could not be disobeyed his act has little meaning. But perhaps on this ground to obey and to choose have been bound together, also. In my imagination I can only resolve it thus: as Dirk walks back across the ice, he is sustained but not compelled by the hand of God.

* * * * *

When I was a child, the etching of Dirk Willems and the thief-catcher had

an almost mesmerizing effect on me. As if I were controlling a movie projector, I repeated the scene over and over, imagining Dirk trudging from the shore back across the ice to perform his heroic duty. And when he reached the broken edge of ice, I imagined him pressed down to save his tormentor, staggering to his knees as if under the heavy, heavy weight of a cross. So cinematic were my imaginings that they often had an accompanying score, usually a martyr hymn. Sometimes in church we sang an Anabaptist hymn predating even Dirk by forty years.

Christ's servants follow Him to death,
And give their bodies life and breath
On cross and rack and pyre.
As gold is tried and purified
They stand the test of fire.

In such terms did I understand Dirk Willems.

Today I think of Dirk quite differently. Still he moves at the same measured pace, for there is no reason to hurry. The meaning of what he is doing was established the moment he turned back, regardless of the result, and no haste will improve his tormentor's chances of rescue. But now I see Dirk walking lightly and freely, doubly blessed by the freedom of his action and by the sustaining hand of God. When he reaches the edge of the ice, I no longer see him stumbling under a great weight, I see him sinking to his knees in an act of worship; now if there is to be a score at all, it will be a simple song of praise. On the ground where Dirk walks, praise and obedience are among those things bound together, and in his action they cannot be distinguished.

When I search for scriptures to help me understand what Dirk did, I go where I have always gone, to the hard sayings of Jesus and to the cross. But now I search for other passages as well, ones that speak of extravagant praise. The gospel of Mark records the story of a woman who poured a jar of costly ointment over Jesus' head. The disciples were indignant at this appalling waste, but Jesus rebuked them, saying, "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her." Like this woman, Dirk Willems has done a beautiful thing for Jesus, and wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, it is good that what he has done should be told in memory of him.

John Foxe's Vision of Printing and Progress

by Keith L. Sprunger

In the fifteenth century, Christian Europe entered the typographic age. Across the centuries history had moved from an "oral culture" (the spoken word), to a "scribal or writing culture" (the written word), to a "print culture" (the printed word). The Protestant Reformation followed soon after the invention of printing. Historians have debated the issue about whether there was a causal relation between printing and Protestantism. A good case can be made for some kind of close relationship between the two movements. Protestantism and printing in the era of the printed word interacted with and energized one another. The Protestant Reformers skillfully utilized the printing press in the advance of their cause. "Printing and Protestantism seem to go together naturally," Elizabeth Eisenstein has written.¹

Printing helped to change the world, and for those who approved of the direction of change, printing produced "progress." In the Renaissance-Reformation era there was a high priority on getting the Bible and other good books into the vernacular languages and into the hands of the people. The Reformers taught the necessity of learning to read. Renaissance humanists saw printing as the tool of an educational reform; the Protestants saw printing as more of an evangelistic tool for the advance of religion. The goals overlapped and reinforced one another. The humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1536) wrote in the preface of his Greek edition of the New

Testament (1516) that he "would wish that the husbandman may sing parts of them at his plough." He saw his Greek edition as the inspiration for many new translations of the Bible into the languages of the common people. Every plowboy would be whistling the Psalms as he plowed the furrows.² Thus was born the hope of educational-religious progress through literacy and printing. According to Myron P. Gilmore, this hope "has recurred again and again in western thought and has remained one of the outstanding characteristics of the evolution of European civilization. It appeared in the early sixteenth century, in the Age of Enlightenment and again among those liberal utilitarians and devotees of progress in the nineteenth century who were the heirs of the Enlightenment."³

William Tyndale (1492-1536), the English Protestant contemporary of Erasmus, translated the New Testament into English. His goal was similar to Erasmus' but more focused on religious faith. He wrote: If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more scripture than thou dost" (speaking to the prelates).⁴ For the Protestants, printing produced religious progress. Although Erasmus' vision was broader, encompassing educational reform as well as religious salvation, Tyndale's words and goals closely echoed Erasmus'.

The clearest statement of the relationship of religion and printing, from the

Protestant side, came from John Foxe (1517-77), the master religious historian of England. He was the author of *Acts and Monuments* (1563 and many editions thereafter), a masterpiece of English Protestant martyrology. By highlighting the role of printing in his *Acts and Monuments*, he provided the historical framework for the proper Protestant appreciation of this invention. Moreover, Foxe was not only the writer of books, but himself was involved in the printing operations. He worked off and on as a compositor; and, while his books were in press, he had regular work at least once a week in the office of John Day of London. That was "our printing treadmill." The alliance between Christian author and Christian printer was well illustrated in the Foxe-Day connection: "Wherein we haue much to prayse God for such good bookes left to the Church, and also for such Printers in preseruing by their industrie and charges such bookes from perishing."⁵

Foxe was as much theologian as historian. His *Acts and Monuments*, commonly known as *The Book of Martyrs*, acknowledged God's powerful sovereign actions as the moving force in human history. Those who withstood God were enemies of Him and of His church; indeed they were persecutors and murderers. One was with God or against God. Foxe by faith discerned a providential scheme of Christian history that proceeded through five ages, beginning with Christ. The fifth age, the age

Title page of the first volume of the three-volume, folio, 1684 edition of Foxe's Book of Martyrs.

Acts and Monuments
OF
MATTERS
MOST
Special and Memorabile,
Happening in the
CHURCH:
WITH AN
Univerfal HISTORY
Of the same.

Wherein is set forth at Large, the whole Race and Course of the CHURCH,
from the Primitive Age to these later Times of Ours, with the Bloody Times,
Horrible Troubles, and Great Persecutions against the true MARTYRS of Christ,

Sought and Wrought as well by Heathen Emperors, as now lately practised by *Romish*
Prelates, especially in this Realm of *England* and *Scotland*.

Now again, as it was Recognized, Perused, and Recommended to the Studious
Reader, by the Author,

M^r J O H N F O X.

Whereunto are annexed certain Additions of like PERSECUTIONS which
have happened in these Later Times.

To which also is added the LIFE of the AUTHOR both in *Latine* and *English*.

The Ninth Edition.

Apoc. 7. *Salus sedenti super Thronum & Agno.*

L O N D O N:

Printed for the Company of STATIONERS, MDCLXXXIV.

of Reformation, ran from the year 1300 to the time of Queen Elizabeth. In this fifth age of history Foxe emphasized the importance of Wycliffe, Protestantism, and among other factors, the inventions of gunpowder and the printing press.⁶ He himself lived in this fifth age.

Foxe's history of the "latter 300 yeares," the fifth age, contained a spirited essay on printing, "The Benefit and Invention of Printing." He placed printing chronologically at the year 1450, just before the fall of Constantinople. Like all good events, the invention of printing was a "divine and miraculous" gift from God. In the spirit of his forerunner Luther, who also sanctified printing, Foxe believed that God caused the invention of printing for the purpose of greater communication with mankind. Printing was one of those rare and extraordinary gifts, like the Pentecost gift of tongues. In olden times God spake through the miracle of many tongues to all peoples; now the Holy Ghost speaks "in innumerable sorts of Books." Regarding printing, "without all doubt God himself was the ordainer and disposer thereof."⁷ With what result?

Foxe identified primarily three blessed fruits of printing: (1) The advancement of learning, enlightenment, and truth; (2) the reduced cost of books, so that many more people can afford to read, and (3) the speedy dissemination of knowledge. Because of these benefits to the Gospel, the art of printing can surely be a ministry of books.⁸

Underlying Foxe's appreciation of printing was a powerful love of Protestantism and a loathing of Catholicism. Printing's enlightenment and truth was the doctrine of Protestantism, and Foxe's enemy of truth was the Catholic church. Because printing and Protestantism were so much in step, Foxe deduced that the Catholic church must hate printing and books. Obviously, the Pope survived only by keeping people in ignorance and darkness. When heroic voices like Hus and Jerome of Prague rose up, the old church persecuted them, the better to entangle and tyrannize the world ("either the Pope is Antichrist, or else that Antichrist is near Cousin to the Pope"). In the fifteenth century, at the moment of extreme need, papal persecutions everywhere, God called forth printing, whereby He began to work for his Church, not with Sword and Target to subdue his exalted adversary, but

with Printing, Writing and Reading to convince darkness by light, error by truth, ignorance by learning." With so many printing presses now in existence, the pope can never again hope to monopolize the flow of information, even through outward repression. Though "tongues dare not speak, yet the hearts of Men daily (no doubt) be instructed through the benefit of Printing."⁹ When people freely have access to the doctrines of truth, Foxe confidently assumed, they will flee from Popish superstitions.

"God hath opened the Press to preach." Foxe gave several historical examples. "When *Erasmus* wrote and *Frobenius* Printed, what a blow thereby was given to all Friars and Monks in the world." Then came "the Pen of *Luther*," and his truth would never cease.¹⁰ In Luther's Germany, the books went to the people in their own language, "that all people may see and read upon them; and so upon the sight of the Books, they lightly follow the true light of Gods word." This Protestant light came bravely to "whole Cities and Countries."¹¹ With the printing press in action, the Pope's days are surely numbered, because every printing press is a battering ram, or a blockhouse, against "the high Castle of St. Angel." Foxe prophesied: "Either the Pope must abolish Knowledge and Printing, or Printing at length will root him out." Popes and priests are ever the enemies of printing, for their power depends upon "lack of knowledge and ignorance of simple Christians."¹² Foxe's historical writing was infused with confident visions of victory and an heroic new age.

The central theme of Foxe's essay on printing, certainly, was the advancement of Protestantism because of the printing press. Other fruits of printing were also sure to follow. Printed books were cheaper to produce and more available. In former times hand-copied books were so expensive "that few could attain to the Buying, fewer to the Reading and Studying thereof; which Books now by the means of this Art, are made easie unto all Men." Foxe recalled how one Englishman, Nicolas Bulward, in the reign of Henry VI had paid the fabulous price of four marks and forty pence for one New Testament, but now that same amount would buy forty books.¹³ Another blessing of printing was that authors could write and disseminate their writings much

swifter than in olden times, to the wholesome benefit of mankind.

The Press in one day will do in Printing
That none in one year can do in writing.

In short, printing books leads to more reading, "so Reading brought Learning, Learning shewed Light, by the brightness whereof blind Ignorance was suppressed, Error detected, and finally Gods Glory with Truth of his Word advanced." On this splendid note, Foxe ended his discourse on printing. "And thus much for the worthy commendation of Printing."¹⁴ Foxe's Christian paean in praise of printing foreshadows the future prophets of progress, who in their more secular ways saw printing as a historical turning point for the better.

At many other points in the *Acts and Monuments*, Foxe pointed out some excellent effects of printing, nearly always with a slap at the Papists. In England the popish prelates opposed printing and, consequently, reformation. In the reign of King Henry VIII, Foxe highlighted William Tyndale and Thomas Cromwell as keen Englishmen who understood the true connection between printing and reform. Although opposed in their good works, both persevered. Tyndale was forced abroad into exile, but from the far and near places of the Continent, he sent back books. His books "being compiled, published, and sent over into *England*, it cannot be spoken what a door of light they opened to the eyes of the whole *English* Nation, which before was many years shut up in darkness." Did the English receive the printed word with gladness? Most honest English people welcomed the biblical word, but the English bishops, like popish prelates everywhere, resisted the books. "Darkness hateth light."¹⁵

The English Reformation at last triumphed through the leadership of Henry VIII and Edward VI. Then came another dark chapter. Queen Mary in 1553 made a desperate try to re-impose the Catholic religion upon the nation. With her tyrannous reign came fires, banishments, and new proclamations against books. The Marian persecutions provided Foxe with many of his most vivid martyr stories. Again and again faithful Christians suffered horribly for the sake of loving and reading the English Bible and other godly books. Popish books of "manifest Idolatry" contended with Protestant books.¹⁶

Finally, in 1558 came the accession of Queen Elizabeth, the English Deb-

orah, and Foxe's chronicle of persecutions ceased. Almost immediately after its publication, Foxe's book established itself as the authoritative historical interpretation of the English Protestant church. In addition to his religious zeal, Foxe illustrated the importance of the relationship between religion and technology. The wonderful printing machine was not incidental to religious change but an essential partner.

From Erasmus, Tyndale, and Foxe, the dream of progress through printing moved onward, adjusting to the time and place. In the eighteenth century Enlightenment, Antoine Nicolas de Condorcet (1743-94) pointed to printing as a great step toward human progress and perfectability. This occurred in Stage Nine of human progress. With enthusiasm akin to Foxe, Condorcet celebrated printing:

The art of printing had spread so widely and had so greatly increased the number of books published; the books that were published catered so successfully for

every degree of knowledge, or industry, or income; they were so proportioned to every taste, or cast of mind; they presented such easy and often such pleasant means of instruction; they opened so many doors to truth that it was no longer possible that they should all of them be closed again, that there was no class and no profession from which the truth could be withheld.¹⁷

Like Foxe before him, Condorcet was a proclaimer of "truth." His "truth" was secular and humane, whereas Foxe's was religious and directed toward Protestant salvation. Regardless of the goal intended, all of these early people of progress through printing saw the potential good of the printing press. Many of those dreams about the progress of the world are unfulfilled. Nevertheless, they were, and still are, a splendid ideal.

ENDNOTES

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⁴Greenslade, *Cambridge History of the Bible*, III, 141-42.

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⁶V. Norskov Olsen, *John Foxe and the Elizabethan Church* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1973), pp. 69-71; Rosemary O'Day, *The Debate on the English Reformation* (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 16-30.

⁷The essay on "The Benefit and Invention of Printing" comes in section VI, 5th age, "Pertaining to the Last 300 Years," *Acts and Monuments* (1684), I, 803-804. In the Townsend-Cattley ed. (1837), this appears in III, 718-22.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹Foxe, II, 333.

¹²*Ibid.*, I, 804.

¹³*Ibid.*, I, 755, 804.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, I, 804.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, II, 302-303.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, III, 226.

¹⁷Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*, in *Classics of Western Thought*, vol. III, ed. Edgar E. Knoebel (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), 186.

The Dutch Golden Age: Prosperity and the Martyr Tradition

by Mary S. Sprunger

In 1685, an expanded and newly illustrated *Martyrs' Mirror* appeared in the United Provinces of the Netherlands. The success of the impressive new martyrology, with splendid etchings by the acclaimed artist, Jan Luyken, suggests a Mennonite readership that was well-educated, wealthy enough to purchase luxury books, appreciative of fine art and interested in their past—in short, Mennonites who, while striving to preserve certain distinct Anabaptist beliefs and practices, were very much in the mainstream of that society known as the Dutch Golden Age. It is impossible to judge the appeal and impact of the *Martyrs' Mirror* without some understanding of the Dutch Republic during the seventeenth century. What follows is a brief description of the most characteristic features.¹

The Burden of War

The Dutch reached their zenith in international influence, trade, culture and prestige while at the same time gaining and defending their independence and freedom of the seas. Although the shrewd and frugal Dutch recognized the great cost of war, peace was the exception during the Golden Age. The Eighty Years War (1568 to 1648, with a truce from 1609 to 1621) began as a revolt against the tyranny of Spanish rule, with particular emphasis on the persecution of Protestants by Philip II, an ardent Catholic. The revolt evolved into a

struggle for independence from Spain, and became a fight for colonial and trading rights in east Asia and the New World.

In the three "English Wars," as the Dutch call them, which occurred on and off between 1652 and 1674, the Republic successfully defended its merchant fleet from envious neighbors across the English channel in a series of naval battles. The last of these conflicts coincided with Louis XIV's invasion of the United Provinces in 1672, which had every chance of crushing Dutch economic might and did succeed at creating a domestic crisis, resulting in the gruesome murder of the stadtholder. Only flooding of farmland saved the Republic from French domination. Yet the French threat continued through three long and expensive wars (1672 to 1678, 1689 to 1697 and 1702 to 1713), involving most western European powers, including Spain, in an anti-French alliance. Although Dutch economy and culture flourished despite the Eighty Years War, the continued cost of prolonged military conflict, especially in the second half of the seventeenth century, began to take its toll: stifling taxation, loss of ships and cargo, disruption of trade, flooded land, general destruction and havoc where fighting was in progress, and, of course, loss of life—all contributed to the eventual stagnation of the Dutch economy.

Mennonites paid for exemption from military duty or helped out in other

ways. Although they did not bear arms, they would help fortify their cities, as in 1573 during the Spanish siege of Alkmaar, or raise money for the war effort. Already in 1574, they presented William of Orange with a large sum of money, and the Frisian Mennonites raised 50,000 guilders in 1666 and 400,000 guilders in 1672 to help fight the English and French. These efforts naturally encouraged civic and state leaders to protect the Mennonites against the sometimes hostile and jealous Dutch Reformed authorities.

Religious Toleration

The revolt against Spanish rule opened the way for a generous amount of religious toleration by early modern standards. Philip II's harsh anti-Protestant policies made the far-sighted and practical program of William of Orange, who shrewdly embraced Calvinism in 1573, all the more welcome. Unlike other European rulers who equated religious plurality with national disunity and weakness, William recognized that freedom of belief could help in the fight against Spain—the rebellious provinces were fragmented enough without religious tensions tearing them apart. But the Union of Utrecht (1579), although protecting freedom of conscience, favored Calvinism; Roman Catholics, Mennonites, Jews and other denominations were tolerated yet did not enjoy full religious freedom. Still, although

the officially recognized church was the Reformed Church, the Dutch Republic was by no means a Calvinist state. The government kept in check the legalistic policies of the Reformed clergy and, except for one disastrous exception (Dordrecht, 1618), forbade national synods. Some have estimated that during the seventeenth century one third of the Dutch were Reformed, one third Roman Catholic, and one third sectarian or indifferent to religion.²

All other religious groups were illegal but tolerated. They were banned from governmental and judicial jobs and their places of worship had to be "hidden," with no steeples, crosses or other symbols visible from the street, although the locations were widely known. The enforcement of such policies varied from province to province and city to city. For example, in the first half of the seventeenth century, Reformed synods

tried to block construction of Mennonite meeting houses in Franeker, Haarlem and Leeuwarden, but the city magistrates had little interest in aggravating respectable and profitable segments of the population. In some areas, Mennonites began to hold office in local government. Sometimes the privilege of toleration could be purchased, as in Gouda in 1677 when the Catholics agreed to give the burgomeesters 750 guilders a year. By 1630 the magistrates of Amsterdam allowed the Lutherans to build a distinctive church in a prominent place, and the well-to-do Portuguese Jewish community built a splendid synagogue in 1675.³

Although complete religious liberty did not arrive until 1796, the tolerance of the new republic and its economic opportunities attracted intellectual and religious refugees from all over Europe, beginning already in the 1580's. Portu-

guese and German Jews, French Huguenots (50,000 after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685), English separatists, Puritans and Quakers, and, of course, Dutch and French-speaking Calvinists and Anabaptists from the Spanish Netherlands (Belgium) found sanctuary and usually prosperity in the United Provinces. The Republic welcomed these industrious immigrants, who brought energy, special skills and creativity to its cultural and economic life.

The Dutch People

This immigration contributed to the burgeoning population in the Dutch Republic. Every province experienced rapid growth during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The population of the Dutch Republic grew from about one million in the early sixteenth cen-



"Cruel murder by the Spanish at Naarden, 1 December 1572" by Jan Luyken

tury to about two million by 1700. Besides immigration, a lower incidence of plague-related deaths than in other European countries, improved nutrition and sanitation, and lower mortality rates (although life expectancy was still only thirty or thirty-five years of age), this population growth was most likely related to the age of women at the time of marriage. Where there was economic stability and adequate food, by having the means to set up their own households earlier, couples could usually marry at a younger age, and the younger the bride, the more child-bearing years. In Holland, the average bride was about twenty-four years old.⁴

With a growing population and a land mass only slightly larger than Maryland, it is not surprising that the Netherlands was one of the most urbanized areas in Europe. In 1622, the three largest Dutch cities were Amsterdam (105,000), Haarlem (40,000) and Leiden (45,000), all located in the province of Holland where over half of the population was urban.⁵ The Mennonites in 1630 may have made up about ten percent of the total Dutch population; in Haarlem, the percentage might have been twice that. Mennonites may have made up 25% of the population of the rural province of Friesland in 1580, and about 13% in 1660.⁶

The Center of World Trade

Descartes, one of many foreign intellectuals to live and write in the Netherlands, wrote of Amsterdam:

In this great town where apart from myself there dwells no one who is not engaged in trade, everyone is so much out for his own advantage that I should be able to live my whole life here without ever meeting a mortal being.⁷

Although surely and hopefully an exaggeration, Descartes' description would have found accord with many other foreign observers of Amsterdam and the United Provinces, which were in such sharp contrast to traditional, aristocratic land-based societies. By early in the seventeenth century, the Republic had in place all the major components of its commercial economy. The Dutch had long been buyers, sellers, and shippers of Baltic wood, metals and grain, North Sea herring, and Iberian salt. With the technologically advanced flute ship, invented by Pieter Jansz. Lioren, a Mennonite from Hoorn, in 1595,⁸ Dutch commercial

superiority on the seas became even more pronounced. So important was the Netherlandic link between northern and southern Europe that the arch enemy, Spain, was forced to trade with the Dutch even while the two countries were at war. The Dutch were notorious for doing business with anyone, friend or foe, in order to make a profit.

Trade with the Dutch East Indies and later the West Indies, while not as voluminous nor as essential as the European trade, was nevertheless highly lucrative and certainly more exciting. When the first successful commercial fleet arrived from the East Indies in 1599, with its cargo of enticing spices and profits of 100% for investors, it was cause for public celebration in Amsterdam. The Dutch swiftly built up a vast trading empire. The Exchange Bank and the Loan Bank facilitated trade and industry and most unique and symbolic of the booming Dutch economy was the Amsterdam stock exchange.

In the center of the city, merchants and dealers from Europe and the Mediterranean clustered around the pillars of the Bourse to trade goods, charter ships, and make investments. Not only wealthy merchants invested their money; for many small savers, playing the stock market was something akin to betting, a social activity with a chance of easy money. An exceptional example of speculation is the absurd boom and bust of the tulip market in the 1630's. First imported into Northern Europe from Turkey in the sixteenth century, the exotic tulip was in the beginning an elite luxury good. By the 1620's, now grown in Holland, tulips had become a popular commodity, and by 1636 tulip mania had increased to ridiculous levels. A single bulb of the most exquisite variety could cost thousands of guilders. One unfortunate speculator left holding the 2,500 guilder tab for one bulb paid up in kind: 6 *last* of grain, 4 oxen, 8 pigs, 12 sheep, 2 oxheads of wine, 4 tons of butter, 1,000 pounds of cheese, a bed, clothing and a silver beaker.⁹ Preachers, who denounced tulips as symbols of vanity and worldly folly, must have had ample sermon material when the bottom fell out of the market in 1638, leaving many reckless investors to the mercy of the city bankruptcy authorities.

The Dutch were industrious and produced many goods for export and domestic use. The textile industry, built

up by immigrants from Flanders, employed many men and women in Leiden, Haarlem and Amsterdam. Dutch-built ships, both commercial and naval, were in high demand throughout Europe. Artisans, such as printers, potters, glass blowers, painters, black smiths, and map makers, made up much of the urban population. There were many jobs for sailors and unskilled day laborers, who worked hard under harsh conditions for inadequate wages. Outside of the cities were farming communities that evolved to meet the new demands of rapid economic expansion. Through specialization of labor, new agricultural techniques, and, since there were no wood lots left in the Netherlands by 1640, the exploitation of wind power and peat, the rural sector was able to supply the labor, food, fuel and export products necessary to maintain a Golden Age.¹⁰

Although found more in some professions than others, such as cloth manufacturing, ship building, and medicine, Mennonites were represented in almost every trade. There were peat haulers and merchants, bargemen and linen bleachers, painters and sailors, whalers and weavers, and, of course, many farmers. One list of members baptized into the Waterlander congregation of Amsterdam in 1650, although only random in listing occupations, mentions a carpenter, a fishwife, a miller, a schoolmaster, a man servant, two serving maids, and many house wives.¹¹

The Poor and Social Welfare

A large segment of Dutch society paid the price for prosperity; by some estimates, one fourth of the population lived in poverty in the 1620's. But even the poor of the Dutch Republic were considerably better off than the unfortunates in other European countries. Wages were higher, the thriving trade economy included plenty of jobs for the unskilled laborer and protected against severe famine. The kinds of rioting induced by food shortages were few and mild compared to other parts of Europe.

For those who could not make it on their own, the Dutch had a remarkably advanced social welfare for the early modern period. The regent and middle class frowned on slothfulness and careless spending, and bankruptcy was a sin and grounds for church discipline. Yet motivated either through compassion, sense of duty, or, as Simon Schama has

suggested, through an "embarrassment of riches," they cared for their poor, elderly, orphaned, mentally ill and even petty criminals in a manner considered laudatory by foreign observers. Following medieval custom, much of the burden of poor relief and care of orphans was in the hands of religious institutions. In seventeenth-century Holland this meant that congregations of all denominations took care of their own poor, although the municipal governments also began to share in this responsibility by providing homes for the aged and orphanages. Many paintings commemorate the wealthy and respectable men and women who formed the boards of regents of the well-kept secular and denominational *hoffes* (almshouses and homes for the aged), orphanages, and leprosariums that dotted the cities of the Republic. Like other churches, Mennonite congregations supported their poorer members with handouts of food and fuel, weekly allowances, orphanages, *hoffes* for the poor and the elderly, and school money, hoping that education could help break the cycle of poverty.

The Golden Age Fades

By 1685, the apex of Dutch art and letters, economy and international influence, the Golden Age was gradually declining, so much so that the Dutch Republic would eventually plummet to footnote status in the history of western civilization. What had once been a progressive, innovative society became stagnant. Most marked was the decline of the economy, due in part to the many expensive military conflicts and increasing industrial and trading competition from other European countries—the Republic was no longer the commercial hub of Europe. More money went into buying land and building homes than into industry and other capitalistic ventures. Effects of this economic decline were readily apparent. Poverty increased as industrial centers failed, while at the same time the ruling class became wealthier and more exclusive. Middle class simplicity gave way to French finery, in dress, manners, homes and art. Rembrandt and scores of other painters had so aptly captured the spirit of the Golden Age in a tremendous period of collective creativity, but by the 1670's the glory days of Dutch painting were already past.



"Familie Bierens," by Hendrik Sorgh (1663)

The Mennonites in 1685

The Golden Age of Dutch Mennonites was also fading by the end of the seventeenth century. Immersed as they were in their society, the Mennonites were not immune to the national trend away from simplicity toward extravagance. The conservative Swiss Mennonites who settled in the Republic to escape from persecution were shocked by the worldliness of the Dutch Mennonites. Church discipline became more lax, mixed marriages more common, and lifestyles more luxurious. Some left the church for the Collegiants, a lay anti-ecclesiastical movement, while others joined the official church to help advance their social position and gain better jobs in government.

Already in the first half of the century Mennonite preachers were predicting that prosperity would lead to complacency and indifference. Thieleman Jansz. van Braght, Jan Luyken and the publishers of the 1685 *Martyrs' Mirror* represent an effort to reverse this trend. Only 111 years had passed since the last Anabaptist was martyred in the Netherlands in 1574, but memories are short. By reminding Dutch Mennonites of their collective past, the stories of the Anabaptist martyrs, set in the context of 1500 years of Christian suffering, might infuse the church with new spirit.

ENDNOTES

¹Good general reading on the Dutch Golden Age in English include K. H. D. Haley, *The Dutch in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1972); Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987); and Charles Wilson, *The Dutch Republic* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1968).

²Geoffrey Parker, *Europe in Crisis, 1598-1648* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1979), p. 139.

³Haley, pp. 93-96.

⁴Prins Winkler *Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, vol. 2 (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1977), p. 124; Jan de Vriew, *The Dutch Rural Economy in the Golden Age, 1500-1700* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), pp. 111.

⁵Winkler Prins, p. 124.

⁶S. Groenvelde et al., eds., *Wederdopers-Menisten-Doopsgezinden in Nederland, 1530-1980* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1981), p. 198; Parker, pp. 139-40.

⁷Quoted in Wilson, p. 42.

⁸*Wederdopers*, p. 190.

⁹Schama, p. 350-71.

¹⁰De Vries, especially pp. 236-43.

¹¹Particular archive 565, B1aIII, fols. 28v, 29, Gemeente Archief Amsterdam.

Spiritual Companions: Women as Wives in the *Martyrs' Mirror*

by Jenifer Hielt Umble

Thieleman J. van Braght intended his collection of martyr documents to remind seventeenth-century Mennonites of the persecution suffered by their sixteenth-century Anabaptist predecessors.¹ He therefore chose to include documents which focus on religious themes: letters exhorting fellow believers to remain steadfast, testimonies recording disputations with monks, court records of trials and death sentences. Of varying degrees of length and detail, one-third (278) of the documents in the *Martyrs' Mirror* contain material about Anabaptist women.

In many cases information regarding women contained in the martyrology is little more than a statement of arrest, steadfast adherence to beliefs, and execution. Fortunately, van Braght also included letters written from twenty-nine Anabaptist men to women (usually their wives) in addition to numerous letters written by men to fellow believers.² These letters indicate that Anabaptist husbands considered their wives to be spiritual companions: aiding them in ministry and strengthening them in times of persecution and arrest.

Letters in the *Martyrs' Mirror* indicate that many husbands considered their marriages to be unions of believers—commitments made in obedience to the ordinance of God. One Anabaptist described his marriage as “according to the Word and command of God, and not as this wicked, blind world.”³ Marriages occurred within the community of

believers, witnessed by “God and His church.”⁴

Anabaptist martyrs strongly emphasized the spiritual aspect of their marriages. Matthais Servaes described his love for his wife as “more according to salvation than according to the flesh.”⁵ Men who joined the Anabaptists after marriage apparently adopted the view of marriage as a partnership of believers. Thus, John Claess began one letter with “an affectionate salutation in the Lord, to my beloved wife, whom I no longer love after the flesh, but after the soul.”⁶ Bidding his wife to “forget my flesh and your sensuality,” Claess’ letter clearly indicates a change in marital perspective which accompanied his conversion to Anabaptism. Terms of endearment also emphasized the spiritual nature of Anabaptist marriages. Many men addressed their wives as “sisters in the Lord.”⁷ Husbands frequently referred to themselves as “beloved husband and brother in the Lord.” Although they echoed biblical forms of address, statements such as these removed attention from the physical union between husband and wife and refocused it on the spiritual nature of their marital covenant.

A description of marriage provided by Claus-Peter Clasen illustrates the importance of spiritual guidance in the selection of a spouse. When proposing marriage, an Anabaptist man would say to his intended, “Dear sister, if it should be the will of God almighty that

you should become my wife for His honor’s sake, please do so.” The couple spent the next nine or ten days fasting until the Lord revealed His will to them.⁸ Religious compatibility was a primary factor in the selection of a marriage partner.⁹

Letters in the martyrology confirm the importance of spiritual companionship between Anabaptist couples. Jan van Hasebroeck described his wife as a “helpmeet in my pilgrimage.”¹⁰ Hendrick Verstralen praised the Lord for giving him a “helper in distress” and then bid farewell to Janneken, his “faithful friend on earth.”¹¹ Jan Wouters van Kuyck thanked his wife for her “dear, good companionship, faithfulness and love.”¹² Beliken van der Straten, imprisoned in Ghent, received this testament from her husband, Maerten: “Hence I thank the Lord without ceasing, that He has given me you; for I would not have thought that God would have given me such a faithful helpmate.”¹³

The spiritual companionship so evident in the letters of Anabaptist husbands is also acknowledged by congregational leaders. Concerned over the flight of some Anabaptist leaders in the face of persecution, Jacob de Roore (also known as Jacob the Chandler) requested wives to “be always valiant . . . and exhort your husbands to stay with the flock.”¹⁴ Addressing his letter to “brethren and sisters in the Lord,” Hans Symons also recognized the im-

portance of wives in the labor of their husbands. He instructed wives to assist their husbands willingly and not be the cause of discouragement and grief, for "if the wife knew what trouble and grief she can cause her husband in his work, she would shun to do it as she would shun poison."¹⁵ Symons specifically instructed spouses to support each other in both spiritual and temporal matters. A letter from Menno Simons to the wife of an active Anabaptist pastor, Leonard Bouwens, further illustrates the importance of women in the ministry of their husbands. Concerned for the safety of her husband, Bouwens' wife asked Menno to release him from his itinerant ministry. Menno gently reminded her that the needs of the church must come before personal considerations. "Dear sister," he admonished her, "strengthen your husband and do not weaken him."¹⁶

Anabaptist men who emphasized the religious foundation of their marriages also referred with affection to their wives. According to Ozment's depiction of marriage in the early modern era, emotional attachments developed in couples who enjoyed a relationship based on "respect and trust."¹⁷ Joost Verkindert, writing to a brother, described the last meal he was permitted to eat with his wife. "How bitter a parting it was," he related, "for I know that she also loves me from the heart."¹⁸ Next to God, Raphael van den Velde considered his wife to be the "dearest of all that I know."¹⁹ Feeling for their wives is also reflected in the desires of some men to suffer in their place. "Though I were to taste a twofold death for you, I should not shrink from it," declared Jelis Matthijss in a letter to his wife.²⁰ Although not considered a major factor in the initial commitment of an Anabaptist couple, words of respect, love, and grief in the letters of Anabaptist men reveal strong emotional attachments between many spouses.

Despite evidence of affection and spiritual companionship, the attitudes of Anabaptist men toward the religious and marital status of Anabaptist women do not seem to differ radically from the sixteenth-century norm.²¹ Hans Symons exhorted wives to live with their husbands "in all subjection and obedience."²² In a letter addressed to the Brethren and Sisters, Jerome Segers instructed young wives to submit to their husbands; husbands should love, admonish, and instruct their wives.²³ Mat-

thias Servaes instructed husbands to "diligently attend" their duty of ruling wife and household. Wives should obey their husbands and bring up their children in a righteous manner.²⁴ Many references to women—even those dealing with spiritual matters—are linked with their status as wives. For example, Joos Verbeeck, a minister, instructed his wife to "behave yourself as becomes holy women, in order to teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to be discreet, chaste, and obedient to their husbands."²⁵ It does not appear that Anabaptist men or women directly challenged the patriarchal organization of church and family life in the sixteenth century.²⁶

Nevertheless, letters from husbands to their wives and from Anabaptist leaders to the community of believers reveal a high regard for (and sometimes a strong reliance upon) the faith of Anabaptist women. Referring to his wife, Jelis Bernaerts rejoiced that she stood with him as a "partaker of the divine nature" through baptism into the body of Christ.²⁷ Christian Langedul's confidence in his wife's faith prompted

him to advise his son-in-law to "associate with her, for she will seek nothing but your common salvation."²⁸

These glowing tributes to the spiritual qualities of Anabaptist women are sometimes accompanied by pleas for continued steadfastness. Although Jelis Matthijss believed his wife would continue to follow Christ's teachings, his letters to her are filled with reminders and instructions for her salvation.²⁹ Jan van Hasebroeck cautioned his wife to "take good heed, that no robber deceive you by philosophy and vain deceit."³⁰ Such exhortations seem to infer a weakness of women. It is interesting to note, however, the hesitancy of some Anabaptist men to exhort other believers—even female believers—to continued faithfulness. Hendrick Maelschalck asked a female friend to "accept this [letter] in good part . . . for I do not think myself worthy to exhort you, since I am fully aware that you are well taught of God."³¹

What then were male reasons for including spiritual instructions in letters to female Anabaptists? Maerten van der Straten admitted to his wife, Beliken, that he was "unworthy" to exhort her





to continued faithfulness, yet he knew that following his death she would be "severely assailed."³² Although he also felt "unworthy," Jan Quirijnss wrote to a sister of the faith "out of true, unfeigned brotherly love."³³ Joost Verkindert cited the Apostle Paul's instructions to "exhort one another daily" in a letter to his mother-in-law.³⁴ Many men wrote in response to requests from women.³⁵ These spiritual instructions do not appear to indicate greater spiritual weakness among Anabaptist women, but instead reflect the concern of imprisoned men for fellow believers who continued to face trials and temptations because of their faith.

Some letters in the *Martyrs' Mirror* indicate that imprisoned men relied upon Anabaptist women for spiritual succor. Jan van Hasebroeck described his impending martyrdom as a sacrifice to the Lord and asked his wife to pray "in my behalf, that I may be an acceptable offering."³⁶ Joost Verkindert asked his wife to pray for the preservation of his soul.³⁷ Christian Langedul asked for the prayers of his wife, "for the prayer of the righteous avails much, of whom you are one in my heart's estimation."³⁸ Little is known about the

wife of Thomas van Imbroeck, although an account in the *Martyrs' Mirror* notes that she wrote, "exhorting him to fight valiantly, and to adhere firmly to the truth."³⁹

The importance of these letters for spiritual strengthening is evident from the reactions of the recipients. Raphel van den Velde cried upon receipt of a letter from his wife.⁴⁰ A letter from Janneken Verstralen meant more to her husband, Hendrick, "than all the riches on the face of the earth."⁴¹ Undoubtedly, most imprisoned men gratefully received words of encouragement. Of interest, however, is the dependence of many Anabaptist men upon women for spiritual encouragement. Men such as G. Kleermaecker asked for letters.⁴² Letters—in many cases the only mode of communication between imprisoned men, their families, and the community of believers—strengthened male martyrs with scriptural reassurances and with biblical messages appropriate to their circumstances.

As they awaited death, some Anabaptist husbands wrote to their wives as to companions in suffering. Four wives actually accompanied their husbands to prison where they suffered torture,

lengthy imprisonment, separation from their families and finally, execution.⁴³ Wives who escaped arrest, however, did not escape hardship. Many letters indicate an awareness by imprisoned husbands of the suffering experienced by wives who would soon lose their spiritual companion and family breadwinner. "Think that He is proving us both," Thomas van Imbroeck exhorted his wife as she prepared to raise their children without a husband and provider.⁴⁴ Jelis Matthijss reassured his wife that God had chosen her "also to suffer tribulation and pain for His name's sake."⁴⁵ Those in prison expected martyrdom to release them from interrogation and torture. Their families, however, would continue to suffer from waves of persecution, the struggle to earn a living, and the loss of husband and father.

Letters such as those preserved in the *Martyrs' Mirror* indicate that Anabaptist women had a concrete, if indirect, impact upon the life of the congregation. Although not able themselves to participate as preachers, Anabaptist women aided the ministry by encouraging their husbands. Imprisoned Anabaptist men welcomed the letters, prayers, spiritual exhortations, and companionship of their wives. Nor did men claim any monopoly on understanding of Scripture or in an ability to remain steadfast. Indeed, the letters of many male Anabaptists reveal a degree of spiritual equality for female believers. The requests of many men for prayers and letters indicates they relied upon their wives for spiritual encouragement.

ENDNOTES

¹Thieleman J. van Bragt, *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs' Mirror of the Defenseless Christians, Who Baptized Only Upon Confession of Faith, and Who Suffered and Died for the Testimony of Jesus, Their Savior, From the Time of Christ to the Year A. D. 1660*, 13th ed., trans. J. F. Sohm (Scottsdale, Pa., 1982). Hereafter cited as MM and referred to in the text as *Martyrs' Mirror*. See van Bragt's "Preface" (pp. 6-11) for his lament over the material wealth and spiritual poverty of his generation.

²Joyce Irwin suggests that the history of women in the early modern era is dependent upon the sources available—most of them written by men. In her book *Womanhood in Radical Protestantism* (New York, 1979), Irwin cautions that male attitudes toward females will not correspond exactly to the roles of women. She assumes, however, that male attitudes greatly determined the options open to women. See p. xix.

³MM, p. 516.

⁴MM, p. 515. Similar sentiments are expressed on pp. 504, 627, 675, 713, 879, 925, 927, 952, 1004.

⁵MM, p. 702.

⁶MM, p. 468. Men such as Matthias Servaes, Maerten van der Straten, John Claess and Jelis

Bernaerts loved their wives "after the soul" according to the command of scripture (MM, pp. 702, 957, 468, 627).

⁷MM, pp. 585, 624, 773.

⁸Claus-Peter Clasen, *Anabaptism, A Social History, 1525-1618* (Ithaca, 1972), p. 202.

⁹Irwin, p. xvii.

¹⁰MM, p. 770.

¹¹MM, p. 880.

¹²MM, p. 911.

¹³MM, p. 955.

¹⁴MM, p. 818.

¹⁵MM, p. 712.

¹⁶Menno Simons, "Sincere Appeal to Leonard Bouwens' Wife," in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, trans. Leonard Verduin, ed. J. C. Wenger (Scottsdale, 1965), p. 1040.

¹⁷Steven Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), pp. 59-61.

¹⁸MM, p. 852.

¹⁹MM, p. 1030.

²⁰MM, p. 676; see similar comments on pp. 514, 1004.

²¹Clasen, pp. 207-8.

²²MM, p. 712.

²³MM, p. 510.

²⁴MM, p. 695. It is worthy of note that Matthias Servaes did not single out women for his instructions. An Anabaptist elder and teacher, Servaes left lengthy instructions for the functioning of the church after his death. Specific references to women are found among lessons for the congregation as a whole, for children, servants, masters, older members and for those who gain their living through trade. It is evident that Matthias discussed the roles of women within the context of relationships among the believers. Women received no special status or treatment in the congregation, yet they were not excluded from the life of the fellowship.

²⁵MM, p. 652.

²⁶John Klassen, "Women and the Family Among Dutch Anabaptist Martyrs," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 60 (1986): 548. Keith Sprunger notes that Anabaptist women did not call for a sexual revolution. See "God's Powerful Army of the Weak: Anabaptist Women of the Radical Reformation," in *Triumph over Silence: Women in Protestant History*, ed. Richard L. Greaves (Westport, Conn., 1985), p. 46. Clasen (p. 207) indicates sixteenth-century Anabaptists did not expand the roles open to women.

²⁷MM, p. 627.

²⁸MM, p. 707.

²⁹MM, pp. 675-680.

³⁰MM, p. 773.

³¹MM, p. 724. See also pp. 854, 959.

³²MM, p. 955.

³³MM, pp. 834, 836. See also p. 933.

³⁴MM, p. 854.

³⁵MM, pp. 624, 724, 956, 976.

³⁶MM, p. 770.

³⁷MM, p. 861.

³⁸MM, p. 705.

³⁹MM, p. 578.

⁴⁰MM, p. 1027.

⁴¹MM, p. 877.

⁴²MM, p. 967. See also pp. 469, 853, 914, 1069.

⁴³Jerome Segers and Lijsken Direks (MM, p. 504), Matthias and Aeltgen Servaes (MM, p. 699), Maerten and Beliken van der Straten (MM, p. 954), Hans and Janneken van Munstorp (MM, p. 984).

⁴⁴MM, p. 581. Wohlers (p. 86) also notes that family members left in the world faced both the loss of a loved one and continued persecution.

⁴⁵MM, p. 676. See also pp. 520, 1031, 1051.



The *Martyrs' Mirror*, A Mirror of Nonresistance

by James W. Lowry

The Anabaptist martyrology was originally called *Het Offer des Heeren*, and only later did the name become the *Martyrs' Mirror*. The use of the word *martyr* is obvious, but how did the word *mirror* come to be part of the title? The name of this article also raises the further question: In what sense is the *Martyrs' Mirror* a mirror of nonresistance?

The seeds from which the mirror metaphor in the title of the Anabaptist martyr book grew lie in several statements of the Apocrypha and the New Testament. One of the books of the Apocrypha, speaking of wisdom, says, "For she is the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted *mirror* of the power of God."¹ This seems to have influenced Paul when he speaks in II Corinthians 3:18 of Christians as seeing the glory of the Lord in a *mirror* and being transformed by that view of God. Paul, using the same metaphor in a different way, indicates that the spiritual knowledge of this present life is like the dim perception of images in a mirror when he says in I Corinthians 13:12, "For now we see through a [looking] *glass* darkly."

In James 1:23-25 the writer speaks of the Christian law of liberty as a mirror. He says that the obedient disciple keeps looking into that mirror and retains the image of what he ought to be in his soul, "like unto a man beholding his natural face in a *glass*."

From such Biblical seeds, an Anabaptist use of the mirror metaphor grew in

two of Menno Simons' writings, both produced around 1537. In his writing on the *New Birth*, Menno says that non-Christians ought to let Jesus Christ with his Spirit and Word be their example and *mirror*. In his *Meditation on the Twenty-fifth Psalm* he says that those who know God "view their consciences in the clear *mirror* of Thy [God's] wisdom," wisdom being either the same as Christ or the Word of God in a probable allusion to both Wisdom 7:26 and James 1:23.²

Menno's statements, as well as the Scriptures, may have influenced Lijsken Dircks, wife of Jerome Segers, of whom we read in the *Martyrs' Mirror*. A prisoner in Antwerp in 1551, she was being led after a hearing through a crowded public place. She said to the guards who were trying to shove the people away from her, "They may look on me and take a *mirror* [spiegel = mirror = example] from me, all who live the word of the Lord." In the margin the author of the account gives a reference to Philippians 3:17, interpreting Lijsken's remark to mean that she gives herself as an example (*mirror*) of what happens to those who follow the Word of God.³ This is the oldest known use of the mirror metaphor in the *Martyrs' Mirror*.

In writings appearing from 1556 through 1564 Dirk Philips makes use of mirror imagery. In these writings he refers seven times to Christ as the mirror of God's glory,⁴ drawing from Wis-

dom 7:26, which seems to have been one of Dirk's favorite passages. He gives the mirror metaphor his most elaborate development in *The True Knowledge of Jesus Christ* when he says that Christ is "a spotless reflection of the divine glory, the express image of the invisible God, in whose face the angels in heaven rejoice and into whose brightness all the faithful of earth look as in a *mirror*."⁵ Dirk is like Menno in considering Christ to be a mirror.

Menno, Lijsken, and Dirk, as well as the Scriptures, all may have influenced Hans de Ries when he wrote his preface to the new, enlarged martyr book brought out in 1615.⁶ He urges his readers to contemplate the martyrs and their sufferings:

Here you see as in a *mirror*, that neither conjugal longing and love, nor parental affection and solicitude, nor the desirable company of near and confiding friends, nor anything which God has put into His creatures, for the delight of man, could move or restrain these heroes; but that they, contemning all this, and separating from wife, children, relatives and friends, house and property, they gave themselves up to severe bonds and imprisonment, to every adversity and hardship, to cruel tortures and martyrdom . . .

Finally, the edition of 1631 brought the word *spiegel* (mirror) from the text of the martyr book to the title page. It was now called *Martelaers Spiegel der Werelose Christenen* (Martyrs' Mirror of the Nonresistant Christians). Hans de Ries' earlier preface was also repro-

duced as the preface of this 1631 edition. This preface explained some of what was implied by the use of the word *mirror* in the title of a book. *Mirror* conveys the idea of reflection, or thought about a subject in contrast with a picture, which gives a mere outward view of a thing. The preface admonishes the reader not merely to see but to reflect, or meditate, on the martyrs and their steadfastness.⁷

Besides the influences mentioned already, one other powerful factor helped bring the word *mirror* onto the title page of the Anabaptist martyrology. That was the wide-spread popularity of the word *mirror* in the titles of books. Throughout the Middle Ages book titles in Latin often included the word *speculum* (mirror).⁸ With the rise of the vernacular languages, books in many different European languages began appearing with their equivalent of the word *speculum* in the title. In his extensive study of the subject Herbert Grabes gives a list of 783 different book titles in European languages with the word *mirror*,⁹ and he admits this list is only partial because good bibliographic tools in several European languages were not at his disposal. He concentrates especially on English titles employing *mirror*, *glass*, or *looking glass* and notes an upsurge in the number of titles (around 185) in the period 1640-1680,¹⁰ just after the Anabaptist martyrology took the title *Martyrs' Mirror*.

In its popular use the word *mirror* in a title sometimes meant that the book was a compendium of information on a subject, as *Spieghel der Zevaert* (Mirror of Navigation)¹¹ which contained useful information for sailors and pilots. Other books with *mirror* in the title like *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* (Mirror of Human Salvation)¹² had moral and religious purposes.

So these three influences—a popular title for books, Anabaptist usage of the mirror metaphor, and the Scriptures—helped produce the title for the Anabaptist martyrology, the *Martyrs' Mirror*.

But the special subject of this article is nonresistance. We will use the *Martyrs' Mirror* as a way of peering into the world of the Anabaptist martyrs. We will look especially for one element of their lives and teachings as we peer into this mirror—that of nonresistance. The *Martyrs' Mirror* will be a mirror of nonresistance for this study.

Just as we traced the development of the mirror metaphor historically, like-

wise we will try to examine the topic of nonresistance in the collection of writings now called the *Martyrs' Mirror*, as the collection developed historically out of the Anabaptist movement. We will try to divide the study roughly into three parts, but we will not always be able to separate the parts neatly. First, we will see what the oldest version of the Anabaptist martyr book, *Het Offer des Heeren*, in its various editions from 1562 to 1599, has to say on the subject. Then, we will notice other testimonies concerning nonresistance, which were printed in Mennonite martyr books after 1599. Last, we will note what van Braght himself contributed to the discussion of nonresistance in his 1660 edition of the *Martyrs' Mirror*, which brought all of these testimonies largely to the form in which we have them now.

Het Offer des Heeren, in the first edition of 1562, begins appropriately with Stephen, the first Christian martyr, setting the tone by going back to the early church for a model and giving a concrete example of how a Christian followed Christ. With this beginning, the primitivism of the Anabaptists and their *nachfolge Christi* are emphasized, and the first nonresistant Christian martyr is linked with the later Anabaptist martyrs. The account says that when the persecutors stoned Stephen

he called and said, Lord Jesus receive my spirit. He kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.¹³

This account appeared in every edition of *Het Offer des Heeren* and is in the modern English *Martyrs' Mirror*.

Certainly the *nachfolge Christi* was one of the most important ideals of the Anabaptists—to follow Jesus, to be as He was, and to do as He did. Jan Claes of Amsterdam said in 1544 that Jesus' followers are known because they follow His example. He also said that He and His have been killed from the beginning.¹⁴ So when the persecutors prepared to put them to death, the Anabaptists wanted to do as Jesus did, praying for their persecutors and forgiving them. The words of Maria and Ursula van Beckum echo the words of Jesus when they prayed that God "would forgive the judges their sins, since they knew not what they were doing."¹⁵

Three other testimonies of forgiveness at the times of execution belong

here, although they did not appear in any of the editions of *Het Offer des Heeren*. These martyrs all date from 1569 and could have read any of the first three editions of *Het Offer des Heeren* (1562, 1566, and 1567) and been influenced by them. They could have read in that book that others, not far removed from them in time and place, had followed the example of Stephen (and Jesus) in forgiving their persecutors. Such contemporary examples would have been a powerful encouragement to lay down one's life in a spirit of forgiveness. Each of the 1569 martyrs forgives his persecutors from a slightly different perspective. Hendrick Alewijns of Middleburgh, thinking of his own need of forgiveness, writes:

May God forgive you all wrong against me, as I forgive you, and as I would have it done to me in regard to all my sins. Amen.¹⁶

Jan Watier of Kortrijk at his execution touchingly asks his tormentors to forgive him if he has injured them in any way:

If we have done amiss to you in anything, do forgive us; we gladly forgive you all that you have done amiss to us.¹⁷

Old Pieter also of Kortrijk goes beyond forgiveness for those who put him to death and at his execution prays for their salvation:

Do not account this as sin to them, but convert them; for they know not what they do.¹⁸

Again, an echo of the words of Christ on the cross.

Forgiving the persecutors at the moment of death was the final act of following Christ during one's lifetime. Christ did not use the sword during His life, nor did He resist with the sword at the time of His death.

But once an inquisitor claimed that Christ and the Apostles did not use the sword to persecute heretics only because they did not have enough power to do so, being without a magistrate to back them. Jacques d'Auchy, imprisoned in Leeuwarden in 1559, denied this claim. Christ could have called twelve legions of angels to fight for Him if He had wanted, but this was not His nature. The Son of God was not like a devouring wolf, but rather like a lamb led to the slaughter. This lamb-like nature is another strong reason for nonresistance.¹⁹

The children of God are nonresistant because they are born of God and have

the nature of God, as Christ did. Christians are like doves, lambs, and sheep. A thousand sheep will flee before one wolf rather than shed the wolf's blood. So Christians do not devour and kill, but suffer as sheep and lambs, Jacques d'Auchy said.

Joost de Tollenaer of Ghent, writing from prison in 1589, explained nonresistance not by a comparison with sheep and lambs but in connection with a somewhat related theme, humility. He wrote his fifteen-year-old daughter that she ought to behave in a meek and lowly way. He tells her never to reward evil with evil but to return good for evil, quoting from the Sermon on the Mount. Turn the other cheek, give both cloak and coat, go the second mile.

Not, dear child, that we like to be smitten, or like to lose our cloak when it is taken away from us, that we should also give the coat, or to go with any one three or four miles against our will; but this is what the Scriptures teach us.²⁰

Joost tells his daughter that Christians don't practice revenge as was permitted under the law of Moses. We are now under grace, and so we show grace and love to our enemies.²¹ We should not wish any ill to those who mistreat us, much less do any actual evil to them. He concludes his discussion with the Golden Rule. "As you would that men should do unto you, so do to them, and you will fulfill the law of Christ."

Joost de Tollenaer explained the doctrine of nonresistance with some subtlety, but there were times when the explanations lacked subtlety. When the Anabaptists defended nonresistance before authorities who were hostile, they sounded different from occasions when they spoke to those who were receptive to the teaching. With a friendly audience they could expound the doctrine fully and also include words of encouragement and comfort. With opponents the Anabaptists, at times, founded nonresistance on proof texts that seemed irrefutable, mixed with words of warning and rebuke.

This comes out clearly if we contrast Joost's teaching of his daughter with some statements Michael Sattler makes about nonresistance.

The testimony of Michael Sattler, the only contemporary, non-Dutch martyr in *Het Offer des Heeren*, appears in second place in that book, right after the material on Stephen.²² The editor of *Het Offer* assigned this prominent place to Michael Sattler also quite appropriately

since Sattler was one of the earliest Anabaptist martyrs and since the Schleithem Confession of Faith, which Sattler probably wrote, had received widespread recognition among Anabaptists and exerted an influence which helped mold the movement.

We don't know what all occurred at Michael Sattler's trial in 1527. But we do know that the town clerk ridiculed and tried to bully Sattler, saying "The hangman shall dispute with you." In such an atmosphere Sattler spoke sharply. He began his defense of nonresistance rather surprisingly with "Thou shalt not kill" (Exod. 20:13). Nonresistance was not customarily defended with statements from the Law but was presented as a New Testament doctrine.²³

Sattler said that if the Turks came, true Christians should not defend themselves against them, but look to God for protection. He further shocked his hearers when he said that if warring were right he would rather take the side against the so-called Christians than against the Turks. Sattler continues:

The Turk is a true Turk, knows nothing of the Christian faith; and is a Turk after the flesh; but you, who would be Christians, and who make your boast of Christ, persecute the pious witnesses of Christ, and are Turks after the spirit.²⁴

Jan Geerts, imprisoned in the Hague in 1564, also expounded the subject of nonresistance under similar, strained circumstances. Mennonite writers commenting on Jan Geerts have criticized the tone with which he addressed a Lutheran minister.²⁵ But under the circumstances perhaps the tone was justified.

While suffering severe physical torture at the hands of the Catholic authorities, Jan Geerts received letters and possibly visits from a Lutheran minister, who regarded Jan as a reprobate. Jan seemed to be convinced that the Lutheran would not really listen to what he had to say, but felt it was his duty to God to answer the Lutheran that his own "soul may rest in peace."²⁶ Jan's remarks become vivid and picturesque, perhaps in hope of arresting his opponent's attention.

Jan wrote that the Lutheran minister was like Goliath and his worldly learning and writing were like Goliath's weapons, whereas he is like little David meeting the giant's attacks only with the Word of God. Jan also compares the Lutheran to Balaam and himself to the donkey. He is provoked to speak out by

the Lutheran's attack on his doctrine, just as the donkey spoke under the blows of Balaam and at the direction of the Holy Spirit. This is certainly a colorful defense of nonresistance. However, Jan does also give a more standard apology when he said Christ taught His disciples only love for their enemies. Christ forbade them when they asked Him if they should call down fire from heaven on their enemies.²⁷

Another example of Anabaptist sharpness in defending nonresistance is found in the writings of Jacques d'Auchy. Three times he calls the Münsterite teaching which allowed violence "the doctrine of devils,"²⁸ certainly an expression loaded with censure.

Although only a minority of the Anabaptists had fallen into the sin of trying to bring Christ's kingdom by force, the peaceful Anabaptists were never allowed to forget it.²⁹ Hans van Overdam, writing in Ghent in 1551, said, "We are daily greatly slandered by those who say that we defend our faith with the sword, as did those of Münster."³⁰

Joos Kindt, imprisoned at Kortrijk in 1553, was accused of being one of the people who committed murder because others would not accept their doctrine. Joos asked, "Did you ever see this in me?" When told no, he said that he should not then be blamed for the misdeeds of others.³¹

"Where is your rapier?" a suspected Anabaptist was asked in Leyden in 1552, supposedly to establish his identity.

"My Master has not taught me to carry a rapier. . . . Christ is my Master," Adrian Corneliss replied,³² rejecting the implication that he was one of the violent Anabaptists. In the same exchange of words, he implied that the violent Anabaptists were not true followers of Christ.

The martyrs rejected the violence of the Münsterites in an absolute way.³³ Adriaen Pan, for example, refused all blame for Münster. In 1559 he said that since he was not yet 33 years old, he was too young to have been present at the Münsterite uprising.³⁴

Beyond never having visited Münster, some martyrs asserted they had never even made the acquaintance of anyone from that city. With reference to the Münsterites Jacques d'Auchy, whom we have already mentioned twice, said:

I do not know any rebellious people, nor am I one of their number; but we would much rather, according to the teachings

of the Scriptures, assist our enemies, satisfy them, if they hunger and thirst with food and drink, and resist them in no wise with revenge or violence.³⁵

Jan Schut of Vreden in Westphalia was asked in 1561 about insurrection.³⁶ Jan told his captors that he did not approve of such evil activities because Christ had taught in His Word that we should love our enemies. Apparently brushing this aside, the authorities asked who his captain was. Jan said Christ was his Captain,³⁷ using the metaphor of spiritual warfare as the Anabaptists often did.

As part of the spiritual warfare theme, the martyrs often spoke of the Word of God as their weapon. Jan Claes said Jesus' followers maintained their cause with the true sword, which is the Word of God. Jesus did not kill those who did not believe in Him, nor does His church.³⁸ Hans van Overdam said that the Anabaptists did "not defend themselves with temporal or carnal weapons, but only with the Word of God, which is our sword."³⁹

These, then, are the testimonies to nonresistance printed in *Het Offer des Heeren* while the persecution was still raging in the Netherlands and Belgium. Many of the themes or approaches to nonresistance continue in the new material added to the martyr books in the seventeenth century, and so the new material is still very much of a piece with that appearing in *Het Offer des Heeren*. In fact, much of the material which first appeared in the later seventeenth century martyr books was actually produced at the same time as the documents of *Het Offer des Heeren*. The writings merely did not become available to the editors of the martyrologies until the seventeenth century.⁴⁰

We now turn our attention to nonresistance as it was expounded in martyr books that were successors to *Het Offer des Heeren*.

One theme which appears in *Het Offer des Heeren*, but perhaps emerges into fuller view in the seventeenth century books is the warning to persecutors of judgment to come. The question arises, was it consistent for the Anabaptists to warn their persecutors of future judgment? Was this a form of striking back verbally and contrary to nonresistance? A look at the nature of God as perceived by the Anabaptists may clarify the issue.

The Anabaptists recognized that the doctrine of nonresistance is rooted in

the basic nature of God, which is love. For example, two Anabaptists living in England as refugees wrote in 1575 that Christ said:

Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you . . . that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.⁴¹

Nevertheless, the Anabaptists also recognized another aspect of God, which created a kind of paradox in His nature. God has love for man, but God also has wrath toward sin. The imprisoned Anabaptists expressed the love of God when they forgave their persecutors, and they also believed that they were not to participate in the wrath of God. Bartholomeus Panten wrote from a prison in Ghent in 1592:

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink.⁴²

Wrath and vengeance were in the hands of God, not man. However, the wrath of God coming at the end of the world was a terrible reality for the imprisoned Anabaptists. When he warned his captors of the coming judgment, ideally he was performing an act of love rather than giving expression to anger in a veiled way. In fact, the Anabaptist went to pains to explain, sometimes, that he was not trying to strike back as he gave his warning. For example, Matthias Servaes imprisoned in Cologne in 1565 told his tormentor:

Remember also that in due time you will have to let us stand by the side of you, when the Lord shall judge you and us together; for, as the Scripture says we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. . . . I desire of you my dear sir, that you do not take this as an insolent answer or threat, but accept it as a warning; for as such I say it to you because I wish you eternal rest, as well as I wish it to my own soul.⁴³

Hendrick Alewijns, whom we have mentioned before, gave this warning:

Woe to the nation that rises up against my kindred, for God will take vengeance on you in the day of judgment. . . . Christ Himself reproves, condemns and threatens all these bloodguilty ones, saying: "How can ye escape the damnation of hell?" . . . let me, weak man, who am nevertheless a witness of the word, and truth of God, give you a friendly warning. . . . My lords, accept in good part this my favor to you. . . .

He further pleads:

But I pray you nevertheless to deal mercifully with me, however, as far as is consistent with the proper course of the sentence imposed by you. . . . It is better that I suffer than you; for I know why I suffer. . . . I am tortured in order to make me speak contrary to the great commandment of love; but love doeth no evil; love endureth all things, beareth all things, and doth not become weary. O my lords, think whether it is not so.⁴⁴

Besides his concern for the spiritual welfare of his persecutors, Hendrick has an even more pressing concern—his children who were soon to become orphans. In a letter of instruction to his children, he discusses the New Testament basis for nonresistance. We have noted earlier that with such a sympathetic audience the martyrs often explained their viewpoint with greater subtlety and detail. Hendrick does so in this case. From the Old Testament he gives a series of examples of God defending His people.⁴⁵

Hendrick begins with the classic example of the Israelites at the Red Sea where God did all the fighting, protecting the Israelites by the pillar of cloud and drowning the Pharaoh and his army in the sea. Among other examples where the Israelites merely stood by and watched while the Lord did the fighting or where the Lord's help in the battle was the decisive factor, he cites the following: In the days of Joshua, God fought for Israel with hailstones and by causing the sun and moon to stand still. Another time God frightened away the Syrian army with a noise in the air. The Ammonites and the Moabites who together on one occasion meant to attack the Israelites instead were led by God to destroy each other. The same happened in the time of Gideon when the Midianites slew one another. When God's people went to battle

though they had neither bows, arrows, shields, nor swords, God fought for them and gained the victory. No one could harm this people save when they departed from the commandments of the Lord their God.⁴⁶

Hendrick also cites three examples from II Maccabees. One example is II Maccabees 10:29-30 where five angels of God protected the Jews in battle and shot arrows and lightning against the enemies.

So Hendrick has collected many of the incidents needed to show that war was contrary to God's will before New



Testament times, but does not take the final step of stating that conclusion. He says that the fighting and killing in the Old Testament

must be understood with a due distinction of times . . . and are plainly prohibited by the Word and example of Christ. . . . Hence Christians may now not wage war.

Hendrick's use of the Scriptures shows how far he was from using the Old Testament to justify war for Christians, as did the leaders of the state churches.

An entirely new theme concerning nonresistance first appears in the material from the 1570s during the war between the Spanish and the Dutch. At this time the authorities began to persecute the Anabaptists for the specific issue of nonresistance. In 1572 the Spanish Catholic authorities tried to compel a certain prisoner to row in a skirmish on Haarlem Lake. When the

man, Jan Smit, refused to row, saying he did not feel free in his conscience to do so since he had no enemies, the Spaniards discovered that he was a Mennonite. Jan Smit was sentenced to hang by one leg from a gallows till death ensued at a military camp near Haarlem. The form of execution seems to aim at humiliation as well as death.⁴⁷

Persecution also came from the Protestant Calvinists when, as the *Martyrs' Mirror* says, "the defenseless lambs of Christ" in the town of Middelborgh and other cities of Zeeland in Holland were told in 1577 and again in 1578⁴⁸ that they must do military service. If not, the Calvinists said that the Anabaptists must close their shops and stop working at their trades.

This example of Protestant persecution actually reflects a growth of toleration. In earlier years the Anabaptists

had not been allowed to exist. But now their continuing existence was begrudgingly conceded, at least in the Netherlands where religious toleration for the Anabaptists came earlier than elsewhere.⁴⁹ William I, Prince of Orange, had even gone so far as to grant the Anabaptists exemption from bearing arms. When the authorities of Zeeland began to pressure the Anabaptists to do military service, the Anabaptists appealed to William to reaffirm their privilege and he did in 1577 and 1578.

About eighty years later the same point of conflict came up in Switzerland,⁵⁰ again reflecting a growth of toleration. The *Martyrs' Mirror* informs us that the government of Bern in 1659 declared that those who would not defend their country would be banished and their property confiscated. So here the issue is again nonresistance, and the persecution is milder in that the death penalty is not imposed.⁵¹

This is the midpoint in our use of the *Martyrs' Mirror* as a mirror of nonresistance. First, we examined the writings of *Het Offer des Heeren*, which is the oldest part of what is called the "Old Book" in the present English *Martyrs' Mirror*. Now, we have finished our study of the remainder of the "Old Book."

It was the "Old Book" (from p. 413 to the end of the English *Martyrs' Mirror*) which van Bragt originally set out to reissue and to the front of which he added so much material that in a sense a "new book" was added to the original collection. Now, we want to look at the "new book," which comprises the first 412 pages of the English edition.

In reissuing the old martyr book, van Bragt decided to trace the themes of adult baptism and persecution throughout church history from the time of the Apostles down to the beginning of the "Old Book" (sixteenth century). Of course, the theme of persecution is closely related to the theme of nonresistance. Those who are willing to take up the cross of persecution will not want to fight back, but will be nonresistant.

Van Bragt supplies by quoting, or otherwise, perhaps nearly half of the material on nonresistance. Proportionately, then, the theme of nonresistance appears somewhat oftener in van Bragt's part of the book than in the older material. One feels that the line of battle is being drawn particularly at this point as toleration advances. The society in which van Bragt lives no longer kills

because of adult baptism or nonattendance in the state churches, but now strikes with economic reprisal at those who refuse military service. In a larger sense, Anabaptist withdrawal from participation in the wars of society is separation from the world, just as was their refusal to participate in an all-embracing state church. But here the offense is more focused. The authorities charge not, how dare you have a separate church, but, why don't you help us defend our country? Even in much more tolerant societies than those which originally persecuted the Anabaptists, this has continued to be a point of conflict. So we can view van Braght's emphasis on nonresistance as responding to the needs of his day and also as prophetic.

Van Braght has a more sophisticated approach to the doctrine of nonresistance than the earlier writers on the subject. He does not merely draw on the words of Scripture as did the Anabaptist martyrs in the heat of persecution, but he ranges over the whole horizon of church history, drawing on diverse sources to prove his point, quoting from individuals, religious groups, and confessions of faith.

Van Braght quotes Gratianus from around the year 160 A.D., saying, "Jesus teaches that Christians shall not repel weapon with weapon, but must flee before weapons."⁵² From that time down to the ninth century van Braght quotes and refers to the following church leaders as teaching nonresistance: Tertullian, St. Martin, Ambrose, Lactantius Firmianus, Hilary, Damascenus, John Chrysostom, Jerome, and Gratian.⁵³

From the second and third centuries van Braght refers to certain soldiers who became Christians and then refused to take part in war: Tharacus, Euvodius, John, and Paul.⁵⁴

Van Braght points out whole constellations of nonresistant groups spangling the sky of church history: Waldenses, Albigenses, Perfecti, Fratricelli, Minorites, and Taborites. An especially bright constellation is the early Waldensian church. Van Braght tells how Peter Waldo of Lyons in France began to preach boldly and publicly against war and other evil practices of the Roman church, which earlier could be spoken against only with fear and in private.⁵⁵ Again and again⁵⁶ van Braght brings up the name of the Waldenses, who were scattered, patiently suffering persecu-

tion "without any resistance, retaliation, or self-defense." So thoroughgoing was the Waldensian commitment to nonresistance that they were supposed even to have said:

The pope and all the bishops are murderers because of the war they carry on. . . . The pope commits mortal sin, when he sends forth to make war upon the Turks; and that they likewise commit mortal sin, who obey him in waging war against the heretics.⁵⁷

This is quite a sweeping condemnation of war, reasons van Braght, because if there could ever be a just war, it would be against the Turks. The Waldenses were not merely saying it was wrong for Waldenses, but for anyone to war against the Turks.

A century before the Reformation some Waldenses joined a party of the Hussites called the Taborites (Grubeneimer), but later found themselves betrayed by these followers of John Huss in the matter of nonresistance. When the Hussites turned to violence in a bloody war against the authorities, the older Waldensian principle asserted itself and the Waldenses withdrew. Van Braght says that by their refusal to participate in war, these Waldenses indicated that

the church of Christ on earth is not a kingdom of triumph and victory, but a school of suffering and death for the name of Christ.⁵⁸

In choosing religious groups and persons from church history to include in his book, van Braght actually uses nonresistance as one of his criteria for selection. He says

we have exerted our utmost diligence, so that as far as we know, there are not found among the martyrs of whom we have given . . . an account, any who can be shown to have been guilty of gross errors, much less of the shedding of blood. At least we have not been able to detect it in any of them, and hence in accordance with the spirit of love, we must judge and believe the best of them.⁵⁹

He further says that until around the year 300 A.D. (the time of Constantine) the church was largely nonresistant. But at that time the error of resorting to carnal weapons came into the church, which caused much suffering, fear, and sorrow among "the defenseless lambs of Christ."⁶⁰

From that time on, the principle of nonresistance becomes a recurring theme through van Braght's history, distinguishing the children of God⁶¹ from the

violent worldly society around them whether purely secular or religious, distinguishing them from the persecuting state churches, Catholic and Protestant, from the revolutionary Münsterites and seditious Battenbergers, and from the Calvinists during a time of lessened persecution.

In his book van Braght includes several formal confessions of faith, one of which had been in earlier versions of the *Martyrs' Mirror*. All⁶² of these confessions discuss nonresistance to a greater or lesser degree. For example, the thirty-three article confession of 1617 gives as one of the signs or marks of the church of God, love, which includes nonresistance. It says we are to love God, our brethren, our neighbors, and our enemies. Those

who persecute and kill us . . . we may by no means resist with carnal weapons; but as Christ did not open His mouth in revenge upon His enemies, but, as an humble and dumb lamb prayed for them, so we must also follow this infallible example. And as all soldiers forsake their former avocation, and wear the livery of their lord and king, as a sign to distinguish them from all strange servants. . . so also must all true servants of Jesus Christ.⁶³

As we mentioned before, the *Martyrs' Mirror* has been a living, powerful book by which the lives and testimonies of the early martyrs shaped the later martyrs. We have tried to discuss what were the ideas and actions which did this shaping and how they developed as the *Martyrs' Mirror* and its adherents moved through history.

Even an important term for nonresistance, *wehrlos*, apparently had its birth on the title page of the 1631 edition of the *Martyrs' Mirror*. The new title for that edition was given as *Martelaers Spiegel der Werelose Christenen*.⁶⁴ At one stroke the book became a martyrs' mirror and a mirror of nonresistance. The emphasis on nonresistance continues today on the title page of the English edition, which is called *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians*.

So, then, this is a study of a literary work, not merely a study of events, but also of the record of events, which itself became the source of events by the influence it exerted on its readers.

To conclude this study of nonresistance in the *Martyrs' Mirror*, I would like to recount several examples of nonresistance in the lives of martyrs.

Except for two (who are earlier in time)⁶⁵ the martyrs could well have read and been influenced by some edition of the Anabaptist martyr book.

All the accounts have a special theme running through them. In each case the martyr specifically forgave the person who betrayed or captured him.

The man who betrayed Adrian Corneliss in Leyden in 1552 was a servant in a prison where some Anabaptists were held. This servant actually tricked Adrian into visiting fellow believers in the prison by pretending to be sympathetic to the Anabaptists. Once Adrian was in the prison, the servant had him arrested. Adrian easily could have felt bitter against him. When this servant brought the prisoners food, Adrian spoke to him in an affectionate way, asking forgiveness if he, Adrian, had injured him in any way. The servant replied to Adrian, "You have not injured me, nor have any of your people."⁶⁶

Jacques d'Auchy, a peddler by trade, was betrayed in a similar way by an old acquaintance. The acquaintance invited Jacques to his house to display his wares. While Jacques was in his house, the man sent for the authorities to arrest him. At his arrest Jacques said:

I had placed confidence in you on account of our old acquaintance . . . but I will gladly and from my heart forgive you for this and it is my earnest desire that the Lord may have mercy upon you.⁶⁷

Adrian Willems was arrested at one or two o'clock in the morning by the bailiff of Vianen. The early hour was probably due to a surprise arrest at home or at a secret meeting and has, perhaps, a hint of treachery in it. Just before his execution Adrian was offered food. The bailiff who captured him was present and offered a drink. Adrian accepted the drink in a friendly manner so that the bailiff would not think Adrian bore him any ill will.⁶⁸

Jan Wouters of Dortrecht often changed his place of residence to avoid capture, but the local bailiff finally found and arrested him. Jan's arrest was a great humiliation to him because his seven-year-old daughter saw him captured, tied up like a criminal, and taken away. Jan states his forgiveness of the bailiff in a letter to the bailiff and in a letter to his wife. Jan writes his wife that she also should be sure to pray for and forgive the bailiff who captured him. For if not, he says,

you should prevent the Lord your and my God from forgiving your debt; hence I beseech you to forgive it from the heart. And pray for them that afflict you, and you will be a good sister in Christ . . . for we daily need forgiveness, because we are frail.⁶⁹

In this instance Jan Wouters himself not only forgives, but also requests his wife to do likewise.

In these accounts Anabaptists expressed forgiveness for persons who betrayed or captured them, persons against whom they could easily have felt bitter. Because imprisonment severely limited their freedom of action, such Anabaptists could express forgiveness only by a statement in a letter or by a friendly word to an opponent whom they chanced to meet in prison.

In one very striking encounter, however, forgiveness was carried beyond verbal expression to an actual deed of mercy. Dirk Willems of Asperen, a known Anabaptist, was being pursued hotly by a thief catcher and his superior, a burgomaster. Dirk dashed across the treacherous ice of a canal or pond. The thief catcher did not make it across, but broke through the thin crust.

Dirk easily could have justified himself in going on and escaping. He could have left the thief catcher floundering in the icy water for the burgomaster or someone else to rescue. But in a dramatic expression of nonresistant love, he turned back and pulled the thief catcher from the icy waters. The thief catcher, naturally, wanted to let Dirk go. But calling from the safety of the shore, the burgomaster compelled the thief catcher to take Dirk prisoner despite his deed of mercy.

Dirk Willems later suffered an exceptionally painful death by burning at the stake, but his striking example of non-resistant love in action received the following commendation in the *Martyrs' Mirror*:

. . . when the chief Shepherd shall appear in the clouds of heaven and gather together His elect from all the ends of the earth, he [Dirk] shall also through grace hear the words: "Well done good and faithful servant . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."⁷⁰

What of importance has our study of the *Martyrs' Mirror* as a mirror of nonresistance brought to light? Here is a review of our findings.

The study has shown the Anabaptists taking Christ, or Stephen as an imitator of Christ, as an example to follow in

the matter of nonresistance, and this fits the general Anabaptist ideal of *nachfolge Christi*. The study has shown Anabaptists supporting the doctrine of nonresistance with various lines of reasoning. They explained nonresistance as springing out of the virtues of love and humility, and also out of the lamb-like nature of Christ, as this nature is imparted to the children of God by the heavenly Father. With another line of reasoning, the Anabaptists said their warfare was spiritual and their sword was the Word of God, thus taking the images of violence to express their peaceful stance, beating verbal swords into spiritual plowshares.

The study has shown that with an unfriendly audience the explanations of nonresistance have a sharp finality that cuts off argument, but with a friendly audience the explanations of nonresistance have subtlety and a convincing, assuring quality.

Later the doctrine of nonresistance itself became a focal point for persecution in a way prophetic of future, continuing struggles of the church.

In the last stage of the development of the *Martyrs' Mirror*, van Bragt took a more sophisticated approach to nonresistance in his use of church history as well as Scripture to defend the doctrine. For example, van Bragt repeated Michael Sattler's early assertion that Christians should not fight the Turks, but did so by quoting a Waldensian statement as recorded in history. For van Bragt, as he studied the records of the past, nonresistance became a sign by which the true children of God could be distinguished from others.

Love for enemies led Anabaptists to try to save them from eschatological danger by sharp words of warning and from physical peril in one instance where the enemy was rescued from drowning. In fact, we have example after example of Anabaptists who actually lived out the principle of nonresistance under the influence of the martyr books, or the influence of the preaching and teaching out of which those books arose. We have viewed the *Martyrs' Mirror* not merely as history, but as a literary work, which comes alive and causes events by the inspiration it produces in its readers.

In the early editions when the book was called *Het Offer des Heeren* (The Sacrifice of the Lord), it was truly a mirror for martyrs. They looked into the book and saw the lives and stead-

fastness of the martyrs. They, then, followed their example and became martyrs themselves. By the time (1631) the title became *Martyrs' Mirror* persecution had abated. Although ridicule and even severe suffering were to be expected in some places, death was not, and so the book was no longer a preparation for becoming a martyr. It was no longer a mirror for martyrs as it was a mirror of martyrs, or compendium into which one could look for inspiration from those who had given their lives for the faith. The book still had great moral and spiritual power, but no longer produced martyrs because of the changed stance of the surrounding society. The reaction of society had become gentler.

Such is the world of ideas, as found in the *Martyrs' Mirror*, a mirror of nonresistance, which the writers and editors of this anthology have created, and into which their contemporaries entered.

ENDNOTES

¹Wisdom 7:26.
²Menno Simons, *Complete Writings*, trans. Leonard Verduin, ed. J. C. Wenger (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1956), 96, 75.
³Thieleman Jansz van Braght, *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs' Mirror of the Defenseless Christians Who Baptized Only Upon Confession of Faith*, trans. Joseph F. Sohm (Scottsdale, Pa.: Mennonite Publishing House, 1951), 522—hereafter *MM*; *Het Bloedigh Tooneel, of Martelaers Spiegel der Doops-Gesinde of Weereloose Christenen* (Amsterdam: J. van der Deyster, et al., 1685; reprint, Dieren: De Bataafsche Leeuw, 1984), II, 127—hereafter *D 1685*. This meaning of the word *spiegel* is similar to one meaning of the word *Ausbund* (paragon, example), perhaps, as it is used in the title of the Swiss German Anabaptist hymnbook. Of course this is only coincidental, not a matter of influence, except that Anabaptists in the Netherlands and those farther south both would have been very interested in examples of moral earnestness. See also *The Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. James A. H. Murray, et al. (13 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), s. v. "Mirror" II, 5.
 For an excellent recent study of the *Martyrs' Mirror* see Alan F. Kreider, "'The Servant Is Not Greater Than His Master': The Anabaptists and the Suffering Church," *MQR*, LVII (1984), 5-29. See also *The Mennonite Encyclopedia* (4 vols.; Scottsdale, Pa.: Mennonite Publishing House, 1955-59), s. v. "Martyr Books."
⁴Dirk Philips, *Enchiridion or Hand Book*, trans. A. B. Kolb (Elkhart, Ind.: Mennonite Publishing Co., 1910), 124, 132, 296, 327, 381, 415; *De geschriften van Dirk Philipsz*, in *Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandica*, X (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1914), 162, 168, 316, 344, 391, 420, 694.
⁵Dirk Philips, *Hand Book*, 132; *De geschriften*, 168. Twice, he also uses the idea of through a mirror darkly: *Hand Book*, 254, 287; *De geschriften*, 277, 307.
⁶*Historie der Martelaren ofte waerachtighe Getuygen Jesu Christi* (Haerlem: D. Keyser, 1615). Hans de Ries and Lijsken were both from Antwerp, although he was a generation later. See W. J. Kühler, *Geschiedenis van de Doopsgezinden in Nederland*, Tweede Deel, 1600-1735, Eerste

Heelft (Haarlem: H. D. Tjeenk Willink en Zoon, 1940), 99, 102-103.
⁷*Martelaers Spiegel der werelose Christenen i'zedert Ao. 1524* (Haerlem: Hans Passchiers van Wesbusch, 1631), 5. As a mirror can be used to improve one's outward appearance, likewise a mirror which presents ideal persons and actions can be used to improve one's life. A further implication is that moral activity is not fanciful or newly invented, but seeks models for imitation. The mirror could be used to re-create, just as the Anabaptists used the New Testament and the early church and strove to revive the patterns they found there.
⁸Library of Congress, *The National Union Catalog: a cumulative author list, representing Library of Congress printed cards and titles reported by other American libraries, 1953-1957* (28 vols.; Ann Arbor, Mich.: Edwards 1958), s. v. "speculum."
⁹Herbert Grabes, *The Mutable Glass: Mirror-imagery in titles and texts of the Middle Ages and English Renaissance*, trans. Gordon Collier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 279, 329. Some interesting titles he mentions are *Speculum militantis ecclesie* (1379) and *Speculum de Antichristo* (1384) both by John Wycliffe; *The mirror of Martyrs . . . the life and death of . . . John Old-castle* (1602) by John Weever; *The Mirror of Martyrs . . . with . . . letters written by M. Bradford* (1613) by Clement Cotton; *A Looking Glass for the Anabaptists . . . The impertinancies . . . of William Kiffen . . . grand ring leader of that seduced sect* (1645) by Josiah Ricraft; and *A Mirror for Anabaptists . . . that may put the blush upon them* (1660) by Thomas Gery.
¹⁰Grabes, 14, 33.
¹¹(1583) Grabes, 294.
¹²(before 1324) Grabes, 44, 253.
¹³*MM*, 70-71; *Het Offer des Heeren*, in *Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandica*, II (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1904), 56, 59—hereafter *D 1570*. This is a reprint, edited by S. Cramer, of the 1570 edition of *Het Offer des Heeren*.
¹⁴*MM*, 470; *D 1570*, p. 85.
¹⁵The prayer of Maria and Ursula, who were from the province of Utrecht, also dates from 1544. *MM*, 467; *D 1570*, p. 514. George Blaurock prayed in 1529, "I sincerely pray Thee for all our enemies, O Lord, . . . do not lay their sins to their charge." This prayer is earlier than the others, but did not enter the martyr books until after 1599. *MM*, 432; *D 1685 II*, 22. Cf. *MM*, 471; *D 1570*, p. 87 and also from the later martyr books *MM*, 75, 433, 434, 1104; *D 1685 II*, 10, 24, 26, 806. Cf. also Ethelbert Stauffer, "Martyrtheologie und Täuferbewegung," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, LII (1933), 547.
¹⁶*MM*, 750; *D 1685 II*, 398.
¹⁷*MM*, 759; *D 1685 II*, 409.
¹⁸*Ibid.*
¹⁹*MM*, 604-605; *D 1570*, pp. 305-307. Cf. Harold S. Bender, "The Pacifism of the Sixteenth Century Anabaptists," *MQR*, XXX (1956), 8.
²⁰*MM*, 1079; *Het Offer des Heeren* (Harlingen: Peter Sebastiaenszoon, 1599), in the unnumbered pages of the appendix at the end.
²¹Cf. Jacques d'Auchy, *MM*, 592; *D 1570*, pp. 272-73.
²²*MM*, 416-18; *D 1570*, pp. 62-67.
²³*MM*, 417; *D 1570*, p. 65; Hans Joachim Hillerbrand, *Die politische Ethik im oberdeutschen Taufertum; eine Untersuchung zur Religions- und Geistesgeschichte des Reformationszeitalters* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962), 57.
²⁴*MM*, 417; *D 1570*, p. 65. In a sense the town clerk and the presiding officials could have felt themselves threatened by the powerful moral logic of the Anabaptists, but they were still masters of the physical situation by the willingness to resort to force. Cf. John H. Yoder, "'Anabaptists and the Sword' Revisited: Systematic Historiography and Undogmatic Nonresistance," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, LXXXV (1974), 129-30.
²⁵*ME*, III, 74; *D 1570*, p. 399 in footnote.
²⁶*MM*, 681; *D 1570*, p. 398. In the same letter

where Jan rejects the coercion of the sword, he rejects infant baptism, also a form of coercion. He quotes Acts 2:41, "And they that gladly received the word were baptized." He asks, "Do your infants also do thus?" *MM*, 684. Cf. Leonard Verduin, *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 74-75.
²⁷*MM*, 682; *D 1570*, pp. 399-400.
²⁸*MM*, 498, 592, 593; *D 1570*, pp. 273, 275. The material in the *English Martyrs' Mirror* on p. 498 did not appear in any edition of *Het Offer des Heeren*, rather it first appeared in the martyr book of 1617 and may also be found in *D 1685 II*, 101. See note on p. 268 of *D 1570*.
²⁹See A. L. E. Verheyden, *Anabaptism in Flanders, 1530-1650: A Century of Struggle*, Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History, IX (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1961), 15, 60.
³⁰*MM*, 492; *D 1570*, p. 116; see also the statements by Jacob de Rore in Bruges in 1569 and by the Anabaptists in London in 1575. *MM*, 780, 1012; *D 1685 II*, 431, 698.
³¹*MM*, 542-43; *D 1570*, p. 225.
³²*MM*, 531; *D 1570*, p. 206.
³³Cf. *MM*, 946; *D 1685 II*, 622.
³⁴*MM*, 619; *D 1570*, p. 343.
³⁵This statement is not from the original material on Jacques d'Auchy in *Het Offer des Heeren*, but was added in later editions of the martyr books. *MM*, 498; *D 1685 II*, 101. See a similar denial by Jan Hendricks in Delft in 1570. *MM*, 938; *D 1685 II*, 613. Menno Simons also made a statement in 1552, disassociating himself from the Münsterites. "I have never seen Münster, nor have I ever been in their fellowship. I trust that by the grace of God I shall never eat nor drink with such . . . unless they truly repent." Menno Simons, *Complete Writings*, 547.
³⁶*MM*, 655; *D 1570*, p. 614.
³⁷In his brief account of the life of Christ, van Braght says that Christ is the Captain of the suffering martyrs, the Leader of all true believers. *MM*, 67; *D 1685 I*, 1-2. See also *MM*, 357; *D 1685 II*, *Voor-reden*. Christ as the Captain or spiritual knight, a very interesting theme, is mentioned numerous times in the *Ausbund*, pp. 180, 236, 424, 425, and 426.
 Also Henderick van Eiten, a former soldier of Antwerp, in 1569 encouraged his brethren to fight manfully in spiritual warfare to receive their reward from the Spiritual Captain Jesus Christ. *MM*, 819; *D 1685 II*, 476.
³⁸*MM*, 470; *D 1570*, p. 85.
³⁹*MM*, 492; *D 1570*, p. 116. Also Jerome Segers and Jan Geerts *MM*, 505, 681; *D 1570*, pp. 128, 398-99. Cf. Ydse Gaukes and Jan Hendricks *MM*, 890, 938; *D 1685 II*, 557, 613. For a similar statement by Dirk Philips see *De geschriften*, 373-74; *Enchiridion or Hand Book*, 361.
⁴⁰James M. Stayer says that *Het Offer des Heeren* shows limited concern with teaching on the sword and refers to only six statements on that subject. *Anabaptists and the Sword*, Second Edition (Lawrence, Kansas: Coronado Press, 1976), 321. However in addition to those Stayer mentioned, several other statements appear to refer to nonresistance, as follows: Adrian Pan (1559) rejects the Münsterites, and if we include the songbook appendix dated 1563, which was always bound with *Het Offer des Heeren*, we also have Maria and Ursula van Beckum (1544), Mariken Jans (1552), and Jan Schut (1561) giving testimony to nonresistance. So this is four more testimonies. By including the account of Stephen, which teaches nonresistance, and that of Michael Sattler, the editor is choosing material on nonresistance and indicating his concern with that doctrine. Rather than the six statements in *Het Offer* which Stayer claims, we now have twelve.
 Further, Jacques d'Auchy brings up the subject several times, not just once, and later editions of *Het Offer* include statements of Jan Geerts (1564) and Joost de Tollenaar (1589). These references to nonresistance are to be found respec-

tively on the following pages: *MM*, 619, 467, 495, 655, 71, 417, 592, 593, 604, 605, 681-82, 1079; *D* 1570, pp. 343, 514, 580, 614, 56, 59, 65, 272-73, 275, 305, 306-307, 398-400, and in the unnumbered appendix of the 1599 edition. Cf. Hendrick W. Meihuizen, "De Geloofswereeld onzer Martelaren," *Algemeen Doopsgezind Weekblad*, V (August 18, 1951), 2. Has Stayer's viewpoint prevented him from seeing these testimonies to nonresistance? Is his argument from silence an argument which is intrinsically weak?

⁴¹*MM*, 1012; *D* 1685 II, 699.

⁴²*MM*, 1084; *D* 1685 II, 782. Cf. Donovan E. Smucker, "The Theological Triumph of the Early Anabaptist Mennonites: The Re-discovery of Biblical Theology in Paradox," *MQR*, XIX (1945), 20-22.

⁴³*MM*, 692; *D* 1685 II, 331.

⁴⁴*MM*, 750; *D* 1685 II, 398. Jan Wouters also gave a warning and said it was "out of love and friendship, and not through bitterness." *MM*, 926; *D* 1685 II, 599. Hans van Overdam, Jacques d'Auchy, and Jan Watier also warn their persecutors of coming judgment. See *MM*, 492, 606, 759; *D* 1570, 115-16, 309, *D* 1685 II, 409. See also Cornelius J. Dyck, "The Suffering Church in Anabaptism," *MQR*, LIX (1985), 21-22 and Jacob Hutter, *Brotherly Faithfulness* (Rifton, N.Y.: Plough Publishing House, 1979), 72-73 for further examples.

⁴⁵*MM*, 753-54; *D* 1685 II, 401-402.

⁴⁶*Ibid.* This is very close to the position of Guy Hersherberger, who holds that war has always been contrary to God's will and that Canaan would have been conquered by the direct action of God without human help if the Israelites had been obedient. See Guy Franklin Hersherberger, *War, Peace, and Nonresistance* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1969), 30-31.

⁴⁷*MM*, 962-63; *D* 1685 II, 641.

⁴⁸*MM*, 1054-55, 1056; *D* 1685 II, 746-47, 749. See also *ME*, IV, 956 and Verduin, 89-90.

⁴⁹Reytse Aysesz, executed in 1574, is said to have been the last martyr in the Netherlands. *ME*, III, 525.

⁵⁰Hans Landis was one of the last executions in Switzerland, but this occurred already in 1614. *Ibid.*

⁵¹*MM*, 1131; *D* 1685 II, 831.

⁵²*MM*, 102; *D* 1685 I, 68. For a fascinating discussion of the actual practice of nonresistance by the Mennonites of the Netherlands during van Braght's century see Peter Brock, *Pacifism in Europe to 1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 178-85. See also N. van der Zijpp, *De vroegere Doopsgezinden en de Krijgsdienst* (Wolvega: G. Taconis, 1930), 17-26.

⁵³*MM*, 120; 153, 159, 160; 157, 162, 166, 169; 232, 235; *D* 1685 I, 110; 140, 147, 148; 144, 145, 150, 156, 160; 239, 235. On p. 160 (*D* 1685 I, 148) van Braght quotes Ambrose as saying, "The violence of worldly opponents must not be overcome with worldly, but with spiritual weapons." However, church history records Ambrose as having believed that some wars are just. See Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1953), 244.

⁵⁴*MM*, 146, 170, 186; *D* 1685 I, 99, 161, 139.

⁵⁵*MM*, 275; *D* 1685 I, 302.

⁵⁶*MM*, 287-88, 305-307, 321; *D* 1685 I, 319, 326-38, 349.

⁵⁷*MM*, 281; *D* 1685 I, 310.

⁵⁸*MM*, 337; *D* 1685 I, 390. Cf. Murray L. Wagner, *Petr Chelčický: A Radical Separatist in Hussite Bohemia*, Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History, no. 25 (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1983), 33, 85-90.

⁵⁹*MM*, 174; *D* 1685 I, 122. See also *MM*, 18-19, 305; *D* 1685 I, [XV], 326; Clarence Bauman, "Gewaltlosigkeit als Kennzeichen der Gemeinde," in *Die Mennoniten*, ed. H. J. Goertz, Die Kirchen der Welt, vol. 8 (Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1971), 128 ff.; Alvin J. Beachy, *The Concept of Grace in the Radical Reformation* (Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1977), 167 ff.; and Hillerbrand, 54. Van Braght withholds a negative judgment when evidence for it was lacking and tries to practice the principle of love in writing history. In another place van Braght says he has omitted some statements about the Waldenses and Albigenses because some of his brethren may hold different opinions on the matter, and he does not wish to offend them. *MM*, 307; *D* 1685 I, 328.

⁶⁰*MM*, 174; *D* 1685 I, 122.

⁶¹Jan Wouters in 1572 says that one of the marks of the little flock of Christ is that they do not resist their enemies. *MM*, 915; *D* 1685 II, 586.

⁶²The "Olive Branch" confession (1627) deals with nonresistance in the English *Martyrs' Mirror* on p. 30; the Jan Cents confession (1630) on pp. 36-37; the Dortrecht confession (1632) on pp. 42-43; as well as the thirty-three article confession (below), which had appeared in the martyr book of 1617.

⁶³*MM*, 393; *D* 1685 I, 432; see also *MM*, 402-403; *D* 1685 I, 442-43.

⁶⁴Clarence Bauman, *Gewaltlosigkeit im Täuferium* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), xiii. Bauman says, "Der Begriff 'wehrlos' kommt im Täuferium anscheinend erstmalig auf dem Titelblatt des Märtyrer-Spiegels von 1631 als letzte Zusammenfassung eines bereits längst vorhanden Glaubensgutes vor." The German *wehrlos* is the equivalent of the Dutch *weeros*, or *weerloos* in modern Dutch. The word *wehrlos* existed before, but not with this specific meaning as applied to one who holds that violence should not be resisted by force as a religious principle. See "wehrlos," and "Wehrlosigkeit," Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, ed. Alfred Götze (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1955), XIV, 281-91. For more discussion of terminology see Ethelbert Stauffer, "The Anabaptist Theology of Martyrdom" (a translation and reworking by Robert Friedmann of the "Martyrertheologie" cited in n. 15 above), *MQR*, XIX (1945), 212.

⁶⁵Adrian Corneliss in 1552 and Jacques d'Auchy in 1559, both antedating the first edition of *Het Offer des Heeren* in 1562.

⁶⁶*MM*, 535; *D* 1570, p. 215.

⁶⁷*MM*, 610; *D* 1685 II, 235.

⁶⁸*MM*, 722; *D* 1685 II, 367.

⁶⁹*MM*, 914, also 897, 913, 925; *D* 1685 II, 585, 566, 584, 599.

⁷⁰*MM*, 741-42; *D* 1685 II, 387-88. The account of Dirk Willems was introduced into the *Martyrs' Mirror* by Pieter Jans Twisck in his 1617 edition, *Historie der warachtighe getuygen Jesus Christi*. See W. J. Kühler, 99. Still other references to nonresistance in the *Martyrs' Mirror*, not dealt with in this article, are as follows: *MM*, 415, 1117; *D* 1685 II, 4, 818-819.

Book Reviews

Ronald A. Wells, *History Through the Eyes of Faith*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989. Pp. 243. (\$9.95—paperback)

In *History Through the Eyes of Faith*, Ronald A. Wells has produced a model for successful integration of Christian faith and the history of Western civilization. He traces the developing mentalities of Western culture, from the classical age to the present, while providing commentary and insight that benefits the thoughtful Christian reader.

The discipline of history is a mental dialog between recorded human experiences and present reflection on and analysis of that experience. Wells leads the Christian reader through a series of reflections and analyses of several ideological crisis points that formed and shaped the modern Western mentality. At each crucial point, Wells models a healthy combination of critical reasoning and empathic understanding that should be practiced by all thoughtful Christians. Therefore, Wells not only provides insight and understanding of the subject matter, he also argues convincingly how Christians should practice historical thinking.

In the first eight chapters, Wells deals with many significant developmental themes of Western culture leading up to the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century. These important themes include: the tensions between the Hebrew and Greek mentalities that contribute to the Judeo-Christian tradition; the historicity of Christ; the developing relationship between the early church and the Roman Empire; the question of genuine Christian spirituality during the middle ages; the relationship between classical and Christian humanism of the Renaissance; the Protestant Reformation as *tragic* necessity; and the dynamic nature of theological interplay during the Reformation as seen in the social and political contexts.

Throughout the first eight chapters, Wells recognizes the insight gained from emphasizing "continuities rather than discontinuities, and . . . transitions rather than abrupt change" (p. 78). By understanding the past up to 1600 in terms of its continuities, we are less inclined to see the story of Christian faith and institutions apart from its

cultural context. Protestant Christians often are tempted to see the story of God's "true church" as completely separate from the ecclesiastical institutions and intellectual achievement of the medieval church. For many Protestants, the Reformation is viewed as a kind of leap back to the "purity" of the early church. Wells kindly reminds us on several occasions that the historical record, from the early church to Luther, indicates that Christian faith found expression within and in reaction to the developing Western culture, but hardly apart from it.

In the second half of the book, Wells considers the rise of modernism, particularly the mentalities of rationalism and progress. He begins this analysis of modernism with the birth of rationalism in the scientific revolution and its popularization during the Enlightenment. He continues with the idea of progress as experienced through the Industrial and Democratic Revolutions of the nineteenth century. The post-modern rejection of rationalism and the rise of "anxiety" during the twentieth century completes the review of European modernism. Wells then raises the question of whether or not America is the focal point for the continuation of the Western modernism and its mentalities of rationalism and faith in the idea of progress.

Wells is correct in stressing the development of the modern mentality in Western culture. The rationalism born of the scientific revolution, nurtured by the optimism of the Enlightenment and developed into the idea of progress, certainly inspired and guided European events of the nineteenth century. It is to these seventeenth- and eighteenth-century developments we should turn and not to the Renaissance and Reformation for the best understanding of the modern Western mentality.

Wells is most provocative when he challenges the reader to understand and come to grips with the secular culture of the United States inherited from Western Europe. He repeatedly draws distinctions between Christian orthodoxy and Western values that are often glossed over or misunderstood by many secular historians. Yet, Wells does not reject the heritage of Western humane values as do many conservative Christians. Rather, he attempts to affirm and applaud the best of Western humanist values while acknowledging the tension between them and orthodox Christian

beliefs. He reminds the reader to avoid simple equating of Western European and American cultures with Christian values and beliefs, while encouraging the reader to appreciate the richness of western culture that has benefited Christians and humankind.

Though Wells evaluates western culture in a spirit of generosity, he does not avoid criticizing it from a Christian perspective. He argues that the development of the modern mentality has been synonymous with the development of a secular mentality. The course of the modern age has seen the demise of "Christian" institutional authority, control, and influence of western culture. However, against the declining influence of organized Christianity, one must remember that in the twentieth century, it seems Western secularism has run its course. Other non-Western cultures are making important impacts on growing global mentalities. While many observers might argue that Christian faith is merely a private matter that cannot influence pressing global affairs (let alone regain its influence over Western or American culture) Wells offers a very different picture.

Wells maintains that Christian faith has always had an impact on culture through the means of each individual Christian. He concludes his essay by citing five short biographies of Christians who have made a significant impact on their societies. The stories of Dirk Willems, Mother Teresa, William Wilberforce, Francis Asbury, and Abraham Kuyper, serve to remind the reader that the greatest impact of Christian faith on culture must always be weighed according to the cost of discipleship paid by each believer in their striving to be faithful to the kingdom of God and His society that is yet to come.

Ronald A. Wells has written a successful integration of Christian faith and history. This does not mean that he has written the definitive integration of faith and history. Rather, this means the author has posed thoughtful and provocative questions that every Christian should consider when studying the history of Western culture. As history is the "mental dialog between recorded human experiences and present reflection on and analysis of that experience," the "definitive" integration of faith and history is best left to the imagination of the reader. After all, each Christian will have a separate set of "present reflections" on which to

analyze the past. *History Through the Eyes of Faith* is of valuable assistance to Christian historians and the thoughtful Christian reader working on their own "definitive" integration of faith and history.

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Daniel and Kathryn McCauley, *Decorative Arts of the Amish of Lancaster County*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 1988. Pp. 160. (\$29.95)

Mennonites and Amish have mixed sentiments about collectors—or so the feeling surfaced at the Mennonite Museums Conference held in April 1989 at the Kauffman Museum. We are pleased that non-Mennonites are interested in the hand-crafted objects from our past and that these items have "value." Yet the sale of these objects to non-Mennonite collectors means that the material evidence of our heritage is separated from us.

Decorative Arts of the Amish of Lancaster County features Amish-crafted objects from 1860 to 1940 that are now in the hands of private collectors. Styled as an art book, *Decorative Arts* provides full-color photographs of decorated objects, each on a neutral white page. Beyond a mere documentation of the visual beauty of these objects, Daniel and Kathryn McCauley furnish information on the construction and decorative styles of the objects and relate these forms to Amish culture and belief. In addition, the McCauleys have made exceptional efforts to trace the Amish people who made, used, gave away, and inherited these objects. The information from this oral history research and the biographies of nine Lancaster Amish artists (in the final chapter) provide a bridge of knowledge to the objects that are now gone from the Amish homes of their creators. It is through these efforts to present a human context and to document the decorative arts of the Amish that the McCauleys, who are collectors themselves, have made a worthy contribution to the Lancaster Amish community.

Decorative Arts is divided into four main sections. "The Amish and Their Decorative Culture" provides a general overview of the history and faith of the

Lancaster Amish community and their relation to the decorative arts. The remaining three sections of the book are devoted to the decorative arts. The "Textiles" chapter is three times longer than the others and includes samplers, quilts, hooked rugs, fabric toys, door towels, clothing, and pin cushions. The chapter on "Graphics" features drawings and paintings, hand-fashioned family records, and bookplates. The shortest chapter concerns "Furniture and Household Objects" (such as button boxes). In all three chapters, each page features one object with a full-color photograph, information on the artist, size, materials, current owner, and a short text placing the object in a broader historical or aesthetic context.

The McCauleys invite more research on Amish decorative arts and corrections of their work (see Preface). One minor but misleading error is the use of the term *crepe* (a tightly twisted yarn or a fabric made from crepe yarns) to designate a manufactured fiber—probably rayon (see pp. 47, 49, 67, 72). While not claiming to be a definitive work, the McCauleys have provided a foundation for what constitutes Amish "decorative culture." Yet to be explored is how the decorative arts serve to limit or link the Amish with other decorative arts traditions. The authors frequently note similarities in the style of Amish-decorated objects to those of the surrounding Pennsylvania German communities, but do not attempt to explain them. Other provocative questions arise upon reading this book. What story lies behind the brightly colored wool yarns and the realistic sampler motifs of the second half of the 19th century which were adopted both by Lancaster Amish women and by Mennonite women in Prussia and Russia? Why is the decorated door towel of the Amish and Mennonites of eastern North America not found among other Mennonite groups? Why have both Amish and Mennonite women incorporated American quilting into their decorative arts but why have only the Amish developed a distinctly visual style? Is there a common source for the lidded basket (p. 148) used by Amish women "to carry baby diapers and assorted notions to church gatherings" and the similar but smaller basket used by late 19th century Mennonite women of the Great Plains to carry their silk lace and ribbon bonnets to church? Given some similarities in textile traditions (a female domain), why are the

styles of Amish and Mennonite hand-crafted furniture (a male domain) so strikingly different?

The collectibility of the Amish decorative arts lies in their visual charm and their connection to a distinctive religious tradition. The McCauleys have demonstrated that collectors are reciprocating by documenting this material culture and by interpreting Amish decorative arts in terms of religious values and cultural identity. The more complex inquiry yet to be built on the McCauley's foundation is the study of how our material history is evidence of our separateness and our connectedness to other Anabaptist groups and to the world.

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H. Wayne Pipkin and John Howard Yoder, editors, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*. Scottdale: Herald Press, 1989. Pp. 608. (\$39.95)

Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism is the fifth volume in the Classics of the Radical Reformation series. For the first time scholars of Anabaptism now have access to a complete English translation of the writings of Hubmaier, an important early Anabaptist leader and theologian.

This English volume is long overdue. Already in 1928, the 400th anniversary of Hubmaier's martyrdom, there was a plan put forward which would have led to a German edition of Hubmaier's writings, including an introduction and commentary, as well as the simultaneous publication of an English translation. Various events, including World War II, interrupted this plan. The German edition, *Balthasar Hubmaier Schriften*, edited by Gunnar Westin and Torsten Bergsten, was finally published in 1962 as a part of the *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer* series. This volume served as a basis for the Pipkin and Yoder work, although existing English translations, notably those of George D. Davidson and Henry C. Vedder, were also taken into account. The translators chose to insert page break numbers in their English text to indicate the beginning of a new page in the Westin and Bergsten publication. This addition is most helpful to the serious scholar wishing to check the

English translation against the original German or Latin of Hubmaier.

Hubmaier, one of the few early Anabaptist leaders trained as a theologian, was awarded a doctorate in theology from the University of Ingolstadt in 1512, where he then served as theology professor and later prorector. By the early 1520s Hubmaier could be counted as a sympathizer of the Zwinglian Reformation and by 1526 a visible participant in Anabaptism, when he was baptized by Wilhelm Reublin, along with sixty other adults from his congregation at Waldshut. In April 1526 he left the Zurich area, travelling first to Constance and then to Augsburg which was to become a center of South German Anabaptism. By July 1526 Hubmaier was in Nikolsburg, Moravia, where he remained under the protection of the Lords of Liechtenstein until he was turned over to the imperial authorities in Vienna in 1527. On March 10, 1528, he was burned at the stake in Vienna.

The writings treated in this volume come from Hubmaier's Anabaptist period, in fact, it was only during this period that he had his writings published. Many of these writings, such as "A Christian Catechism," "On Fraternal Admonition," "A Form of Water

Baptism" and "A Form for Christ's Supper" are significant treatises for the early Anabaptist movement. The one work which set Hubmaier apart from mainstream Anabaptism was "On the Sword," a lengthy treatise demonstrating his own positive attitudes toward government. This document was directed not only toward the *Stäbler* (staff-bearers) of Nikolsburg, but also against other Anabaptists who took a nonviolent stance. One additional Hubmaier text of interest today is "On Heretics and Those Who Burn Them." This treatise, printed sometime after September 1524, may be the first Reformation text dealing with freedom of the will and with human rights.

Translators are always faced with the dilemma of strict literalism and clarity or readability. This translation is very readable and at the same time quite true to the original. Hubmaier's writings preceded Luther's translation of the Bible into standard High German (1534) and consequently do not always adhere to modern orthography or sentence structure. One might be tempted to translate a few phrases differently in an attempt to capture more accurately the color or flare of the original. For example Pipkin and Yoder translate "kains wegs werdend ir zstaintod

sterben" as "By no means will you die" (page 59). Perhaps "in no way will you become dead as stones" would better recapture Hubmaier's feelings. On page 60 one finds the translation of "damit die so ietz psudelt sind, noch bass psudelt werdind" as "so that those who are filthy may become more filthy." I would suggest "so that those who are now soiled (stained) become even more contaminated."

The text is not marred by any glaring grammatical or typographical errors, thanks to modern technology. One error noted is found on page 51 where I Cor. 14:20 is cited, rather than I Cor. 14:26 as should be the case.

H. Wayne Pipkin and John Howard Yoder stand to be commended for having given us this outstanding addition to Anabaptist studies. It includes an excellent bibliography, useful and detailed indexes, illustrations and a large fold-out map. This volume should become a part of the libraries of schools, churches, pastors and other scholars interested in Anabaptist and Reformation history.

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Cornelius Krahn (1902-1990)

Cornelius Krahn, founding editor of *Mennonite Life*, died August 3, 1990, in Newton, Kansas. Dr. Krahn was an Anabaptist-Mennonite historian of international reputation. Through his prodigious efforts in research, writing, editing, teaching, collecting, organizing, and inspiring others to carry on, he established a legacy which will live for generations to come.

Krahn served as editor of *Mennonite Life* for a quarter century, from its beginning in 1946 to his retirement in 1971. His scholarship was characterized by breadth of vision. He tended toward an inclusive view of the Radical Reformation—refusing to read out of the tradition those whose theology or behavior he found uncongenial. He had a strong ecumenical spirit much like that of another Cornelius who preceded him in Anabaptist studies at Bethel College, President C. H. Wedel.

Krahn strove to make *Mennonite Life* relevant to Mennonite people facing a changing world. In the early issues he wrote stirring editorial appeals in behalf of an awakened Christian faith. In January 1948 he wrote,

The greatest need in the world today is love—divine love. Our civilization is in the state of the prodigal son—living on husks that swine would not eat. It has not yet found its way back to the house of the Father. . . . We as evangelists living in the atomic age need to make use of all available means that are in harmony with the “glad tidings” to make them effective in our day.

Cornelius Krahn’s death is mourned by hundreds of students and scholars. We who were helped along our way, whether in formation of peoplehood identity, in Christian faith, or in the launching of career, will be forever grateful to this great scholar and inspiring teacher.