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# Menno Simons

1492-1561

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Menno Simons was another contemporary of Luther and moved the Reformation forward in the Swiss Confederate states. He influenced the Dutch Anabaptists, and the Mennonites are named after him.

He had become a priest at the age of twenty-four, but thought himself, and the other clergy, careless and self-indulgent. He had doubts about transubstantiation, and his research led him to some of Luther's writings. Because of this he studied the New Testament, which he had previously been afraid to read.

There was a dispute about the correct age for baptism following the 1531 execution of Sicke Freerks Snijder, for his rebaptism as an adult. Menno's search left him discontent with inconsistent answers he found comparing Luther, Bucer, and Bullinger. He resolved to rely on Scripture alone. Upon this decision he became an evangelical preacher.

His preaching provoked opposition, then persecution. "The error of the cursed sect of the Anabaptists ... would doubtless be and remain extirpated, were it not that a former priest Menno Symons ... has misled many simple and innocent people," complained a letter to the regent of the Netherlands in 1541. "To seize and apprehend this man we have offered a large sum of money, but until now with no success. Therefore we have entertained the thought of offering and promising pardon and mercy to a few who have been misled ... if they would bring about the imprisonment of the said Menno Symons."

Holy Roman Emperor Charles V joined in, and offering 100 gold guilders for Menno's arrest. He successfully avoided arrest. He reacted to his opposition by adopting pacifism, believing that ideas were more powerful than armies. He said, "The regenerated do not go to war, nor engage in

strife. They are children of peace who have beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning forks, and know no war.” His preaching changed those who followed them to become likewise pacifist and moderate.

Even before leaving Catholicism, he rejected the Catholic teaching of transubstantiation because he detected nothing in the bread and wine he dispensed at Mass to suggest it transformed into Christ’s body and blood. This was a position he did not adopt lightly, and his decision came only after careful examination of the question. "Finally, I got the idea to examine the New Testament diligently. I had not gone very far when I discovered that we were deceived, and my conscience, troubled on account of the aforementioned bread, was quickly relieved."

His view on Christian duty can be summarized in his statement: “True evangelical faith, cannot lie dormant, it clothes the naked, it feeds the hungry, it comforts the sorrowful, it shelters the destitute, it serves those that harm it, it binds up that which is wounded, it has become all things to all creatures.”

After leaving Catholicism he became an Anabaptist leader. Though many of their preachers were enthusiastic, even fanatical, he exemplified sober, thoughtful Christian life and tried to be a meek follower of Christ. His followers were thought to be dangerous and were persecuted and mistreated. When they endured it well, the authorities came to regard them as both different and non-threatening.

He was not the founder, but was the regenerator of the Anabaptist movement. He was their most significant spokesman in the Netherlands during the sixteenth century. Menno provided moderate leadership and prolific writings to unify the nonviolent Dutch Anabaptists. Their peaceful beliefs have made their survival in surrounding, violent societies a cause for admiration.

Menno took I Corinthians 3:11 as his motto – “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.” He made this a theme for his ministry, and his teachings are therefore defined as Christ-centered.

Menno's followers were referred to as Mennonites, a name used to deride them. Later, however, the Swiss Anabaptists who emigrated to America

adopted that name. Today there are almost 1.5 million Mennonites in 75 countries.

After leaving Catholicism, he married and fathered three children. He died in 1561.