

When Caesar Looks Like God: Mennonite Peace Theology in a Militaristic Society

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Among the distinctive views of Mennonites who came to Royal Prussia early in the sixteenth century, few created such sharp differences with the rest of society as did their views of the relationship between church and state. The Mennonite peace position elicited special concern. Beginning with the Schleithem Confession of 1527, most Anabaptist statements of faith regularly contained a strong affirmation of showing love in all situations, even in war. Menno Simons reiterated these views when he taught that love for one's enemies was a central part of being a follower of Christ.

It should be noted that the Mennonites were not alone in rejecting warfare. Erasmus, for example, in his *Complaint of Peace*, had decried the selfish ambition and greed that, from his perspective, often led princes and other political leaders to go to war against each other. Indeed, as he lamented in this treatise, even bishops and the pope himself, resorted to armed struggle for territorial and economic gain. Thus, Erasmus concluded, Europe engaged in civil wars, pitting church brothers against each other. Surely there must be a better way to resolve disputes.¹ It is worth noting that some Anabaptist-Mennonite leaders used Erasmus as an example of how a renowned and respected intellectual leader responded to the frequent resort to war. Menno also made a number of positive references to Erasmus. Similarly, in 1693 a Dutch Mennonite minister, Engel Arentson of Doregeest of the Mennonites in Ryp, wrote to a professor at the University of Leyden, explaining why Mennonites rejected participation in war. He appealed to Scripture, history and also specifically to Erasmus.²

When Mennonites first came to Royal Prussia, they were faced with the demand that all citizens in towns had to be ready to come to their defense. Since Mennonites usually refused military service, this effectively barred them from becoming citizens. Often this also meant that they could not live in the town proper, but only in its suburbs. For those Mennonites living rural communities, military obligations were often of less concern. In this context, the Mennonite belief in pacifism did not necessarily cause problems

with the authorities, other than that Mennonites were not accepted as burghers, or citizens, but rather as persons with restricted rights.

When Mennonites began immigrating into the Vistula Delta, they naturally brought with them the belief that Christians should not engage in warfare. Menno Simons had repeatedly emphasized that followers of Christ should demonstrate love, and not go to war.³ A letter he wrote to “the children of God in the land of Prussia” in 1549 reflects this irenic position.⁴ Such views were also repeatedly affirmed by Dutch and other Mennonites.⁵

Mennonite Pacifism in Royal Prussia

Since Mennonites were invited to come to the Vistula Delta because of their skills in transforming marshes into productive farmlands, it is not surprising that early settlers were not subjected to careful doctrinal examinations. As their numbers increased, however, and a number of Mennonites settled in cities or city-owned land, some tensions began to arise between them and other religious groups. Leaders in Danzig and elsewhere began to ask exactly what the beliefs of the Mennonites were. This concern became especially pronounced as the Counter-Reformation forces moved resolutely against dissenting religious views. Church and state, in reflecting the political and religious practices of the day, worked together to achieve their goals, whether this involved Catholic or Protestant rulers. It is therefore not surprising that kings of Poland, like their counterparts in other countries, involved themselves directly in religious issues. Thus, when King John III Sobieski came to Danzig in 1678, Mennonite leaders were asked to explain their religious beliefs. The interrogation, conducted by Bishop Stanisław Sarnowski, covered a wide variety of teachings, and also included a question regarding the Mennonite attitude toward war and government. When asked if Mennonites permitted taking revenge against one’s enemies, the Mennonite minister responded that in Matthew 5:43 Christ had forbidden such action.⁶ When asked about participation in government and military action, he responded that holding office at the local level was permissible, but not at a high level where one might be involved in taking a position that required “the shedding of blood.”⁷

Another Mennonite minister, when interrogated, gave fairly detailed responses about various tenets of Mennonite faith,⁸ and demonstrated that pacifism was a basic belief of the Mennonites.⁹ Correspondence with Mennonite churches in the Netherlands at this time also shows clearly that Mennonites in both regions shared this view.¹⁰

Mennonites in Elbing were also subjected to scrutiny of their religious beliefs. When some guild members complained about

economic setbacks because Mennonites were establishing themselves in the city, they used religious nonconformity as a pretext for urging expulsion of the Mennonites. They persuaded the Lutheran minister in St. Mary's Church to urge the expulsion of the "heretic" Mennonites from the city and its adjacent land holdings; the city council, however, refused because the city benefited from the economic activities of Mennonite craftsmen and traders. Mennonite farmers in particular were regarded as desirable settlers, since they were turning the city-owned marshlands to the west, such as the Ellerwald, into profitable farmlands. In 1572, for example, the council, acting under considerable pressure, agreed to expel Mennonites, but then decided that expulsion should be delayed until "the grain could be harvested."¹¹ This postponement was first extended to 1575 and then shelved indefinitely.¹² Soon, prominent Mennonites were allowed to become citizens, and to pay an assessment in lieu of military service. The sequence of events illustrates a technique used frequently by authorities. They would issue a pro forma statement against Mennonites, then not implement the decision. Mennonites in turn would pay higher taxes or assessments¹³ Compared to conditions in most other parts of Europe, the situation in Elbing at this time suggests an unusual openness and tolerance. Despite their religious distinctiveness, Mennonites were allowed to have their own church building as early as 1590, live in the city as well as on city land, engage in most occupations, and adhere to their religious beliefs.

It is important to note that, because of their historical development and their support of the Polish king during the war between him and the Teutonic Knights, cities such as Danzig and Elbing functioned as largely independent cities under the crown. They were thus able to control most of their external and internal affairs, including matters of religion and diplomacy. In both Danzig and Elbing, the Lutheran Reformation gained dominance. Lutherans shared power with Catholics, and for a time, efforts were made to exclude other Protestant faiths, such as the Calvinists. It should be noted that Mennonites were not alone in being subjected to religious discrimination. Both cities, however, were important centers of commerce, and thus had extensive trading ties with other regions, such as cities in the Netherlands, England, Scotland, and elsewhere.

An important consequence of the growth of Protestant faiths in Poland was a decision taken by the Sejm (Parliament) stating that its members would not go to war with each other because of religious differences. This historic event, the "Confederation of Warsaw" in 1573, was a major factor in sparing Poland from the kind of religious warfare that swept through other parts of Europe.

The State and Inter-Church Relations

The Confederation of Warsaw, in effect, encouraged the growth of various religious groups. In Danzig, the Calvinists gained control of two churches, but felt their numbers merited another church. When the council raised objections, the Calvinists appealed to the government of the Netherlands, and in a memorandum of January 19, 1651, the Estates-General urged the council to grant the request of the Calvinists. In many instances, the council approved requests from the Estates-General. This time, however, the council wrote that there already was a Reformed church nearby, and the Lutherans also needed one there. Thus, the council diplomatically appealed to the Dutch sense of fairness, and declined the request.¹⁴ At the same time, the incident demonstrated that connections between Danzig and the Netherlands remained strong; Mennonites also benefited from this connection.

Most Mennonites in Royal Prussia lived on reclaimed marshlands that constituted part of the Vistula-Nogat delta. This land, commonly referred to as the “Werder” (Żuławy), was divided among numerous owners, each of whom held broad jurisdiction over their respective territories. Owners included the king, church, nearby cities, nobles and others. The common thread that united the land-owners and rulers was a desire to make their lands productive, although other concerns, such as preventing the spread of heresy could also shape policy.

One of the larger Mennonite communities in the Werder arose around a village later known as Tiegenhof (Nowy Dwór). Situated on the Tiede (Tuja) River, and surrounded by marshy lands, the area was crown land, but held by the brothers Loitz, in exchange for contributions to the royal treasury. These brothers invited Mennonites from the Netherlands to come, drain the lands and make them productive.¹⁵ Early contractual arrangements specify that the Mennonite settlers would be free from any responsibility to quarter troops. Subsequently, monetary payments in lieu of military service became common. Sometimes, as political changes occurred and new owners and leaders arose, previous agreements were called into question. Thus, at the provincial sejmik in Graudenz (Grudziądz) in 1581, the Bishop of Culm (Chełmno) mournfully intoned, “Since many have forsaken God, religious divisions have spread like a cancer in our society, attacking our earlier time when all held to a pure faith and all things were done in love and unity.”¹⁶ A similar view was expressed at the sejmik in Graudenz in 1608 when the Bishop of Culm deplored the spread of heresy¹⁷ and urged expulsion from the Werder of Lutherans, Anabaptists and other dissenters. Again in 1612 some representatives in the provincial diet called for stopping all further immigration of “Calvinists, Anabaptists and other sectarians.”¹⁸

Vigorous opposition came from the cities, and freedom to choose one's religion was again affirmed. Soon thereafter, King Władysław IV issued a sweeping re-affirmation of Mennonite liberties. He declared that Mennonites, who had brought prosperity to the Werder and who had been invited by his grandfather and others, were to enjoy exercise of their promised rights "for all time."¹⁹ From that time on, when Mennonites felt themselves pressured, they appealed to the king; virtually without exception, Polish kings came to the defense of the Mennonites. An important perception of royal power emerged in the Mennonite community; kings were seen as friends.

The State and Inter-Confessional Relationships

Another issue that involved relationships between Mennonites and power structures was the question of accepting converts from other faiths into Mennonite churches. Both Catholic and Protestant church officials, as well as numerous civil authorities, repeatedly issued warnings forbidding persons to join Mennonite congregations. Mennonites were warned not to accept or seek converts from other faiths. However, when a person from another faith asked to receive baptism and be accepted into a Mennonite church, the situation could become difficult. In 1686 a woman asked to be baptized and accepted into a Danzig Mennonite church. When the city council learned of this, the Mennonite minister was summoned, accused of having misled the woman, fined 50 ducats, and instructed to refer her to the Lutheran minister.²⁰

Nonetheless, others did join Mennonite congregations. Sometimes, such converts would go to the Netherlands to be baptized and then return to a Mennonite church in Royal Prussia. Thus, in 1731 church leaders in the Large Werder wrote to the Bij Het Lam Mennonite church in Amsterdam and informed them that two men who had been baptized as infants now wanted to be baptized upon profession of their faith and join the Mennonites. These two men wanted to come to Amsterdam to be baptized.²¹

A similar procedure was followed in 1741 when a Lutheran woman living on Danzig-owned land married a Mennonite. They went to the Netherlands where she was baptized and joined his church.²² Upon their return, they were not permitted to reside in Danzig or on Danzig-owned land.²³ In a similar vein, ordinances issued by the Danzig city council in 1711 and 1712 stipulated that children born to mixed marriages were to be reared in the faith of the non-Mennonite partner.²⁴ Occasionally, harsh punishment was ordered for converts to the Mennonite faith. When Johann Nabel, a Catholic convert to the Mennonite faith, went to the Netherlands to be baptized he was imprisoned upon his return to Danzig. A Mennonite church in Amsterdam wrote to express its dismay at the "limited" freedom in

Danzig.²⁵

Practices governing adoption of the Mennonite faith, however, were not uniform, and not always harshly enforced. On other occasions, some people were so impressed with the life and beliefs of the Mennonites that they asked to be admitted into their churches. Thus, in 1719 a Mennonite elder from the Netherlands, Berents Hulshoff, sailed to Danzig to conduct a preaching tour in a number of churches in Royal Prussia. According to his diary he met a remarkable man, Freerik Luetzner, from the Mennonite church in Schottland in Danzig. Luetzner, a former soldier, told the elder that he had been so impressed with Mennonites that, despite the jeers of his fellow soldiers, he had become a member of the Mennonite Church in Danzig.²⁶

Responses by officials were sometimes modified by personal relationships. Thus, Elder Hendrick Donner of the Orloffelfelde church repeatedly accepted those who had come from other confessions, then had gone to the Netherlands to be baptized. He confronted authorities to discuss such issues and argued for freedom of conscience. On one occasion, he proceeded to baptize a young woman against the advice of his fellow ministers, but with a local official present. Donner had deliberately rejected the suggestion of quietly accepting her on her confession of faith, thus avoiding possible official censure. There were, however, no negative repercussions from government officials. This, no doubt, reflected the community stature of Donner rather than the openness of the officials.²⁷ Sometimes, however, Donner encountered opposition from within the Mennonite churches. Elder Jacob Siebert, elder of the Thiensdorf congregation, contended that Mennonites were breaking agreements with governments if they tried to win converts to the Mennonite churches. Donner disagreed sharply, contending that other churches should not be permitted to control Mennonite policy. Further, there was no official agreement by Mennonites stating that they would not accept persons from other faiths. He insisted that children of mixed marriages should be free to choose their faith. Donner welcomed adults from other confessions, and saw no violation of official policy if he did so. He was well aware that other religious groups objected vigorously; he contended, however, that every person had a right to religious choice. Donner worked hard to maintain good relations with local government officials, and kept them informed of his actions. Repeatedly, they raised no objections.²⁸

Within the larger Mennonite community, however, the question long remained a contentious issue. State churches, whether Catholic or Lutheran, opposed Donner's policy, and many Mennonites did not wish to alienate non-Mennonite churches. Donner, however, not only maintained such practices in his own congregation, the Ohrloffelfelde

church, but he also came to the assistance of other churches who encountered opposition when they baptized and accepted into membership persons who came from other faith traditions.²⁹

Growth of Intolerance in Royal Prussia

Repeatedly, Mennonites found protection from the royal court. In 1660 King John Casimir issued a decree stating that Mennonites living on crown lands in the Tiegenhof area, whose recognized agricultural skills contributed significantly to the royal coffers, stood under royal protection. Furthermore, any local laws issued against Mennonites were declared null and void.³⁰

At a time when the Catholic Counter-Reformation was gaining strength, and Protestantism, especially Calvinism, was losing ground in the ranks of the nobility, it is not surprising that Catholic prelates often tried to use the decline of Protestant influence as an opportunity to move against Mennonites. Thus, despite earlier royal declarations of toleration of Mennonites, in 1676 the voivode (governor) of Pommerellia noted that recently dikes along the Vistula and Nogat had broken, causing considerable damage. This, he suggested, might be God's way of punishing the country for tolerating heretics, such as the Mennonites. This time, representatives from Marienburg (Malbork) defended the Mennonites, and suggested the country needed more such people whose farms could well serve as models. Representatives from other cities supported those from Marienburg, and no action was taken against the Mennonites.³¹ When this attempt was repeated at the next national Sejm, another delegate quietly informed the king that the voivode was urging this action because it would bring him significant new income. King John III Sobieski denounced the voivode's position, and ordered that the proposed legislation against the Mennonites be torn up.³² The king declared the Mennonites to be under his protection, and in 1694 issued another decree confirming traditional liberties of Mennonites, stating that these rights applied to all Mennonites in the Werder, irrespective of the positions taken by local owners or administrators of the land. With respect to religion, the king expressly stated that the "free exercise of the Mennonite religion" was hereby confirmed.³³

Sometimes changes in rulers convinced opponents of the Mennonites to denounce them as undesirable heretics. When Augustus II, newly-elected king from Saxony, assumed the Polish throne in 1699, renewed efforts were made to link Mennonites to Antitrinitarians. The latter had been expelled earlier. After some delay, occasioned by war with Sweden, Mennonites found support at the royal court. The king, noting that his predecessors had invited the Mennonites from Holland, gave an unusually comprehensive overview of Mennonite liberties. These included free exercise of their religion, the right to observe baptism

and the Lord's Supper according to their own beliefs, permission to bury their dead, including children, in regular church cemeteries, conduct their own schools and hire their own teachers. Anyone who sought to curtail these rights would be subject to prosecution by the appropriate authorities. Seldom had Mennonite rights been so fully and vigorously asserted.³⁴

Similar decrees were issued by succeeding kings. In 1736, Augustus III confirmed all previously-granted privileges of the Mennonites,³⁵ and in 1764, Poland's last king, Stanisław Augustus, reaffirmed this position.³⁶ Thus, throughout the time when Mennonites lived in the Vistula Delta, before this area (except Danzig) was seized by Prussia, Polish kings repeatedly safeguarded traditional religious liberties, despite attacks from some elements of both Catholic and Lutheran clergy, government officials at local and national levels, or protagonists of a variety of economic interests.

Like Mennonites in the delta, those living in the valley of the Vistula, as it stretched from beyond Warsaw to Danzig, lived in villages and towns that were under the jurisdiction of a variety of overlords, including the king, ecclesiastical authorities, nobles, civic authorities and local lords. Sometimes religious liberties were negotiated locally, as when Mennonites in the Montau (Maławy) region were allowed to have their own church building as early as 1586.³⁷ At other times, the royal court issued a decree intended for the entire realm. Thus, in 1750 King Augustus III, noting that Mennonites living in the territories of "Graudenz (Grudziądz), Schwetz (Świecie), Neuenburg (Nowe), and those who live in other parts of Prussia . . . have protested that they have been subjected to injustices, and curtailment of practice of their Mennonite religion . . .,"³⁸ declared that Mennonites were to have "all rights, privileges, freedoms, and customary practices in the exercise of their religion"³⁹ assured them by previous monarchs. The royal decree went on to assert that Mennonites had the right to establish their own schools, observe, according to their custom, baptism and communion, perform weddings, maintain their own cemeteries, and teach their young people according to Mennonite beliefs. This sweeping affirmation of Mennonite privileges was issued in the same year that the king supported the guilds of Danzig in their efforts to curtail competition from Mennonite craftsmen. The king, evidently, was able to distinguish between religious and economic privileges.

The Price of Toleration

The price that Mennonites paid for maintaining their religious beliefs varied from place to place, and from time to time. The question of responsibility to the state remained problematic. Danzig established the practice of requiring Mennonites, during wartime, to pay for soldiers who would be hired to take the place of the

Mennonites. Later, during the War of the Polish Succession (1733-1735),⁴⁰ Mennonites distinguished themselves in civilian service when they served as firefighters during the bombardment of Danzig, thus preventing the besiegers from starting a major fire.⁴¹ After the war, when Augustus III was able to assert his authority, he imposed an annual tax of 5000 florins on Mennonites in Danzig or its territory. Later this assessment was reduced to 2000, then in 1774 to 1500 florins.

Just two years earlier, the world of the Vistula Delta had changed when Frederick the Great occupied almost all of it. The new king imposed a tax of 5000 thaler on the Mennonites in the seized territories, thus introducing a practice that had already been implemented in the city of Danzig. There, through a combination of civilian service in wartime, and payment of additional taxes, Mennonites were able to maintain their exemption from military service. For almost two and one-half centuries, whether under Catholic or Protestant rule, Mennonites had been able to retain this practice. After the first partition, such a position became uncertain. Mennonite leaders in 1772 joined in paying homage to the king, but what lay ahead?

Frederick moved quickly to consolidate his position. Although he reaffirmed traditional Mennonite religious liberties, he restricted further acquisition of land from non-Mennonites, since military obligations were tied to land ownership. To get a more complete picture of the number of Mennonites living in the territory newly acquired from Poland, now given the name of West Prussia, as well as those living in East Prussia, the royal government took a census in 1774. This indicated that 13,495 Mennonites lived in this region (not including Danzig).⁴² Mennonite leaders were now formally told that they would be responsible for paying 5000 Thaler for the support of a military academy in Culm.⁴³ It was their responsibility to determine how this sum should be raised. Mennonites remained concerned about the census, and sent several delegations to the king, over the next several years, to try to get a formal declaration concerning exemption from military service.⁴⁴ At the same time, they also requested exemption from paying dues to Catholic or Protestant churches. These dues were tied to the lands represented by a parish, and were central to the income of the local Catholic priests and Lutheran pastors. The king's ministers also raised the touchy question of intermarriage. If Lutherans and Catholics were to marry Mennonites, and thereby expand Mennonite land-holdings, the military exemption would not be extended to the newly-acquired lands.

In 1777 Mennonite leaders again formally petitioned the king for relaxation of restrictions on what they regarded as economic opportunity and rightful pursuit of a livelihood. Delegates Hendrick

Donner, Elder of the Orlofffelde Mennonite Church and Johann Busenitz from the Marienburg congregation, went to Berlin to request relaxation of land acquisition policies, freedom from paying dues to Catholic and Lutheran churches, and an easing of regulations governing intermarriage.⁴⁵

This was to be one of several such journeys. The king was not ready to grant some requests, but did issue a "Resolution" assuring the Mennonites of his good will toward them, and his concern about their well-being. Another trip to Berlin and the royal court in Potsdam resulted in the emissaries personally delivering their "memorial" directly to the king, and being assured that a specific statement would be issued.

Eventually, in 1780 King Frederick II issued the long-awaited "Gnaden-Privilegium" (gracious charter of liberties). It declared Mennonites exempt from military service "for ever" (*auf ewig*).⁴⁶ The promise made by the king in 1772 was now formally recognized and stated. Apparently liberties which Mennonites had enjoyed under Polish rule were now also confirmed by a Prussian king. Frederick II thus gave expression to his dictum that all people should be free to find salvation in their own way. In addition, as subsequent events showed, the prohibition of acquiring more land by Mennonites was rather loosely interpreted, so that from 1781 to 1784 Mennonites acquired more than 150 additional parcels of land.⁴⁷

When Frederick died in 1786, Frederick William II, his successor, almost immediately issued an order prohibiting the acquisition of additional landed property by Mennonites, except by special permission. Another land-related issue, that of paying church assessments to Catholic and Lutheran churches, continued to be a matter of contention. Catholic and Lutheran parishes, however, demanded that the dues to the church be continued, also when Mennonites acquired more land. In 1788 a Lutheran official in Neuteich (Nowy Staw) declared that 10 of 18 Lutheran parishes would be unable to continue if Mennonites were freed of assessments. Several such instances were referred to the courts; not until the twentieth century, however, was this issue resolved in favor of the Mennonites.

In Danzig, meanwhile, the desperate attempt to maintain self-government under the Polish king, became ever more difficult. Frederick William imposed taxes on goods coming into the city, as well as on exports. Many of the Danzig Mennonites, including Pastor van Steen, expressed opposition to Prussian designs on the city, and this political issue created some tension in the Mennonite community. When a visiting minister from outside Danzig territory included the king of Prussia in his morning prayer at a Danzig city Mennonite church, he was soon reminded that Danzig was under the

king of Poland, not the king of Prussia.

Mennonites Under Increasingly Restrictive Prussian Rule

After the death of Frederick the Great in 1786, Mennonite leaders journeyed to Königsberg to show their loyalty to the new king, and once again Donner and other Mennonite leaders requested that the traditional Mennonite liberties, and specifically the “Privilegium” be affirmed.⁴⁸ The new king indicated his willingness to support traditional rights, but at the same time moved quickly to tighten existing regulations. Some Mennonites felt that the “Gnaden-Privilegium” also guaranteed economic liberty, including unrestricted acquisition of land. The new king disagreed.

Instead, Frederick William quickly established his intent, not only of stopping further land from being acquired by Mennonites, but also of regaining some of the land bought by Mennonites, and return it to its earlier military obligations. In a declaration issued in 1789 Frederick William declared that, in the interests of national security, he was determined to curtail Mennonite ownership of land. Those Mennonites who wanted full freedom to acquire land could achieve that goal by accepting their military obligations, like other subjects. Also, there was to be no expansion of land ownership by anyone who would not accept military obligations. For Mennonite families with several sons, there was now little, if any, prospect of more than one son becoming a landowner.

When Mennonite leaders tried to gain some relaxation of these regulations, the king responded that the declaration could not be rescinded, since the continued growth of Mennonite families posed a threat to the “defense of the Fatherland.”⁴⁹ Mennonite Elder Hendrick Donner deplored the situation, asserting that some of his fellow-ministers were not taking a strong enough stance against the king’s declaration. Donner contended that some elders were trying to escape their responsibility by saying they did not wish to appear to be opposing the king, nor did they wish to offend him, or create a situation that would arouse opposition. Such a position, Donner concluded, showed that they were “ashamed of the Gospel.”⁵⁰ At the same time, the Prussian court ruled that “in the King’s lands, there is complete freedom of conscience. Children of interfaith marriages must therefore . . . be free to choose the Mennonite confession of faith.”⁵¹ In the context of the time, this ruling was a strong declaration of religious freedom; it did not, however, decide how contentions related to land-related obligations to church or state should be regulated. Elder Hendrick Donner (d. 1804) and other leaders continued their struggle to expand Mennonite liberties.⁵²

In an effort to clarify rights, liberties and responsibilities of Mennonites in his kingdom, King Frederick William II in 1789 issued

a lengthy “Edict for the Future Regulation of Mennonite Affairs.”⁵³ The document began by affirming the Mennonites’ historic right to practice their religion. The king noted that this included a belief in pacifism. The state, however, also had to be prepared to defend itself, a responsibility, he noted, that most subjects gladly accepted. The king insisted that the document constituted no infringement on Mennonite religious freedom; that was a personal matter.

Frederick William declared that evasions of laws would no longer be permitted. Acquisition of additional land by Mennonites was forbidden, except under special and pre-approved arrangements. Also, Mennonites would have to pay the usual land-based dues to Lutheran or Catholic churches and schools. When non-Mennonites, who owed military service to the state, joined Mennonites, they were to pay another person to take their place. Members of other church bodies could join the Mennonites, but children of such mixed marriages were to be reared in the faith of the non-Mennonite partner.⁵⁴ In addition, no new Mennonite settlers were to be admitted into East or West Prussia.

It was evident that Prussian rule represented an interpretation of religious liberty that was very different from what Mennonites had enjoyed under Polish kings. It was thus not surprising that in the very year that Frederick William issued the edict of 1789, the first large group of Mennonite emigrants from Prussia settled in New Russia. There they believed they would find greater liberties than under Prussian rule.

National Loyalties and Personal Beliefs

During much of the nineteenth century, many European countries centralized and consolidated their political and economic power as they created national states. Failure to do so might, as in the case of Poland, prove fatal. As nationalism, expressed in part through unified and expanded military power, led to the consolidation of the Prussian, then the formation of the German state, traditional Mennonite adherence to pacifism was increasingly challenged and undermined. Frederick William’s seizure of Danzig and Thorn in 1793 reflected the determination to assert Prussian power and influence.

With the accession of Frederick William III in 1797, pressure on Mennonites was intensified. In 1799 Mennonite young men were summoned to a local review board, first to be asked if their parents and grandparents were Mennonites, then to present a statement from a local Mennonite elder as well as the court stating that they were members of a Mennonite church.⁵⁵ In response to this unusual procedure, Mennonites sent delegates to Marienwerder, the new capital of the restructured province, and asked for assurance that the great “Charter of Liberties” was still in effect. The authorities

assured them that it was, and that the whole matter would be carefully examined. Elder Donner made a specific petition on behalf of nine young men whom he had baptized, but who came from mixed marriages. Donner's request to allow them to remain in the Mennonite church was granted. At the same time, new problems arose when some members of Werder communities complained that the "rich Mennonites"⁵⁶ were oppressing the increasingly impoverished Lutherans. Thus, public pressure became an increasingly important factor in determining policy. And when some Mennonites suggested a reduction of the assessment for the Culm military academy, the king responded that this could happen only when the number of land holdings of the Mennonites would fall below what they held in 1780.

Further restrictions were placed on Mennonites when a declaration, dated December 17, 1801, stipulated that only sons could inherit the right to military exemption based on land. Such restrictions created a great deal of concern, and so a general meeting of representatives from Mennonite churches in the region was held in Heubuden on March 2, 1802. They decided to hire a legal advisor, who then prepared a brief for the king, contending that Mennonite liberties were being systematically reduced. The government rejected this appeal, saying that the basic rights granted in 1780 were still in effect. That "Charter of Liberties" had been designed only for the Mennonites and their land-holdings at that time. By expanding their land, Mennonites had moved beyond the limits defined by that document, and so could not claim exemption for lands they had acquired since 1780. Some Mennonites, such as those in the village of Augustwalde in the Little Werder, now chose to accept their military alternative; others said they would rather dispose of their land.⁵⁷

Mennonites and the Napoleonic Wars

The pressures to conform to national military practices were intensified when Prussia became involved in the Napoleonic wars. Mennonite leaders tried to respond in a positive way by pledging to give the king 30,000 Thalers: on 23 November 1802, they gave the king 17,000, and then proceeded to collect the rest. The Mennonite leaders expressed their hope that the money would be used to alleviate suffering caused by the war, especially in helping orphans and widows.⁵⁸

As the wars continued, the situation in Prussia became increasingly difficult. The government placed an additional assessment on farms in the Werder. The Mennonite churches decided to pay this amount, plus a voluntary sum of 10,000 thalers to support the king. A grateful king declared that Mennonites should now be relieved of earlier land-acquisition restrictions; they should have freedom to buy land, just like others.⁵⁹ New difficulties, however, arose when Napoleon's

forces invaded Prussia, and Prussian authorities ordered immediate formation of the Landwehr, to which all able-bodied men were to be summoned. There was to be no exemption. Mennonite leaders said they would serve as firefighters, medical orderlies and in other ways to help the war effort, but they could not take up arms.

In response, the government said it would accept 25,000 Thalers and 500 horses from the Mennonites. Leaders of the Mennonites had difficulty meeting these demands by the set deadline, but in the urgency of the moment were given 48 hours to meet their assessments. The more well-to-do Mennonites now extended loans to families unable to meet their share of the payment, and so the financial demands were met. When only 300 horses were provided, an additional levy of 14,000 Thalers was imposed and paid.⁶⁰ These assessments were levied on Mennonites living on the right side of the Vistula; those on the left, under a different military jurisdiction, received somewhat different assessments.

Government officials declared this to be a temporary response to an immediate problem, and stated that the traditional exemption from regular military service had never been designed to cover situations where a public militia would be called into emergency service to defend their homes. Similarly, non-Mennonite members of communities expressed their vigorous opposition to the idea that anyone should be granted exemption from defensive military action when the homeland was being overrun by the enemy.

In addition, Mennonites were required to perform support services, such as caring for the cavalry, or helping transport supplies and foodstuffs. In cases where there was a delayed response, officials came to get the men and take them to the military base in Graudenz. Mennonite leaders protested that this was a violation of their promised liberties, and soon secured the release of the drafted men. An order-in-council stipulated that the military exemption could be extended only to persons who were actual members of Mennonite congregations. The churches expressed their gratitude by donating another substantial sum of money as well as 6000 Ellen of canvas to the government.⁶¹

As the war dragged on, the changing military configurations repeatedly led military commanders to insist that Mennonites should be prepared at least to join in the Landsturm, the civilian militia designed as a last desperate line of defense. Again, Mennonite leaders appealed to the king, and again the king agreed that the Mennonites should be exempt from bearing arms, but should make contributions to the military that would be the equivalent of actual personal military service. Local military authorities were empowered to determine what that would be. In consequence of this decision, applications for emigration visas increased dramatically.⁶² This

led to a temporary prohibition of issuing the required emigration papers; also, the government ordered a halt to the collection of monies from the Mennonites. In response, Mennonites voluntarily gathered clothing and funds for the military. Repeatedly, however, as the military situation changed and became increasingly desperate, royal concessions of the past were questioned by local military and civilian leaders. Local military commanders had authority to levy an assessment that would be “comparable” in value to actual personal military service.⁶³ The new demands must have been heavy because shortly after this declaration local authorities reported that applications for visas for emigration had multiplied.⁶⁴ The Mennonites responded by sending large supplies of food to military hospitals in the region. Then, when the Prussian government in 1814 introduced universal military service, Mennonites were not specifically mentioned. Instead, the government agreed to consider requested exemptions on a case-by-case basis. If the request was granted, assessments on Mennonites would be increased to an amount deemed comparable to actual military service.⁶⁵ Some Mennonite men were actually pressed into service,⁶⁶ but released when the royal decree was published.

Charting a New Course

As the states of Europe slowly recovered from the Napoleonic wars, Mennonites found that they could not simply go back to the status quo ante bellum. Mennonites in western Europe, in a number of instances, had accepted regular military service. Also, in West and East Prussia, the pressures from society and the military policies of the government had scored some success in the Mennonite churches. The most celebrated case involved David von Riesen, a member of the Elbing Mennonite Church who joined the military to fight Napoleon. In consequence, the leaders of the church declared that his action had removed him from the church. Upon his return, he attempted to regain his membership, but the church refused. Von Riesen now appealed to the ministries of justice and of internal affairs; these now directed the church to receive him back into membership. When the leaders refused to change their position, the state brought charges of violation of state laws. The appeal to the courts resulted in a dismissal of charges against the ministers; in addition, the court found that the Mennonite Church had the right to exclude from its membership a person who deliberately broke his commitment to the church by violating one of its teachings.⁶⁷

Elsewhere in Europe, the Napoleonic wars had made even deeper inroads. In the Netherlands, in centers such as Zaandam, a number of Mennonites joined the military to defend their homes. Although the large congregation in Amsterdam opposed such practices, the

question remained unresolved. As the pressures of war mounted, and the Netherlands was brought under French rule, Mennonites lost their traditional privilege of military exemption. After the war, the Dutch Mennonites did not return to a uniform practice of refusing military service, and pacifism was dropped from the confession of faith.⁶⁸ Similarly, Mennonite congregations in other parts of western German states, such as those along the Rhine, no longer insisted on a pacifist position after the Napoleonic wars.⁶⁹

In 1848, when a wave of revolutionary movements swept over much of Europe, the Frankfurt "Parliament," an assembly drawn from the parliaments of the various German states, attempted to formulate a constitution for the creation of what they hoped would be a unified German state.

There was strong support for the view that the new state should be shaped by democratic and liberal ideals, and that power should be shared between crown and parliament. In the ensuing debates, Hermann von Beckerath, a member of the Krefeld Mennonite Church, emerged as one of the most eloquent and respected leaders. Some of his central themes were equality before the law, freedom of conscience and freedom of the press. Earlier, as a member of the Landtag of the Rhineland, he had become a strong champion of equal rights for Jewish members of society and had argued that a land dominated by Christian principles could learn much from ancient Jewish beliefs. The emancipation of Jews in the Rhineland was long overdue, he argued.⁷⁰ Now, in Frankfurt, von Beckerath argued for political freedom and equality without special privileges for anyone.

As the debates continued, the issue of national security was discussed, and the question of military exemption of Mennonites came to the floor. Von Beckerath, already known as a champion of civil liberties and equality, irrespective of religious beliefs, specifically called for full civil liberties for Jews and dissenters, arguing that Mennonites and other persons not part of established religions should be equal before the law. They should enjoy the same rights and responsibilities as other citizens, but should not ask for any special privileges such as exemption from compulsory military service. They should be proud to be viewed as equals in rights and responsibilities. Von Beckerath noted that in earlier times there had been no universal military conscription and so the exemption granted Mennonites had not appeared unusual; now, however, "since a free state is to be established, a state whose very authority rests upon the equality in rights and duties of all citizens, such a special favor can have no justification."⁷¹ This vigorous rejection of military exemption was met with enthusiastic applause.⁷²

Von Beckerath led the drive for sharing power between the crown and parliament, but he soon found the king did not share these

democratic sentiments. King Friedrich William responded that he would never allow himself to become a “tool of the parliamentary majority.” He declared that “authority,” not “majority” would be the guiding principle.⁷³ The struggle for a constitutional monarchy continued, but increasingly champions of the old guard, led by Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, defended the existing authoritarian rule of the monarch and his advisors. After vigorous debate, and determined intervention by the king, the old “alliance between throne and altar” carried the day.⁷⁴ Political equality and constitutional monarchy would have to wait.

Mennonite churches in the Vistula Delta immediately expressed their strong disagreement with von Beckerath. Contending that the majority of Mennonites still held to pacifism, Mennonite leaders responded that their rejection of military service did not arise from the good or evil intentions and actions of government; rather, this was an expression of their understanding of the teachings of Christ.⁷⁵ Furthermore, refusal to serve in the military, these ministers contended, sprang from deeply-held beliefs that were seen as an expression of obedience to Christ. No ruler could change the commandments of Christ. Once again the government decided to return to the former practice of basing military obligations on land ownership, thus barring Mennonites from further land acquisitions. It was clear, however, that Mennonites in Prussia, as well as in other states, no longer spoke with a unified voice in this matter.

With the increasingly important role played by representatives of the general populace, initiatives to address Mennonite military exemption began to originate from among the elected deputies, not only government officials. Thus, in 1859 a deputy in the lower house in Prussia introduced a measure to impose compulsory military service on Mennonites, and free them from the special assessments they paid, as well as from any land acquisition restrictions. The upper house seemed favorably inclined, and awaited a response from government ministries. Mennonite leaders in the delta presented another protest to the king, asserting that (1) pacifism was a basic belief of Mennonites since the Reformation, and was not the product of external factors, but rather of their understanding of the teachings of Scripture; (2) the right to practice this tenet of their faith had been granted formally by a long succession of rulers; and (3) a modification of the centuries-old practice, unless arrived at through discussion and mutual consent, would be a violation of the very spirit of freedom and justice on which the emerging state of Prussia prided itself.⁷⁶ If, despite these concerns, the government should abrogate the military exemption, Mennonite leaders declared that the members of their churches would emigrate.⁷⁷

Although this resolution was adopted by a majority of Mennonite

churches, the Danzig Church felt a more conciliatory stance should be taken. Nonetheless, elders from several churches were appointed to take the resolution to the government in Berlin. Several government ministers received them cordially, and the king himself granted them an audience, informing them of his good will, but also stating that he was bound by the constitution, and was not free to make arbitrary exemptions. Another minister told the Mennonites that the modern state had no room for privileged exemptions.⁷⁸

When the elders returned, another meeting was called to plan further action. Wilhelm Mannhardt, professor at the University of Berlin, was retained to draft a formal statement of the basis and history of Mennonite beliefs on pacifism. When this study was completed, a group of Mennonite leaders met and approved what had been written. At the same time, a general meeting of Mennonites was called to review the document. After some changes and omissions were made, the document was published as “Die Wehrfreiheit der Altpreussischen Mennoniten.”

It was at this time that a power struggle between the king and the Reichstag (Parliament) led to the dissolution of the latter. New elections were called, and for the first time Mennonites in the Delta became directly involved in the campaign. A prominent Mennonite, Warkentin, ran as a candidate of the Liberal party, which was widely perceived as the champion of more widely shared governmental power. He however, lost to the Conservative candidate who gained strong backing from Mennonite leaders. Apparently they believed that Mennonites would fare better with a strong king than under a more democratic political system. Subsequent developments were to show that forces of nationalism and militarism were the real arbiters of power.

Nationalism and Militarism Confront Pacifism

Prussia's wars in the 1860s placed Mennonites under new tension. First, the war between Prussia and Denmark in 1864, then the war with Austria in 1866 sharply challenged Mennonite privilege. Chancellor Otto von Bismarck presented a draft of legislation to make military service universal, but allowed for Mennonite and Quaker exemptions. The parliament, however, struck down these exemptions, and in one swift action in 1867 declared an end to Mennonite military exemption. This exemption, though it had gone through different formulations, had been preserved since the coming of the Mennonites more than three centuries earlier. The parliamentary representative from the Elbing-Marienburg area, von Brauchitsch, elected with Mennonite support, now advised Mennonite leaders to send delegates to Berlin to try to address this matter. A delegation of five elders traveled to Berlin⁷⁹ and Minister of War von Roon received them cordially. He

urged them to consider serving as medics.⁸⁰ Von Roon also asked the elders if they thought military persons, such as he, could be included among God's redeemed. One of the elders responded with an illustration from Paul's writings to the Corinthians, noting that Paul had recognized that responses may well be different, depending on one's conscience and understanding. Von Roon responded, "So you would allow someone like me to enter heaven." When he received the response, "Most certainly," he replied, "Then I am satisfied."⁸¹ Von Roon said he would try to help, but he was not in control of this situation.

On the following day, the delegates listened to some of the debates in the Reichstag, but were not able to see Chancellor von Bismarck. Later, the elders learned that Bismarck did not wish the law adopted by the Reichstag to be changed; instead he had pushed it through the upper house, the Bundesrat, as well.

In February 1868, von Brauchitsch suggested a Mennonite delegation again go to Berlin, and so the elders returned. They were able to meet with a number of cabinet ministers and other leaders, including the President of the Bundesrat, Count Stollberg. Several times, the elders were urged to consider allowing their young men to serve as medics in the army. Eventually, the elders were also granted an audience with King Wilhelm I, the later kaiser. When the elders explained their predicament to the king, he responded that he had no intention of violating someone's conscience. He hoped that a way could be found for Mennonites to be willing to accept a compromise that would not require them to engage in combat. After a cordial discussion, the elders were dismissed in a friendly manner.

On the following day, the elders were granted an audience with the crown prince, the later Kaiser Wilhelm II. When the elders requested the crown prince to find a way that would provide for military exemption, he responded that he had no such power. The laws stood above the king, not the other way around. One of the elders then requested that, should no solution be found, Mennonites be granted a time of adjustment. When the crown prince asked why this would be helpful, he was told that, if the law would be enforced as written, Mennonites wanted time to prepare to emigrate.⁸² When asked where they might go, the elders said that Russia was a possibility. The Crown Prince dryly remarked that, should Mennonites move to Russia, they might be well advised to have alternative plans, since Russia would soon, no doubt, also impose compulsory military service.⁸³

In further discussion, the elders suggested they would be happy to provide care for wounded soldiers, and would also be willing to pay extra assessments in lieu of military service. Wilhelm indicated this might be a suitable alternative to military service. He stated that he, as well as the whole royal house, would do what they could to respect

the Mennonite conscience. Soon after, the Mennonite delegation returned home, hopeful that a solution would be found.

The elders soon learned that no accommodation to their requests had been made. The law stood as it had been passed. A written petition was now sent to the king and to the government, once again requesting a modification which would permit Mennonites to exercise "freedom of faith."⁸⁴ This time, there was no response, even though von Brauchitsch sent a personal note of support.

Church leaders waited for more than a month, but when no response came, a general meeting of Mennonite elders in the region again decided to send petitions to Chancellor von Bismarck and Minister of War von Roon. Again, the elders offered to take care of sick and wounded soldiers, but in their communities, not under military control. The Mennonite Church in Danzig declined to support this position, but recommended that young men volunteer to serve as medics, as well as to perform various support services that did not require the bearing of arms. Once again, the petitions failed to elicit any positive response.

Mennonite leaders now called another meeting for 9 January 1868 and decided to send a letter directly to the crown prince. When no response was received, a meeting in February drew up a petition for presentation to the upper house, the Bundesrat. The five elders who had earlier gone to Berlin once again made the journey, and once again were granted audiences by the king and the crown prince. Despite a cordial reception, the delegation received no assurances that the law would be changed.

Finally, on 3 March 1868 the king issued an order-in-cabinet stipulating that the exemption of Mennonites from military service was now terminated; however, those who would not voluntarily bear arms could meet their obligations by serving as medical orderlies in military hospitals, as secretaries, deliverers of supplies or in other tasks not requiring combat.⁸⁵

The long struggle over the right to military exemption had not brought the Mennonites the kind of response the elders had requested. It had, however, divided the Mennonite church in the region. Jacob and Wilhelm Mannhardt repeatedly wrote in the *Mennonitische Blätter* urging acceptance of the government's decision, especially since it allowed for noncombatant service. Many Mennonites felt they could live with the new law; others threatened to emigrate. Elders Gerhard Penner, Wiebe and Toews were leaders of the latter group. At the same time, a statement thanking the king for having provided for alternative service received 450 signatures and clearly represented the majority view.⁸⁶

The division within the Mennonite community led to a veritable war of petitions, carefully analyzed in Mark Jantzen's dissertation,

“At Home in Germany? The Mennonites of the Vistula Delta and the Construction of a German National Identity, 1772-1880.” Both sides repeatedly drew up petitions to the government, with more than a thousand signatures on some of the petitions. At the same time, the confrontation raised a controversial question: Could someone who served in the military be a Mennonite? Clearly, a strong majority of Mennonites in the Vistula Delta and beyond vigorously answered in the affirmative.

For some, however, the alternative presented was not adequate. Elder Toews resigned his position and emigrated to Russia. The Montau-Gruppe congregation split when Elder Bartel from Gruppe insisted that young men being baptized had to agree to serve only as noncombatants, while Montau allowed each person to choose. In Heubuden, where Elder Penner resisted active military service as an option, and refused communion to those who joined the military, some members tried to have him removed from office. Eventually, the Berlin Supreme Court held that Elder Penner’s position was contrary to law. After a divisive struggle, Penner, together with several of the congregation’s other ministers and a number of members, left for America.

The large majority of Mennonites who remained in Prussia came to terms with the new conditions, and shared sentiments expressed in a resolution adopted unanimously by the Danzig Church on 2 October 1870:

While we agree with our ancestors that all war arises because of sin and is a great evil, and that it is our obligation to live according to the love and peace of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to express these beliefs in our life as a church, we nonetheless find it difficult to conclude from the statements of Scripture that it is always wrong for all members of society to support a state’s demand for military service.

Accordingly we decline to issue an obligatory and binding command prohibiting all participation in military service. In altering our traditional understanding of this belief, we are united in allowing each of our brothers to have free choice in deciding how and in what manner they will meet the demands of the state and at the same time, satisfy their consciences before God. At the same time, we affirm that it is our conviction that the most fitting way to meet these demands is through service in transporting supplies, providing medical assistance, working in offices or in strengthening economic production.⁸⁷

The statement went on to declare that everyone should be free to choose the manner in which to serve the state. Members of the

church were urged to prefer service such as helping the sick, working in positions where they would not have to fight, and where they could perform practical acts of healing and helping.

A confession of faith, issued in 1895 by the “Mennonites of Prussia,” formally acknowledged that the historic position was no longer a necessary part of Mennonite belief. Emphasis was placed on the right and the freedom of the individual to choose how to respond to the nation if it demanded military service. In addition, each person was exhorted to “do all that was possible”⁸⁸ to live in peace. Earlier confessions, such as that of 1836,⁸⁹ as well as the one printed in 1860, still stated that “we may not use the sword or other weapons against our enemies.”⁹⁰

Thus, after more than a century of meetings and discussions in churches, debates among church leaders, petitions to government officials, consideration of possible alternatives, the Mennonites in the Vistula Delta concluded that the progressive and enlightened times, far removed from the tyranny and persecution of earlier times, made service to the state, even in the military, an acceptable and conscientious response.

Pacifism in a “Progressive and Enlightened” Society

The extent of this transformation became apparent during World War I. On 3 March 1915, the venerable, respected community leader, Pastor H. G. Mannhardt of the Danzig Mennonite Church, addressed a public gathering in support of Germany’s war effort. His speech, entitled “Deeds and Heroes,” was preceded by arias and choruses from the first part of Handel’s “Judas Maccabaeus.” Mannhardt quickly drew a parallel between the Maccabean struggle for liberty and the current war. Germany, he declared, was desperately trying to save freedom and the fatherland from the unjust hostility of other countries. The Danzig pastor now lent his support to the demonization of the enemy, whom he described as “oppressors” and “liars” whose “envy and hatred” had led to a “destructive rage” now directed against a land that championed righteousness. Mannhardt went on to assure his listeners that God would stand by Germany as she fought for justice and liberty. Citing a central biblical virtue, Mannhardt, declared, “Righteousness exalts a nation.” He left no doubt that this divine approbation applied to Germany as she fought for the noble causes of human dignity and liberty. With ringing praise of “Germany, heart of the world, there is so much for which we must thank you!” he called on his hearers to be ready to fight and die for the fatherland.⁹¹

Mennonites in Danzig and elsewhere were by no means alone in asserting that their nation was upholding godly principles, and that their cause was also God’s. Just a few months earlier, a similarly

rousing call for support of the ruler, whose just and noble cause would surely have divine blessing, was made in a large, full church, the Lutheran Church of St. Peter, but this time, the scene was set in St. Petersburg, and the godly ruler was Tsar Nicholas II.⁹² A casual visitor might well have wondered how both sides could be so sure that their ruler was the one whom God would bless and grant victory.

And yet the centuries-old Mennonite teaching of constructive pacifism was not forgotten. In 1925, on the occasion of the celebration of the 400th anniversary of the beginning of the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement, Emil Händiges, pastor of the Mennonite Church in Elbing-Ellerwald, praised the early Mennonites for their rejection of war, their constructive role in emphasizing freedom of conscience, their emphasis on the separation of church and state, and the prominent role of the laity in the life of their church.⁹³ It is worth noting that Händiges showed an awareness of the strong peace movements gaining support in Europe and North America at that time. And yet, by the time World War II began, it quickly became evident that most Mennonites in Prussia, as in the rest of Germany, were not committed to the traditional Mennonite understanding of peace and reconciliation. Once again, feelings of nationalism and skilful manipulation by the news media proved strong enough to overawe lingering feelings of pacifism. The call of the state had apparently taken precedence over the teachings of Christ as the voice of Caesar was accepted as the voice of God.

Notes

- 1 See: Abraham Friesen, *Erasmus, the Anabaptists and the Great Commission* (Grand Rapids Eerdmans, 1998).
- 2 Wilhelm Mannhardt, *Die Wehrfreiheit der Altpreussischen Mennoniten* (Marienburg: 1863), XXXII
- 3 Menno Simons, *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, translated by Leonard Verduin and edited by J. C. Wenger (Scottsdale, PA :Herald Press, 1956). See, for example, his "Foundation of Christian Doctrine, 1539, " 103-226.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 1030-1035.
- 5 At disputations conducted at various places, Mennonites repeatedly upheld this belief. At one such meeting at Frankenthal in 1571 Mennonites declared that a Christian should not take the "sword to exact revenge"; at another disputation held in Emden in 1578 they stated that they would not "take up arms to defend the city"; and again, at a meeting in Leeuwarden in 1596, Mennonites declared that "Christians were not permitted to take up arms in war." W. Mannhardt, *Die Wehrfreiheit der Altpreussischen Mennoniten*, 29-31.
- 6 *Eine gar kurze jedoch deutliche Beschreibung vom Gottes Dienst der Mennoniten im Werder. . . mithin auch Acht und dreissig Frag[en] u. Antwort[en] . . ." Archivum Państwowe w Gdańsku (hereafter APG), 492/1021, 1-24.
- 7 APG, 492/1021, 23.
- 8 Georg Hansen, "Confession oder kurzes, einfältiges Glaubensbekenntniss der Mennoniten in Preussen, die man die "Clerken" nennt," Biblioteka Polskiej Akademii Nauk w Gdańsku (hereafter BPANG), 1678, Ms 694.
- 9 See Harvey Plett, "Georg Hansen and the Danzig Flemish Mennonite Church: A Study in

- Continuity," Ph.D. Diss., University of Manitoba, 1991.
- 10 W. Mannhardt, 42.
 - 11 W. Mannhardt, 71.
 - 12 See Wilhelm Crichton, *Zur Geschichte der Mennoniten* (Königsberg: Hartung, 1786), 23.
 - 13 See Wolfgang Froese, "Stets hilfreich und tolerant engegekommen? Die Politik des Elbinger Rates gegenüber den Mennoniten bis 1772," *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter*, 1992, 56-72.
 - 14 BPANG, Ms 450, 397 verso-400 recto.
 - 15 Abraham Hartwich, *Geographisch-historische Landesbeschreibung derer dreyen im Polnischen Preussen liegenden Werdern* (Königsberg: Eckert, 1723).
 - 16 Lengnich, *Geschichte*, II (1723), 399.
 - 17 On this occasion, Lutherans from Danzig suggested that all groups should be allowed to retain their faith, since God had permitted a diversity of beliefs to arise (W. Mannhardt, 79).
 - 18 Hartknoch, *Altes und Neues Preussen*, 484.
 - 19 For the text of this decree, see W. Mannhardt, LX-LXI.
 - 20 BPANG, MS 494, 374
 - 21 Gemeentearchief, Amsterdam, C, 741 (4 Juni 1731)
 - 22 BPANG, MS 494, 374
 - 23 Gotthilf Löschin, *Beiträge zur Geschichte Danzigs und seiner Umgebungen* (Danzig, 1837), 55
 - 24 Löschin, 55
 - 25 GAA, A, "hoe beperkt toch hunne vrijheid is" (September 1739)
 - 26 "Bezoekreis van Hendrik Berents Hulshoff an de Doopsgezinde Gemeenten der Oude Vlamingen in Pruisen en Polen in 1719," edited by H. Ch. Hulshoff, *Bijdragen en Mededeelingen van het Historisch Genootschap*, 59 (1938), 32-82
 - 27 Donner, *Chronik*, 17-19; see also Donner, *Orloffferfelde Chronik*, 9 for a statement by Donner arguing that Mennonite churches should be open to welcome members from other religious groups, but only through adult baptism. See also his account of how a Lutheran theology student came to him and wanted to be baptized upon profession of faith (36, 37)
 - 28 Geheimes Preussisches Staatsarchiv, II, Generaldirektorium, Westpreussen u. Netzedistrikt, CIX, No. 1, vol. 2, fol. 152.
 - 29 Donner, *Chronik*, 53-55.
 - 30 W. Mannhardt, 84-85.
 - 31 Lengnich, *Geschichte der Preussischen Lande Polnischen Antheils*, vol. VIII, 126-127.
 - 32 W. Mannhardt, 86-87; Crichton, 26-27.
 - 33 The text of the king's decree is given in W. Mannhardt, 87-89 (German), and LXV-LXVI (Latin).
 - 34 The text of this decree is given in W. Mannhardt, 90-91.
 - 35 It should be noted that, despite this affirmation of traditional Mennonite religious liberties, Augustus in 1750, after a long battle with the Danzig guilds, agreed to restrict some economic occupations of the Mennonites (APG, 300, 10/82, folios 146ff.).
 - 36 APG, 358/132 (a German copy of the original); W. Mannhardt, 91.
 - 37 BPANG, Ms 1251, "Urkunden und Notizen zur Geschichte der Mennoniten [*sic*] in Westpreussen." "1586 ist das Bethaus der Mennoniten zu Montau zum ersten Mal gebaut," fol. 7.
 - 38 W. Mannhardt, 93.
 - 39 W. Mannhardt, 94.
 - 40 John L. Sutton, *The King's Honor and the King's Cardinal: The War of the Polish Succession* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1980), 120-134.
 - 41 According to military reports made by Russian and Saxon military forces, as quoted in W. Mannhardt, 108.
 - 42 W. Mannhardt, 128.
 - 43 W. Mannhardt, 128. The number of Mennonites was listed as 13, 495 (without Danzig and Thorn).
 - 44 In 1775, Elder Hendrick Donner and Peter Regier were sent by Mennonite leaders to petition the king for a charter of liberties (W. Mannhardt, 128).
 - 45 APG, 836/1, 1-119. Hendrick Donner, in a hand-written chronicle, untitled, and bearing the following inscription on page 1: "Anno 1774, d. 20. Septembr. Habe ich in diesem Buche angefangen

- anzuschreiben, was sich in unserer Gemeine, zeit meiner bedienung merkwürdiges zugetragen, Hendrick Donner, Schönesee,” cited here as Donner, Chronik. The references are to pages 12-13.
- 46 W. Mannhardt, 132. The document has often been printed, and is widely disseminated. The Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz (GStA) has a slightly different version (Preussisches Staats-Ministerium, I, Rep. 90, Abt. A, Titel X. 2a).
- 47 W. Mannhardt, 136. At the same time, the king intensified his economic blockade of Danzig; he was determined to bring the city under his control. The anger aroused in the city has been graphically described by Johanna Schopenhauer, mother of the philosopher.
- 48 Donner, Chronik, 88-89.
- 49 W. Mannhardt, LXXXVII, where the king declared that ever more land holdings carrying military obligations were being withdrawn from the supply base of the “Vaterlands-Vertheidigern.”
- 50 Donner, Chronik, 118-119
- 51 W. Mannhardt, 142-143.
- 52 W. Mannhardt, 142.
- 53 The text is found in Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz (GSA), Berlin: II Hauptabteilung., Generaldirektorium, Rep. 84a, 2087
- 54 Ibid., section 10: “Was aber die Kinder betrifft, . . . so sollen dieselben . . . in der Religion desjenigen ihrer Eltern, welches diesem Glaubensbekenntniss nicht zugethan ist, erzogen werden.”
- 55 W. Mannhardt, 147.
- 56 W. Mannhardt, 149.
- 57 W. Mannhardt, 153.
- 58 W. Mannhardt, 156.
- 59 W. Mannhardt, 157.
- 60 W. Mannhardt, 161.
- 61 W. Mannhardt, 166.
- 62 W. Mannhardt, 171.
- 63 The king issued this authorization to local authorities on 25 August 1813 (W. Mannhardt, 171).
- 64 The Prussian government ordered a delay in issuing emigration visas, and also decreed that collection of the new assessments be halted.
- 65 W. Mannhardt, 180.
- 66 The account appears in the “Orlofferfelde Chronik,” 2 August 1816.
- 67 Johann Donner, “Selbst-Biographie,” *Christlicher Gemeinde-Kalender* (1932), 101-102; W. Mannhardt, 47.
- 68 W. Mannhardt, 53. See also Blaupot ten Cate, II, 8-20.
- 69 W. Mannhardt, 188-189.
- 70 Dieter Kastner, *Der Rheinische Provinziallandtag und die Emancipation der Juden im Rheinland 1825-1845, Teil 2*, (Köln: Rheinland Verlag, 1989), 682-690
- 71 Franz Wigard, ed., *Stenographischer Bericht über die Verhandlungen der deutschen constituirenden Nationalversammlung zu Frankfurt am Main* (Leipzig, 1848), III, 1753
- 72 “Bravo von allen Seiten,” *Stenographischer Bericht*, III, 1753
- 73 Ulrich Hettinger, *Hermann von Beckerath im Vormärz* (Köln, 2003), 190
- 74 Hettinger, 197
- 75 W. Mannhardt, 192.
- 76 W. Mannhardt, 202
- 77 H. G. Mannhardt, “Die Entstehung und Geschichte der König. Kabinettsorde vom 3. März 1868” (*Christlicher Gemeindekalender*, 1919), 7 (“Entstehung”)
- 78 “Entstehung,” 98
- 79 The selected delegates were Elders Gerhard Penner, Heubuden; Johann Toews, Ladekopp; Johann Wiebe, Fürstenwerder; Johann Penner, Thiensdorf; and Peter Bartel, Gruppe. The latter wrote an account of the mission, “Beschreibung der persönlichen Bemühung der fünf Ältesten . . .” (cited as “Beschreibung.” The author received a copy from Elder Bartel’s great-grandson, Siegfried Bartel).
- 80 “Beschreibung,” 2
- 81 “Beschreibung,” 3

- 82 "Beschreibung, 9-10
- 83 Crown Prince Wilhelm was, of course, right. Four years later Russia implemented such a policy.
- 84 They requested "Anerkennung ihrer Glaubensfreiheit," Mannhardt, "Entstehung," 101
- 85 Mannhardt, "Entstehung," 102.
- 86 (University of Notre Dame, 2002); see also Mannhardt, "Entstehung," 104
- 87 H. G. Mannhardt, *Die Danziger Mennonitengemeinde*, 176, 177
- 88 *Glaubensbekenntnis der Mennoniten in Preussen* (Marienburg: Halb, 1895), 18
- 89 *Glaubensbekenntnis der Mennoniten in Preussen* (Elbing: Wernich, 1836), 38
- 90 *Glaubensbekenntnis der Mennoniten in Preussen und Russland* (Stuttgart: Steinkopf, 1860), 31
- 91 H. G. Mannhardt, *Taten und Helden* (Danzig: W. F. Burau, [1915])
- 92 Carl von Kügelen, quoting the *St. Peterburger Zeitung* in *Ostdeutsche Monatshefte*, (Oliva, No. 12, March 1925), 1224-5
- 93 Emil Händiges, *Seid eurer Väter wert!* (Ludwigshafen: Konferenz d. Südd. Mennoniten, 1925)
See also his *Die Lehre der Mennoniten in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Friedrichs-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, 1921).