
Toward a Definition of Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism: Twentieth-Century Historiography of the Radical Reformation

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"To define the essence is to shape it afresh."

— Ernst Troeltsch

Twentieth-century Anabaptist historiography has somewhat of the character of Hegelian philosophy, consisting of an already established Protestant-Marxist thesis, a Mennonite antithesis and a recent synthesis. The debate has centred on three major and related issues: geographic origin, intellectual sources, and essence. Complicating these issues has been confusion over the matter of categorization: Just who is to be included among the Anabaptists and who should be assigned to other groups? Indeed, what are the appropriate categories, or groups, in the sixteenth century? This paper will attempt to unravel some of the tangled debate that has gone on concerning these issues.

I

The Protestant interpretation of Anabaptism has the longest academic tradition, going back to the sixteenth century. Developed by such Protestant theologians and churchmen as Bullinger, Melancthon, Menius, Rhegius and Luther who wrote works defining and attacking Anabaptism, this interpretation arose out of the Protestant understanding of the church. Sixteenth-century Protestants believed in a single universal church corrupted by the Roman Catholic papacy but reformed by themselves. Anyone claiming to be a Christian but not belonging to the church

(Catholic or Protestant) was classed as a heretic,¹ a member of the miscellaneous column of God's sixteenth-century army. For convenience all of these "others" were labelled "Anabaptists." Protestants saw the Anabaptists as originating in Saxony with Thomas Müntzer and the Zwickau prophets in 1521 and spreading in subsequent years to Switzerland and other parts of northern Europe. Lutherans took this viewpoint because Thomas Müntzer and the Zwickau prophets were the first "heretics" they encountered, and the Swiss Reformed accepted it because they were quite happy to place the blame on the Germans.² One of the effects of this interpretation was that it tied the Anabaptists in with medieval heresy³ through Hussite influence on the Zwickau prophets. This was not greatly stressed by the Protestants, who had their own affinities to Hus. For them, the immediate source was unimportant; the ultimate source of all heresy was the devil.⁴ Similarly, Protestants were not greatly concerned about determining the chief characteristics, or essence, of Anabaptism — heresy, like evil, was by nature chaotic. Nevertheless, they did discern two main characteristics. The first was spiritualism, that is, that the Anabaptists relied on the inner voice of the Holy Spirit rather than on Scripture as their authority. (In later historians the inner voice would be secularized to subjectivism or individualism.) The second characteristic, following from the first, was the rejection of political authority or the advocacy of violent revolution, often in a context of millenarian apocalypticism. The Peasants' War of 1524–25 and the Anabaptist takeover of the city of Münster were seen as typical results of Anabaptist doctrine. Sometimes a third characteristic was added, libertinism, particularly sexual licence (as in the city of Münster 1534–35), which was declared to be one aspect of Anabaptist communitarianism.⁵ Although there were religious, political and social aspects, it will be noted that this is mainly an ideological definition — the Anabaptists were to be defined by their (erroneous) doctrines. Since history is written from the point of view of the winners, the Protestant interpretation was the one that prevailed among historians for four centuries. (Moreover, the Protestant theologians' views had been published and were readily available, while Anabaptist sources were not.) Although some historians were more sophisticated in their views than others, it could still be argued by twentieth-century Mennonite historians that Anabaptists had been dismissed by all previous historiography as "revolutionaries and fanatics."⁶

II

While it is generally true that history is written from the point of view of the winners, it would perhaps be more accurate to say that history is written by successors or by those who see themselves as successors to historical groups. Therefore, a more favourable view of Anabaptism did not emerge until there were some articulate historians who looked back to

the Anabaptists for their roots. The first of these historians were the Marxists, socialists and liberals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, beginning with Wilhelm Zimmermann and Friedrich Engels. Somewhat surprisingly, the Marxist view of Anabaptism did not differ that greatly from the Protestant view in regard to origin and characteristics.⁷ Marxists still saw all Anabaptists as deriving from Thomas Müntzer. They ignored the spiritualist-subjectivist idea but stressed the revolutionary and communitarian aspects. Thus, Anabaptism emerged as an abortive early proletarian revolution.⁸ This interpretation differs from the Protestant interpretation in two respects. First, while both interpretations saw the Anabaptists as revolutionaries, the Marxists said that revolution was good, and Protestants had assumed that it was abhorrently evil. Secondly, the Marxists defined the Anabaptists in terms of a social class, while the Protestants had primarily defined them in terms of ideology (spiritualism plus eschatology). Although some Protestants had earlier noted the lack of education among Anabaptist leaders, this marked a significant shift in viewpoint.

Turn-of-the-century socialists such as Karl Kautsky and Belfort Bax took somewhat similar positions to the Marxists, although they also recognized Thomas Müntzer's religious side.⁹ With the Russian Revolution of 1917, Marxist theorists devoted themselves to other issues, feeling that the historical foundations were well established. Little additional research was done on the Anabaptists. Moreover, Russian communists found the Mennonites, the descendants of Anabaptism, to be more of a counterrevolutionary force than a revolutionary one. It was only when communism came to Germany and Czechoslovakia, areas where Anabaptism had flourished in the sixteenth century, that Marxists again looked for their roots in Anabaptism. Since the Second World War, East German historians in particular have found in Thomas Müntzer a forerunner of Marxism — although Czech historians noted that Müntzer was influenced by John Hus, their own native son.¹⁰ This new Marxist interpretation did not differ very much from the older Marxist interpretation, except to see the Peasants' War as a bourgeois revolution in which the proletariat (Müntzer and the Anabaptists) cooperated with the bourgeoisie. Gerhard Zschäbitz, however, departed from his fellow Marxists in some important respects. Following Kautsky and Bax, he argued that Thomas Müntzer was more of a theologian than a revolutionary, although the peasants themselves were primarily concerned with socio-economic matters. The Anabaptists, then, were not Thomas Müntzer's revolutionary cadre but a religious sect into which many disillusioned peasants retreated *after* the failure of the revolution. This meant that everything was in a state of flux and confusion in the early years and that Anabaptism as a distinct movement did not emerge in Zwickau in 1521 but not until after the Peasants' War in 1526 or 1527. Zschäbitz' reinterpretation

tion was to have important consequences for non-Marxist historiography later on.

III

Until after the First World War, most Anabaptist research (and most Reformation research, for that matter) had been carried on by Europeans. In the 1930's, with American universities now firmly established and American isolationism being gradually overcome, American scholars became involved. They brought with them a peculiarly American perspective. Especially prominent among them were American Mennonites, who established what is sometimes called the Goshen school of Anabaptist historiography.¹¹ Although John Horsch was also prominent in the early years, it was Harold S. Bender's influential paper, *The Anabaptist Vision*, that outlined the elements of a radically new interpretation. Indeed, modern Anabaptist historiography could almost be said to begin with this paper. (The origins of modern Anabaptist historiography are clearer than the origins of Anabaptism.)

Basing his interpretation on recently published sixteenth-century Anabaptist writings, Bender argued that Anabaptism had begun with the Swiss Brethren in Zurich in 1525, spreading from there to Germany, Moravia and the Netherlands. He further argued that Anabaptism was "consistent evangelical Protestantism," the Reformation completed by a minority when Luther and Zwingli failed to fully implement their reform ideals; it was an attempt "to recreate without compromise the original New Testament church."¹² Bender discerned three principles of Anabaptism: "first a new conception of the essence of Christianity as discipleship; second a new conception of the church as a brotherhood; and third a new ethic of love and nonresistance."¹³ The most important of these three was the first, discipleship (following Christ, *Nachfolge*)¹⁴ — and believers' baptism was the sign of the commitment to discipleship. (Like most scholars, Bender recognized believers' baptism as the sign rather than the essence of Anabaptism.) In sum, then, the Bender interpretation saw Zurich as the origin and Protestantism (and the Bible) as the source of Anabaptism and defined it religiously¹⁵ as a belief in discipleship, a voluntary church and nonresistance.

Fundamental to the Bender reinterpretation was a reworking of the sixteenth-century categories. Roland H. Bainton and John T. McNeill had already renamed the miscellaneous column of sixteenth-century Christians the "left wing of the Reformation."¹⁶ This left Bender free to restrict the term "Anabaptist" to its generic meaning, those who had practiced rebaptism. (This would eliminate the troublesome Thomas Müntzer, who had attacked infant baptism but had never instituted believers' baptism, and perhaps Melchior Hoffman, the inspirer of the Münsterites, who might not have been rebaptized himself and who suspended rebaptism

for a time.) Bender, however, went farther. By creating the category "evangelical Anabaptism," as defined in the *The Anabaptist Vision*, he was able to eliminate *all* undesirable elements, a sort of posthumous excommunication. Anabaptism's Protestant and biblical source excluded spiritualism; the Anabaptists' nonresistance (as well as their origin near the end of the Peasants' War) precluded revolution; and their discipleship was the antithesis of antinomian libertinism. Anabaptists were not "mystical, spiritualistic, revolutionary, or even antinomian."¹⁷ Thus, Bender eliminated the very elements which the Protestants labelled Anabaptism's definitive characteristics! "Evangelical Anabaptists" included only the Swiss Brethren (in Switzerland and South Germany), the Hutterites (in Moravia) and the Mennonites (in the Netherlands). All other elements in the left wing of the Reformation, whether they rebaptized or not, were ignored.¹⁸

In retrospect, Bender seems to have been attempting to make Anabaptism respectable by the standards of American Protestantism. In this he succeeded almost too well. The Anabaptist vision as outlined by Bender gained a large following among American historians (even some non-Mennonite church historians who took up the Anabaptist cause and claimed it as their own). Bender's was a complex vision, however, and not all Benderites chose to emphasize the same elements of it — their choices sometimes distorted Bender's original description. J. C. Wenger, for instance, so stressed scripture, the believers' church, evangelism and the conversion aspect of discipleship that Anabaptism seemed barely distinguishable from American evangelicalism. (In this he was following the emphasis of such earlier interpreters as Henry S. Burrage and John Horsch.)¹⁹ Robert Friedmann stressed the concept of two worlds, one Christian and the other antichristian, which Bender had considered a corollary of his second point. Ethelbert Stauffer emphasized "The Anabaptist Theology of Martyrdom," another aspect of Bender's second characteristic.²⁰ Some more modern Mennonites define themselves as "the historic peace churches," a definition that seems to derive more from twentieth-century Mennonite abstention from war than from sixteenth-century Anabaptist separation from the state, although nonresistance was Bender's third characteristic.

Perhaps the most popular element in Bender's description of Anabaptism, especially among non-Mennonites, was his second principle, relating to Anabaptism's new concept of the church. Led by Franklin H. Littell, many scholars concluded that

the Anabaptists proper were those in the radical Reformation who gathered and disciplined a "true church" (*rechte Kirche*) upon the apostolic pattern as they understood it. In a treatment of the Anabaptists, the doctrine of the church affords the classifying principle of first importance.²¹

Whether they called it the believers' church, the New Testament

church, the voluntary church, the disciplined church or the free church, many historians agreed that a distinct ecclesiology was the essence of Anabaptism.²² This stress drew upon the work of the German scholar Ernst Troeltsch. In *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* Troeltsch had divided Christian groups into three categories: churches (organizations allied with the state), sects (organizations independent of the state) and spiritualists (groups which were indifferent to all types of formal organization). Although this affixed to Anabaptists the perjorative label "sect" with its connotations of schism and heresy, it also increased their importance. In the sixteenth century, they were the sole representatives of a major category (the sects), while Protestants and Catholics were lumped together in another category (state churches). Moreover, this approach distinguished between sects (Anabaptists) and spiritualists as Bender was anxious to do.

Baptists especially appreciated the ecclesiological interpretation of Anabaptism because it gave a historical pedigree to their distinctives of separation of church and state, religious toleration, voluntarism in religion and congregational autonomy. Their interpretation owed much to the older theory of Rufus M. Jones that Anabaptists had passed on the idea of a free church to the English Baptists and hence to American Baptists. This inheritance remains a matter of historical debate despite the detailed "proof" of it by Irvin B. Horst.²³ Nevertheless, it was generally agreed that at the very least Anabaptists were to be credited with being the forerunners of the free church movement.

The separation of church and state and religious toleration, however, were not merely Baptist principles but *American principles*, enshrined in the American Constitution. As William R. Estep pointed out, this made "the Anabaptist heritage . . . the prized possession of every advanced civilization of the twentieth-century world."²⁴ In the 1950's, when America was engaged in a global cold war in defence of the principles of freedom and democracy, the ideas of religious liberty and democratic church organization were particularly appealing. An added attraction of this understanding was that it gave a historical dimension to the struggle against German totalitarianism that had been the Second World War. Americans could now see themselves as descendants of the Anabaptists rather than of the Lutheran church, which had been almost a department of the Nazi bureaucracy. Even Mennonites were not immune to this national sentiment. As William Klassen pointed out, Harold Bender derived the concept of discipleship more from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's opposition to Adolf Hitler than from the Anabaptists' opposition to Charles V.²⁵ Overnight American Mennonites had been transformed from traitors (as a result of their refusal of military service in the Second World War) to the founders of essential Americanism.

Although in *The Anabaptist Vision* he had rejected the eccle-

siological definition of Anabaptism as too narrow, Bender himself must bear part of the responsibility for the stress on Anabaptist ecclesiology. In his major piece of research, *Conrad Grebel: The Founder of the Swiss Brethren*, Bender had stressed that the Swiss Brethren had originally broken with the Protestant Reformer Zwingli over the question of church and state — the Anabaptists had followed Protestant principles unhesitatingly, while Zwingli compromised them in deference to the Zurich City Council.²⁶ This was confirmed by the Swiss historian Fritz Blanke and by Bender's fellow American Mennonite John H. Yoder.²⁷ Later American historians, however, were not as careful to distinguish between originating issue and essential principles.

IV

With the 1960's there came another shift in Anabaptist historiography, but this time the shift was more subtle. A series of chiefly North American scholars, generally acknowledging their debt to Bender, began to test and elaborate his interpretation. Labelled by James M. Stayer the "new Mennonites," it was not clear at first that this group would significantly modify the prevailing historical opinion.²⁸

The new Mennonites could be said to have begun with the publication in 1957 of the collection of sources *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers*, edited by George H. Williams and Angel M. Mergal. In the Introduction to his section of the book, Williams summed up the results of the previous two decades of research by reshuffling the sixteenth-century categories. Instead of seeing three categories, Catholic, Protestant and the left wing (including Anabaptists), Williams saw two categories, Catholic and Reformation. Reformation, however, was broken up into Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican and radical (including Anabaptists). Here Williams incorporated some of the perspective of the Benderites, who had insisted that Anabaptism was a branch of Protestantism. Moreover, by breaking up Protestantism into Lutheran, Reformed and Anglican branches, Williams increased the importance of the radical Reformation, which had formerly been dwarfed numerically by the monolithic categories, Catholic and Protestant, and also demonstrated that Protestants as well as Anabaptists could quarrel among themselves. Perhaps the most significant part of the book was the use of the term "radical Reformation" as a replacement for "left wing of the Reformation," which had unfortunate associations in the 1950's with atheistic communism. Williams subdivided the radical Reformation into Anabaptists, spiritualists and evangelical rationalists. Each of these groups was "radical" in that it wanted to return to the roots (*radix*-root) of its faith, Anabaptists to the New Testament church,²⁹ spiritualists to the Spirit and rationalists to reason. Common to all three was a belief in the separation of church and state. Thus, Williams

accepted that simplification of Bender which argued that New Testament ecclesiology was the essence of Anabaptism. He also maintained the excommunication of spiritualists from Anabaptism, set unitarianism apart as the category "evangelical rationalism", but left revolutionaries as a subcategory of Anabaptists and spiritualists. Williams remained acceptable to the Bender school by subdividing his subdivisions: Anabaptism had evangelical, revolutionary and contemplative branches; spiritualism had evangelical, revolutionary and rational branches; and the rationalists were either evangelical Catholics or free spirits (including unitarians). The advantage of such an elaborate categorization is that it allowed for consideration of interaction and relationships between the various groups. For instance, Hans Denck, whose status as an evangelical Anabaptist had been questionable, could still be considered an Anabaptist even though his "contemplative" approach clearly had ties to spiritualism; ties could also be seen between Erasmus, an "evangelical Catholic" and "evangelical Anabaptists."

In the long run, Williams' realignment would shift attention from Anabaptism to the radical Reformation as a whole. (Williams himself was the first to attempt a definition of the radical Reformation, transferring the American ideal of religious freedom from Anabaptism to the radical Reformation.) In the short run, however, Williams gave a new impetus to the study of Anabaptism, now freed from the strait jacket of Bender's "evangelical Anabaptism" and seen in relationship to other radical groups. The new Mennonites built on the basis of Williams' summation.

The Bender school had postulated that Anabaptism had arisen in Switzerland, moved north into South Germany and then divided, one branch advancing eastward into Moravia (and possibly north into central Germany) and the second following the Rhine in a northwesterly direction eventually reaching the Netherlands (and possibly England). Benderites in the first few years had concentrated on the origin of Anabaptism in Switzerland. As the new Mennonites moved on to study other areas, they found themselves forced to modify the Bender thesis in spite of their felt allegiance to Benderite presuppositions. The modifications occurred in all three areas, essence, source and origins.

In the first place, the distortion of Bender which stressed ecclesiology became increasingly untenable. As John S. Oyer discovered, "the attitude toward the church was not central to Anabaptist thought in [central Germany]"³⁰ Hans J. Hillerbrand even questioned the primacy of ecclesiology in Switzerland: "The impression that the issue evolved around two differing views of the church is misleading."³¹ It was now argued that the essence of Anabaptism was to be found in soteriology. This was startling because it soon became obvious that Anabaptists and Protestants disagreed fundamentally on this key Christian doctrine: "The Lutheran-Anabaptist conflict centered in soteriology."³² "What

separated Zwingli and the Zurich Anabaptists was a different understanding of the nature of justification."³³ The Benderites had always insisted that the Anabaptists were perfectly orthodox Protestants in theology — which they were, according to the standard by which the Benderites judged. That standard, however, was American evangelicalism.³⁴ The Benderites did not appreciate that evangelicalism could not be equated with Protestantism but was itself in some ways a combination of Protestantism and Anabaptism.³⁵ (Sixteenth-century Protestantism, for example, had little interest in missions and did not stress conversion.) Therefore, to some extent the reinterpretation of Anabaptism was tied in to a new historical appreciation of sixteenth-century Protestantism and its distinctiveness from modern Protestantism.³⁶ It was now evident that Protestantism presupposed predestination and original sin, while Anabaptism was predicated on man's free will;³⁷ Protestantism established *justification* on the basis of faith alone, while Anabaptism insisted that *salvation* came only to those who freely committed their lives to following Christ.³⁸ Benderites had been able to cite numerous Anabaptist claims to believe in justification by faith,³⁹ but they had not realized that the Anabaptists had understood faith as commitment, or discipleship. As Alvin J. Beachey was to point out, Protestants and Anabaptists had been unknowingly arguing on the basis of different concepts of grace.⁴⁰ Harold Bender had been right in stressing the importance of discipleship for Anabaptism. He was wrong in limiting discipleship to sanctification as a corollary to justification by faith.⁴¹ Discipleship constituted a replacement for justification by faith.⁴²

This reinterpretation was not the work of one influential scholar but seems to have been discovered almost simultaneously by a variety of scholars.⁴³ In a sense, the reinterpretation was closer to the original Bender vision with its stress on discipleship than was the ecclesiological emphasis of the 1950's. On the other hand, it called into question Bender's assertion that Anabaptism had its source in Protestantism. If Anabaptism was not really similar to Protestantism on the key issue of justification by faith, was it possible to argue that Anabaptism was Protestant at all? Furthermore, where had the concept of discipleship come from? Some Benderites tried to argue that Anabaptists were merely extreme Protestants on soteriology: "There is no repudiation of the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith but rather a new interpretation which attempted to read into the term more biblical content than Luther ever gave it."⁴⁴ John S. Oyer and William Klassen argued that Anabaptists derived their soteriology from John's New Testament writings rather than Paul's.⁴⁵ It soon became obvious, however, that Anabaptists were really closer to Roman Catholicism on the question, particularly in advocating free will and the necessity for some kind of works. This seemed to confirm some offhand sixteenth-century Protestant remarks that Anabaptism was a

new monkery. On the other hand, in their preference for Scripture over tradition, their ultra-Protestant belief in the priesthood of all believers and their ultra-Protestant sacramentarianism (doctrines which supported their unique sectarian ecclesiology) it was obvious that Anabaptists were closer to Protestantism. The question had then to be asked: Was Anabaptism Protestant or Catholic? Hans Hillerbrand concluded, "The postulate of Anabaptism as a tradition in its own right may be the answer to our problem."⁴⁶ This *sui generis* understanding of Anabaptism as a third alternative was accepted by many scholars and was perhaps best expressed by the title of Walter Klaassen's summary work *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic nor Protestant*.⁴⁷ It was in some senses a return to the pre-Bender and pre-Williams view. Instead of the radical Reformation being juxtaposed to the Lutheran, Reformed and Anglican Reformations, it was once again opposed to Roman Catholicism and the magisterial Reformation. Bender's insistence that Anabaptists were Protestants had improved their reputation in the 1940's and 1950's; in the 1960's the insistence on uniqueness would have the same effect. Anabaptists were now *better* than Protestants. In his summary Walter Klaassen waved "radicalism" as a banner: discipleship had great appeal in the new era of activism.⁴⁸

At the same time, in spite of Klaassen's title, this new viewpoint seemed to have connotations of "both Catholic and Protestant." Protestant on Scripture and the priesthood of all believers, Catholic in soteriology, and going beyond both in ecclesiology, Anabaptism was a "'middle way' between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism."⁴⁹ The new viewpoint was popularized by George H. Williams' massive history of *The Radical Reformation* published in 1962. It appealed particularly to those who nourished ecumenical hopes in the 1960's. The influence of Barth, Brunner and Bonhoeffer was moving the Reformed churches closer to Anabaptism with a neoorthodox theology emphasizing salvation by God's faithfulness (not man's faith), the Divine Word within the written word, the believers' church and believers' baptism.⁵⁰ The influence of neoorthodoxy had already been evident in the Reformed Leonard Verduin's cautious admiration of Anabaptism. An ecumenical concern was also evident in Hans Hillerbrand's *A Fellowship of Discontent*.

This *sui generis* characterization of Anabaptism complicated the search for the sources of Anabaptism. Some with ecumenical leanings followed Walter Koehler⁵¹ in looking for an Erasmian influence, since Erasmus, too, was an ecumenicist and similar to Anabaptism on free will, discipleship, anticlericalism, anti-scholasticism, Scripture, pacifism and sacramentarianism. This theory was partially accepted by Hillerbrand, as it had been by Littell, but generally found few followers.⁵² While it was possible to see similarities, there seemed to be few direct contacts outside the Netherlands, except for the influence of Erasmus' tract on free will.

Another attempt to find a solution to the source question was Kenneth R. Davis' *Anabaptism and Asceticism*. In this book, Davis revived the suggestion of Albrecht Ritschl that Anabaptism derived from the spiritual Franciscans. Davis argued that the chief ideas of Anabaptism, particularly the idea of the pursuit of holiness, or discipleship, were really a continuation of medieval asceticism. Since it had already been established that there were few direct links between the spiritual Franciscans and the Anabaptists, Davis traced the descent through the Brethren of the Common Life (the *devotio moderna*) to Erasmus and thus to humanism and finally to the Anabaptists. In some cases, humanist Protestants such as Zwingli serve as a further link between the humanists and the Anabaptists. This elaborate theory of transmission had three serious weaknesses. First, by working with loose definitions of concepts, it unjustifiably equated such diverse movements as asceticism, the *devotio moderna*, Erasmianism and Anabaptism. Secondly, the connections between the various groups in the chain were often tenuous, and, where they existed, it was not obvious that it was precisely the concept of asceticism-discipleship that had been transmitted. Thirdly, it confused the issue of whether Anabaptism derived from spiritual Franciscanism, Erasmian humanism or Protestantism by combining the first two and in some cases all three. Davis' thesis has not found wide acceptance. The influence of the spiritual Franciscans and the writings of Joachim of Fiore seems to have been greater on the spiritualists and apocalyptic revolutionaries than on the Anabaptists.⁵³

The most popular answer to the question of sources was that Anabaptism, particularly its discipleship soteriology, derived from late medieval mysticism with its emphasis on suffering and imitating Christ. The trouble with this source, however, was that it called into question the Zurich origin of Anabaptism. Medieval mysticism was clearly mediated to Anabaptism through Denck, who had spiritualist tendencies, and Thomas Müntzer, who had revolutionary ones. Walter Klaassen demonstrated that Thomas Müntzer had passed on some aspects of discipleship to Hans Hut and thus to German Anabaptism. John S. Oyer and Rollin S. Armour concurred.⁵⁴ This implied that, as the Protestants had claimed, Thomas Müntzer, rather than the Swiss Brethren in Zurich, had been the originator of Anabaptism. The new Mennonites, however, went to great pains to maintain the unity of Anabaptism as well as the importance of Zurich. Klaassen and Hillerbrand noted (as the Protestants had once argued) that Thomas Müntzer had also influenced the Zurich Anabaptists on the question of soteriology.⁵⁵ However, unlike the Protestant historians, the new Mennonites argued that the Anabaptists had never accepted Müntzer's revolutionary apocalypticism. Hillerbrand made this more plausible by stressing the influence of Carlstadt, Müntzer's non-revolutionary associate.⁵⁶ This allowed the new Mennonites to argue that

Anabaptism had indeed begun in Zurich, combining Müntzerite discipleship with Zwinglian biblicism, sacramentarianism and pacifism; it had spread from there, converting Müntzer's former followers to pacifism, biblicism and sacramentarianism but not to discipleship since they had already learned this from Müntzer. Oyer, especially, stressed that Hut and Melchior Rinck had been converted. The apostolic succession of Anabaptism remained intact: The Swiss Brethren had baptized Hubmaier who had baptized Denck (converting him from the spiritualistic element of medieval mysticism) who had baptized Hut (converting him from revolutionary apocalypticism) who had brought Anabaptism to Germany.

The new Mennonite attempt to maintain the distinction between Anabaptists and Müntzerite revolutionaries seemed reasonably successful. In the first place, most revolutionaries did not rebaptize. In the second place, the idea of revolution was not necessary to discipleship. Indeed, Swiss Brethren nonresistance fit much more readily into the concept of following the example of the suffering Christ than did revolution. On the other hand, the charge of spiritualism proved much more difficult to exclude. Personally following Christ necessarily had a subjective element. The personal experience of God had an element of spiritualism. Man's free will was related to the idea of an inner divine spark.⁵⁷ Oyer admitted that in their arguments against the Lutherans Anabaptists had been forced back from Scripture to an authoritative spiritual voice.⁵⁸ William Klassen noted that Pilgram Marpeck, following Denck, had sought the inner Word within the written word. Many Anabaptists had insisted that Scripture alone was not self-interpreting but required the Holy Spirit to make it clear.⁵⁹ Many of the Anabaptists in whom these spiritualistic elements appeared had been excluded from Anabaptism by the old Benderite formula.⁶⁰ With the redefinition of Anabaptism in terms of discipleship soteriology, it was clear that these people belonged.

Mennonite scholars have struggled to come to terms with the spiritualistic aspect of Anabaptism. Fortunately, the modern charismatic movement has rendered the charge of spiritualism less odious than it was. The Eighth Mennonite World Conference in 1967 took as its theme *The Witness of the Holy Spirit*. Nevertheless, the embrace of spiritualism was tentative at best. For instance, Peter J. Klassen's paper at the conference on "The Anabaptist View of the Holy Spirit" in essence reduced the Holy Spirit to an adjunct of older emphases on conversion, Scripture and the church. Elsewhere, Cornelius J. Dyck equated spiritualism with the experience of regeneration or conversion.⁶¹ Others have argued that relying on the Holy Spirit to interpret Scripture really means congregational interpretation. Walter Klaassen, on the other hand, took a less fundamentalist, more Barthian and more Denckian view of Scripture, arguing that the Bible contains rather than constitutes the Word of God.⁶²

John H. Yoder tried to cope with the charismatic element in Anabaptism by redefining "charismatic" in terms of the believers' church depending on the gifts of the Spirit (a variation of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers).⁶³ In a similar vein, Ken Davis has recently argued that there are two types of spiritualism: Good spiritualism in the tradition of Tertullian employs the Spirit to interpret Scripture; bad spiritualism in the tradition of Origen uses Spirit as an alternate authority to Scripture. The Anabaptists, of course, were good spiritualists and the spiritualists proper bad spiritualists.⁶⁴ These scholars were thus maintaining Williams' distinction between contemplative Anabaptists with their roots in the Bible on the one hand and spiritualists on the other. Mennonites are not enthusiastic about the spiritualist streak in Anabaptism, but at least spiritualism (unlike revolution, which is stressed by the Marxists) is religious. Lesser evils are tolerated when greater evils threaten. One of the reasons suggested for modern ecumenicism is a closing of Christian ranks against the external enemy, Marxism.

The new Mennonite interpretation of Anabaptism, then, insisted that Anabaptism was united and originated in Zurich. Its sources were medieval mysticism (for discipleship soteriology) and Protestantism (for biblicism, sacramentarianism and the priesthood of all believers). Nevertheless, the essence of Anabaptism was discipleship soteriology.⁶⁵ The new Mennonite reinterpretation also involved a slight shuffling of categories. Their new view of Anabaptism was basically a German one. (Most of the research concentrated on German areas in the 1960's.) Bender had seen three branches of Anabaptism: Swiss, Mennonite and Hutterite. The new Mennonites added German, and Oyer even split German into South and Central.

New Mennonites investigating Anabaptism in other areas also found some divergences. Benderites had assumed that Mennonites had derived from Swiss Brethren.⁶⁶ The only obvious link, however, was Melchior Hoffman, who had connections with Strasbourg spiritualists and whose apocalypticism had inspired the Münster revolutionaries. Many Dutch scholars, therefore, denied the Swiss Brethren *origin* of Dutch Anabaptism in order to defend the Swiss Brethren *character* of Dutch Anabaptism. Thus, W. J. Kühler had earlier argued that peaceful Dutch Anabaptists (the Mennonites) had existed before and separate from Münster. Karel Vos denied this.⁶⁷ More recently, Klaus Deppermann said that both Münsterites and Mennonites derived from Hoffman but ignored the issue of Hoffman's sources.⁶⁸ William E. Keeney ignored the question altogether, starting his history in 1539!⁶⁹ One suspects that nationalism is playing a part here. Dutch scholars prefer a Dutch origin for Dutch Anabaptism to a Swiss origin. The sources of Dutch Anabaptism would then have to be Dutch sacramentarianism and Erasmian humanism.⁷⁰ G. K. Epp, however, has recently confused the issue by

noting that Menno Simons was trained by the Premonstratensian order, which displayed many characteristics of the Anabaptists.⁷¹ Epp does not press his conclusions very far, but one can discern here a link to Catholicism such as was found in Germany.

Concerning the Hutterites, Jarold K. Zeman argued that they had a spiritualist wing, were somewhat different from German Anabaptism but did not derive from medieval Czech heretics.⁷²

One should not misunderstand the nationalistic bias of the new Mennonite reinterpretation, however. The new Mennonites insisted that there was still a definable united Anabaptism, with minor national variations,⁷³ just as Protestantism had Lutheran, Reformed and Anglican variations. Indeed, one of the reasons for the variations within Anabaptism may be that it was opposing a varied Protestantism. German Anabaptists stressed discipleship soteriology and the importance of the Holy Spirit in response to Luther's stress on justification by faith alone and Scripture alone. Swiss Anabaptists stressed sectarian ecclesiology in response to the Reformed stress on the city as a sacral society.⁷⁴

V

By the late 1960's, the impetus in Anabaptist studies had passed from American scholars to Canadian and European ones.⁷⁵ The reasons for this are not obvious. Was it due to the decline of language skills among Americans? A feeling that sixteenth-century questions had all been answered? The loss of American interest when Anabaptists were no longer associated with the American democratic ideal? Disillusionment with the American ideal itself? American Mennonite preoccupation with the Vietnam War and the history of their own pacifism during previous American wars?⁷⁶ Greater receptivity among Canadians and Europeans to the social direction historiography was taking? We can only speculate. At any rate, the field is now dominated by a number of Canadian (James M. Stayer, Werner O. Packull, C. Arnold Snyder) and European (Hans-Jürgen Goertz, Martin Haas, Klaus Deppermann, Heinold Fast, Gottfried Seebass) scholars who are taking Anabaptist historiography in a radical new direction. There is a tendency to label these historians secularists due to their advocacy of "methodological atheism" in history.⁷⁷ However, while many of them are not Mennonites, it is not at all the case that they are all non-Christians. (They are "secular" or "worldly" only if we were to take a narrow Anabaptist "two worlds" view à la Robert Friedmann.) These historians are rather syncretists, attempting to reconcile the Mennonite and Marxist views of Anabaptist history.⁷⁸ Quite clearly, such an approach would be impossible in the United States, where Marxism and Anabaptism's "free" ideals are seen as opposite poles. It is easier in more socialist Canada and Europe.⁷⁹

The syncretists were selective in what they borrowed from other

scholars for their synthesis. On the one side, they owed a great debt to the new Mennonite German studies, particularly as they had revealed the diversity within Anabaptism and the influence of Thomas Müntzer. On the other, the Marxist historian that appealed most to the syncretists was Gerhard Zschäbitz. Zschäbitz had already moved some distance toward the Bender school in agreeing that Thomas Müntzer was primarily a theologian and that Anabaptism was primarily a religious refuge for ex-revolutionaries rather than an organization of revolutionaries. Therefore, Zschäbitz had argued, until considerably after the Peasants' War there must have been considerable confusion, interaction and realignment until revolutionaries and Anabaptists sorted themselves out.

The syncretism in the new school appears most clearly in the 1978 Sixteenth Century Studies Conference Symposium in St. Louis led off by Hans-Jürgen Goertz' paper "History and Theology: A Major Problem of Anabaptist Research Today." Goertz argued that the Bender, as well as the Protestant, school had erred in defining Anabaptism theologically.⁸⁰ He was raising the old question of the relationship between ideas and actions in history, the ideas as elucidated by the Benderites and the socio-economic activity as described by the Marxists.⁸¹ Although Goertz insisted that it was the interaction of ideas and their socio-economic context that should be studied, he assumed that the ideas resulted from the socio-economic context rather than vice versa. The other syncretist scholars at the symposium agreed that it was the study of the interaction of ideas and context that was the proper approach but denied that the context was necessarily primary. Further, they argued that replacing American Mennonite ideas with Marxist ideas was not much of an improvement.

Syncretism began its work with the historical sources these scholars used to investigate the Anabaptists. While the old Protestant-Marxist view rested on the writings of sixteenth-century Protestant Reformers, Mennonite interpreters had insisted that the only proper sources for Anabaptist research were the writings of Anabaptists themselves.⁸² Syncretist scholars used both. Werner Packull, for instance, assumed that where there is smoke there must be fire: If Bullinger said the Anabaptists were spiritualists, there must be some truth to the charge.⁸³

The syncretism is also evident in the categorization scheme used by the new school. Their focus is on the radical Reformation rather than on Anabaptism alone. This is best portrayed in *Profiles of Radical Reformers: Biographical Sketches from Thomas Müntzer to Paracelsus* edited by Hans-Jürgen Goertz. Goertz kept George H. Williams' terminology but redefined radical Reformation in political terms as any movement or tendency which "shakes the foundation of society."⁸⁴ This, Goertz argued, preserved "the dialectical relationship between theological ideas and social development, at the same time measuring radicalness ultimately by the social context in which any theology is grounded."⁸⁵

Again we see the combination of theology and socio-economic considerations, with the social predominant in Goertz' mind. By employing this broad, somewhat vague definition, Goertz could present the radical Reformation, in the Marxist Zschäbitz' terms, as a chaotic mass of groups and ideas spawned by the creative genius of Müntzer and Carlstadt;⁸⁶ out of the conflicting tendencies within this chaos there gradually emerged distinct groups, revolutionaries, Anabaptists and spiritualists, but in the beginning there were only radical Reformers with varying combinations of the several tendencies.⁸⁷ Accordingly, Goertz arranged the biographies in three clusters, revolutionaries, Anabaptists and spiritualists-antitrinitarians-others, but made no formal divisions. Indeed the arrangement is such that one category gradually blends into the next with no discernible boundary markers. For example, it is not clear whether James M. Stayer's presentation of Wilhelm Reublin, for whom "the common man and the gospel seemed joined in the same cause against all religious and political 'big shots'," belongs to the first category or the second.⁸⁸ Within this chaotic mass of the radical Reformation, Stayer had earlier used a "nominalist" definition⁸⁹ to distinguish Anabaptism — Anabaptists were all those who rebaptized and their associates.⁹⁰ The Mennonite historians had recognized believers' baptism as a sign of certain specific characteristics. For Stayer, only the sign remained — there were no specific universal characteristics.⁹¹

Syncretism appears also in *The Anabaptists and Thomas Müntzer*, a collection of Mennonite, Marxist and syncretist essays edited by James M. Stayer and Werner O. Packull. Perhaps Packull himself best exemplifies the syncretist nature of the new scholars. Trained by both Ken Davis and Stayer, Packull studied the same South German Anabaptists that Davis had concentrated on and confirmed Klaassen's argument that German Anabaptism had derived from medieval mysticism through Hans Hut, Thomas Müntzer and Hans Denck.⁹² Packull, however, also noted the revolutionary element in this source⁹³ and stressed the spiritualist element more than Klaassen had, noting that some spiritualists had evolved out of some of the followers of Hans Hut. Indeed the boundaries between Anabaptists and spiritualists were "artificial."⁹⁴ Thus Packull demonstrated the chaotic state of the early radical Reformation. Anabaptists were not distinguishable from other radical Reformers in the early chaotic years. It was only later (after the Schleithem Confession of 1527?) that German radical Reformers split into spiritualists, revolutionaries and Anabaptists of the Swiss type.

Developing the syncretist approach even farther, Packull refused to accept the new Mennonite redefinition of all Anabaptism in terms of discipleship soteriology.⁹⁵ Rather, he clung to the older Benderite biblical and sectarian characterization of the Swiss Brethren,⁹⁶ thereby postulating that Swiss Anabaptism and German Anabaptism were separate

entities. This was emphasized by Packull's suggestion that Denck had never been baptized by Hubmaier and that Denck and Hut had never been converted from spiritualism and revolutionary apocalypticism respectively to normative Anabaptism. This spelled the end of Bender's normative vision of Anabaptism.⁹⁷ By maintaining the old Benderite interpretation that the Zurich Anabaptists had separated from Zwingli on the question of ecclesiology, Packull denied that one could talk of Anabaptism *per se*. Rather, one had to talk of Anabaptisms. In another article, Stayer, Packull and Klaus Deppermann argued that there were at least three distinct origins of Anabaptism, Swiss, German and Dutch,⁹⁸ and C. P. Clasen even denied that one could talk of a single Anabaptism deriving from several sources. The separate groups remained separate and refused to recognize each other as brothers.⁹⁹ Clasen went so far as to say that the Hutterites were so different from other Anabaptists that perhaps they should not even be called Anabaptists. One wonders here if syncretist scholars are being unduly influenced by nationalism. Is the magnitude of the diversity due to the historians' bias, or was incipient nationalism so powerful in the early sixteenth century? If the latter is true, it could have significance for a wider historiography than that of the radical Reformation.¹⁰⁰

The syncretist closest to the Marxists was James M. Stayer. He emphasized both the chaotic nature of the early radical Reformation and Anabaptism's links to the revolutionaries. In his major study, *Anabaptists and the Sword*, Stayer argued that there had been no consensus among Anabaptists on separation of church and state and pacifism until after the Schleithem Confession of 1527. Early Anabaptists wanted to reform Christendom and had retreated into pacifist sectarianism only after they had failed to get the state to go along. One sees the syncretist approach very clearly here. The Anabaptists' pacifism was not an ideology that Anabaptists put into practice as the Benderites had argued. Rather, it was a product of Anabaptists' socio-political status as a persecuted minority, a pragmatic means of survival. In later articles, Stayer carried his interpretation even farther, arguing that Anabaptism arose among the peasants rather than among the Protestants in the cities. Thus, Stumpf, Reublin and Brötli rather than Grebel were the leaders of the Zurich Anabaptists,¹⁰¹ and the crucial break came over the question of tithes in the summer of 1523 rather than over the mass in October of 1524.¹⁰² "The Anabaptism of 1525 was revolutionary, and not in a purely religious sense, if indeed it is proper to think of religion as separated from the ongoing life of the world."¹⁰³ Stayer was moving in the direction of defining Anabaptism by socio-economic class. Werner Packull also saw a notable influence of the Peasants' Revolt on South German Anabaptism and on Swiss Anabaptism.¹⁰⁴ Deppermann argued that Dutch Anabaptism led naturally to the Münster revolution under conditions of eco-

nomic duress.¹⁰⁵ Another syncretist, C. Arnold Snyder, has argued that it was the Peasants' War rather than Protestantism that pried Michael Sattler out of the cloister and set him on the road to becoming an Anabaptist.¹⁰⁶ More recently, Werner Packull has been looking at Anabaptism as the Reformation of the Common Man and arguing that if there is a common denominator it is anticlericalism.¹⁰⁷ This definition by attitude seems the perfect compromise between the Marxist socio-economic definition and the more purely intellectual definitions of the Protestants and Mennonites.

The syncretist view of the radical Reformation may be summarized as follows. Its origins were many and varied, although Thomas Müntzer is given some prominence. Its sources were perhaps Thomas Müntzer (and through him medieval mysticism) but more likely the social experience of the Peasants' War and the general upheaval of the sixteenth century. Its common denominator was a desire for social transformation and, in particular, a concern for the lot of the common man. Anabaptists were those elements within the radical Reformation distinguished solely by the fact that they practiced believers' baptism. Normative Anabaptism (as Bender described it) began with the Schleithem Confession of 1527 and gradually over the next few years converted most Anabaptists to its standard.

VI

To some extent, the syncretist approach to the study of Anabaptism has been accepted by other scholars. John H. Yoder has agreed that early Anabaptism was chaotic and diverse.¹⁰⁸ In an article that is ostensibly an attack on Stayer's *Anabaptists and the Sword*, Yoder accepted that Anabaptist teaching on the sword was a result of personal experience of specific governments rather than the product of a carefully worked out political theory. He attacked Littell and Friedmann as much as Stayer for emphasizing the political aspect of Anabaptism, arguing that it was above all a religious movement.¹⁰⁹ Walter Klaassen made some similar concessions in *Michael Gaismair: Revolutionary and Reformer*. While maintaining that the Anabaptists and revolutionaries were mostly separate groups, he recognized that both were preoccupied with the lot of the common man. He also argued that Anabaptists *should* have been preoccupied with the lot of the common man. To Klaassen's way of looking at discipleship, faith *should* result in social action.¹¹⁰ Of course, phrasing it this way, Klaassen implied that social action results from faith rather than the other way around as the syncretists would have it. Klaassen also accepted the Marxist view that Anabaptism was a refuge for ex-revolutionaries but stood this on its head — it was the revolutionaries who were not radical enough. Anabaptism was not a deterioration of social revolution, but social revolution was an inferior preliminary to Anabaptism.

While it is historical controversies that advance our knowledge, it is the consensus that is left behind after historians have moved on to other issues that perhaps comes the closest to constituting that knowledge. John H. Yoder has mentioned that there is an emerging consensus in Anabaptist studies.¹¹¹ The consensus is visible when scholars of various traditions gather as at Strasbourg and St. Louis and then they collaborate on volumes such as Goertz' *Profiles of Radical Reformers*. Indeed James M. Stayer has even warned against too much of a consensus, urging new Mennonites such as Klaassen to maintain the religious perspective as indispensable to a well-rounded view.¹¹² In a similar vein, Hans-Jürgen Goertz argued that "The time is not yet ripe for a general presentation of the 'radical Reformation'," just as it was "too soon" for Williams to attempt such a thing in 1962.¹¹³ Disputed points and unexplored areas remain. Nevertheless, one suspects that the syncretists have overstated the case. There are some things that can be said by way of summary.

It is generally agreed that there was a movement (or collection of movements) in the sixteenth century that was neither Catholic nor Protestant, a movement now called the radical Reformation.¹¹⁴ Within the radical Reformation there were revolutionary, Anabaptist, spiritualist and unitarian trends.¹¹⁵ The old Protestant view of the radical Reformation as a single movement has been discarded. It is generally conceded, however, that the divergences were not clear in the initial stage (however long or short that may be). As the new Mennonites recognized a spiritualist element in Anabaptism, the syncretists have proven a revolutionary connection. (The Protestants were correct to see both *in* Anabaptism, but not *as* Anabaptism.) Within Anabaptism at least four groupings have been discerned: Swiss, German, Mennonite and Hutterite (the German being added to Bender's original three). Many other subdivisions have been proposed, particularly within the German wing,¹¹⁶ but one has commanded universal acceptance. Regarding Anabaptist origins, both the Protestant (and new Mennonite) postulate of Thomas Müntzer and the Bender emphasis on Zurich are deemed at least partially correct. The suggestion that there may be a third, Dutch, origin seems more of an unproved assumption than a conclusion at this point. At most, however, this is trigenesis, not polygenesis. Here again the syncretists seem to have overstated the case. Regarding sources of Anabaptism, a variety have been demonstrated. The Benderites have proven a Protestant influence, especially on the Swiss Brethren with such doctrines as the authority of Scripture, the priesthood of all believers and sacramentarianism underlying the idea of the believers' church. The new Mennonites and syncretists have argued convincingly for roots of discipleship soteriology in medieval mysticism through Denck, Hut and Müntzer. Dutch studies, in particular, suggest a sacramentarian-humanist connection, although this is less well established. Protestant and evangelical suggestions of origins

in medieval heresy have found little support. The syncretist investigation of the influence of the Peasants' War, however, has shown positive results. It is also clear that the Anabaptists, as the Marxists insisted, were drawn chiefly from the lower classes, particularly artisans in the early years and peasants thereafter.¹¹⁷ What is not certain is whether the classes created the ideology or, as the new Mennonite rearguard would have it, the ideology appealed primarily to certain classes.

What, then, is Anabaptism? The nominalist definition, that Anabaptists were all those and only those who rebaptized or were rebaptized, has generally been accepted (albeit reluctantly),¹¹⁸ but no scholar seems to have considered believers' baptism as the central tenet of Anabaptism. All recognize it as a sign of something else. New Mennonites argue it is a sign of discipleship soteriology. The syncretists are less clear. With their conception of the multiple nature of truth, it is not certain that they can or wish to define Anabaptism simply. To them, Anabaptism is all that we have said above and more. In the end, however, they may settle on some such definition as anticlericalism. Their position rests on the certainties that the sectarian ecclesiology of the Swiss and the discipleship soteriology of the Germans are irreconcilable and that therefore Anabaptism is too chaotic to define ideologically.¹¹⁹ Here, also, the syncretists appear to overstate the case. It is clear that German Anabaptism *can* be defined (in terms of discipleship soteriology), just as Swiss Anabaptism can be defined (either as sectarian ecclesiology or discipleship soteriology or both). Moreover, even in syncretist terms it is arguable that sectarian ecclesiology and discipleship eventually became characteristic of a unified Anabaptism once the first chaotic years had passed. Still, the question of essence remains unresolved. As John S. Oyer notes, after twenty years of testing we still do not know "whether there was any at all."¹²⁰ Perhaps Paul Peachey was correct that "Anabaptism was probably too dynamic a movement to be reduced to a simple definition."¹²¹ One thing is certain: The syncretists have not had the final word. In the Hegelian dialectic, today's synthesis becomes the premature thesis for tomorrow's antithesis.

Notes

¹Roman Catholics considered all non-Roman Catholic Christians heretics, thus lumping Protestants and Anabaptists together.

²This would not be the last time that nationalism would warp the interpretation of Anabaptism.

³Cf. Ludwig Keller, *The Reformation and the Older Reformed Parties* (1885).

⁴See John S. Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers Against Anabaptists: Luther, Melancthon and Menius and the Anabaptists of Central Germany* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), pp. 250-251.

⁵Protestants accused Anabaptists of wanting to share wives and other people's goods.

⁶William Echard Keeney, *The Development of Dutch Anabaptist Thought and Practice from 1539-1564* (Nieuwkoop: B. de Graaf, 1968), p. 13.

⁷Marxism itself has sometimes been identified as a Christian heresy. Abraham Friesen sees it as a liberal Protestant heresy: *Reformation and Utopia: The Marxist Interpretation of The Reformation and its Antecedents* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, 1974).

⁸This is true even if the proletariat was seen as cooperating in the bourgeois revolution i.e. the Reformation and the Peasants' War.

⁹Karl Kautsky, *Communism in Central Europe in the Time of the Reformation* (1894). E. Belfort Bax, *Rise and Fall of the Anabaptists* (1903).

¹⁰Friesen, p. 203.

¹¹It was named after the Mennonites' Goshen College in Goshen, Indiana.

¹²*The Anabaptist Vision* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1944), p. 13.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁴Discipleship was first stressed by Johannes Kuhn in *Toleranz und Offenbarung* (Leipzig, 1923).

¹⁵Syncretists such as Hans-Jürgen Goertz would call this an *intellectual* definition (theological definition). Bender, however, would disagree, with some justification. Bender was arguing that the Anabaptists were a religious rather than a socio-political group. In doing this, Bender no doubt undervalued the social element in Anabaptism. The new Mennonite view of Walter Klaassen et. al. is more balanced, noting that their religious approach had profound socio-economic and political results.

¹⁶Roland H. Bainton, "The Left Wing of the Reformation," *The Journal of Religion*, XXI (1941), 124-134.

¹⁷*The Anabaptist Vision*, p. 11.

¹⁸Those ignored were mostly Germans: Hans Denck, Hans Hut, Balthasar Hubmaier, Melchior Hoffman and their followers. Sometimes these individuals were denied Anabaptist status. At other times their early differences from evangelical Anabaptism were considered purged by a conversion experience.

¹⁹Henry S. Burrage, *A History of the Anabaptists in Switzerland* (1882, reprinted in 1973 by Burt Franklin, New York).

²⁰Stauffer's article was published in the *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, XIX (1945). Cf. *The Anabaptist Vision*, pp. 27-28.

²¹Franklin H. Littell, *The Anabaptist View of the Church: A Study in the Origins of Sectarian Protestantism* (Beacon Hill: Starr King Press, 1958, 1952), p. xvii.

²²Cornelius Krahn used all of these terms: *Dutch Anabaptism: Origin, Spread, Life and Thought (1450-1600)* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968). Leonard Verduin, the Reformed scholar, also defined Anabaptism in terms of ecclesiology. *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964).

²³John S. Oyer, "Topics For Research in Anabaptism," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, LV (1981), 382. Horst, *The Radical Brethren: Anabaptism and the English Reformation to 1558* (Nieuwkoop: B. de Graaf, 1972).

²⁴*The Anabaptist Story*. Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1963. Cf. also Roland H. Bainton, *The Travail of Religious Liberty: Nine Biographical Studies* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1951).

²⁵William Klassen, "History and Theology: Some Reflections on the Present Status of Anabaptist Studies," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, LIII (1979), 198.

²⁶"The most characteristic feature of the Anabaptist contribution, following inevitably from its concept of discipleship is its insistence upon a new church of truly committed and practicing believers." (Goshen, Indiana: The Mennonite Historical Society, 1950, p. 210). Cf. also Bender's *The Anabaptists and Religious Liberty in the Sixteenth Century* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970).

²⁷Blancke, *Brothers in Christ: The history of the oldest Anabaptist congregation Zollikon, near Zurich, Switzerland* (Scottsdale, Pa. & Kitchener, Ont.: Herald Press, 1961). Yoder, "The Turning Point in the Zwinglian Reformation," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, XXXII (1958), 128-140; and also "The Prophetic Dissent of the Anabaptists" in Guy F. Hershberger, *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision: A Sixtieth Anniversary Tribute To Harold S. Bender* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1957), p. 96.

²⁸The term "new Mennonite" is perhaps not a good one. Not all were Mennonites. Many were Protestants defending Protestantism but also influenced by neo-orthodoxy to move in an Anabaptist direction. Also, I have probably applied the term more broadly than

Stayer intended, labelling as new Mennonites some whom Stayer would classify as Benderites.

²⁹This is restitutionism as in Littell and Verduin.

³⁰*Lutheran Reformers Against Anabaptists*, p. 228n.

³¹"Anabaptism and the Reformation: Another Look," *Church History*, XXIX (1960), 411. Cf. also Rollin Stely Armour, *Anabaptist Baptism: A Representative Study* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1966), p. 186, that the Zurich split was over theology rather than ecclesiology. Less radical was Robert C. Walton, "Was There a Turning Point of the Zwinglian Reformation?" *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, XLII (1968), pp. 45-56. He argued (versus Yoder) that Zwingli had not betrayed Reformation principles by bowing to the state.

³²Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers Against Anabaptists*, p. 234.

³³Hillerbrand, "Anabaptism and the Reformation," p. 411.

³⁴"It is clear that Conrad Grebel was thoroughly evangelical in the same sense that Luther and Zwingli were." Bender, *Conrad Grebel*, p. 204. Cf. also the chapter "Sin, Salvation, Sanctification" in John Horsch's *Mennonites in Europe* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Mennonite Publishing House, 1942, 1971); and Yoder, "A Summary of the Anabaptist Vision," chapter 8 of Cornelius J. Dyck, ed., *An Introduction to Mennonite History: A Popular History of the Anabaptists and the Mennonites* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1967), p. 109.

³⁵The question of whether Baptists are Protestants or Anabaptists is thereby resolved.

³⁶In the nineteenth century, the sixteenth-century Protestants had been called "Evangelicals."

³⁷Fritz Blanke had incorrectly identified an Anabaptist's consciousness of sin with the Protestant doctrine of original sin, p. 32.

³⁸Justification implies a legal status, salvation an actual state. It will be noted that evangelicals also use the term "salvation".

³⁹Bender, *Conrad Grebel*, p. 204. John C. Wenger, *Even Unto Death: The Heroic Witness of the Sixteenth-Century Anabaptists* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1961), pp. 95-97.

⁴⁰*The Concept of Grace in the Radical Reformation* (Nieuwkoop: B. de Graaf, 1977). This thesis, while not published until 1977, was originally defended in 1960.

⁴¹Walter Klaassen argues that the justification-sanctification distinction is Wesleyan and evangelical and thus anachronistic when applied to the sixteenth century: "Hans Hut and Thomas Muntzer," *The Baptist Quarterly*, XIX (1962), 225. However, the distinction was well established by the early seventeenth century: see John Smyth, "Defence of Ries' Confession," *Works* (Cambridge U. Press, 1915), II, 699.

⁴²Hillerbrand, "Anabaptism and the Reformation," p. 415.

⁴³See also Armour, *op. cit.*, p. 135, and William Klassen, *Covenant and Community: The Life, Writings and Hermeneutics of Pilgram Marpeck* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968).

⁴⁴Estep, p. 143.

⁴⁵Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers Against Anabaptists*, and Klassen, *Covenant and Community*, p. 108.

⁴⁶Hillerbrand, "Anabaptism and the Reformation," p. 418.

⁴⁷Waterloo, Ont.: Conrad Press, 1973; revised ed., 1981.

⁴⁸This identification could work both ways. Claus-Peter Clasen justified the sixteenth-century suppression of Anabaptism: *Anabaptism: A Social History, 1525-1618: Switzerland, Austria, Moravia, South and Central Germany* (Ithaca & London: Cornell U. Press, 1972).

⁴⁹This was a sixteenth-century characterization cited in Bender, *The Anabaptists and Religious Liberty in the Sixteenth Century*, p. 2.

⁵⁰Walter Klaassen displays a neoorthodox approach in discussing just these points: "Was There a Consensus Mennoniticus Before the Baptism of 1525?" in Cornelius J. Dyck, ed., *The Witness of the Holy Spirit: Proceedings of the Eighth Mennonite World Conference* (Elkhart, Indiana: Mennonite World Conference, 1967), pp. 254-259. Cf. also Klaassen, "The Modern Relevance of Anabaptism" in Hans-Jürgen Goertz, ed., *Umstrittenes Täuferium 1525-1975: Neue Forschungen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), pp. 290-304.

⁵¹Cf. Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision*, p. 12.

⁵²Hillerbrand, "The Origin of Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism: Another Look,"

Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte, LIII (1962), 152–180. Littell, pp. 13, 52. Opposition to this theory can be found in Bender, *Conrad Grebel*; Claus-Peter Clasen, "The Anabaptist Leaders: Their Numbers and Background Switzerland, Austria, South and Central Germany 1525–1618," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, XLIX (1975), 122–164; Werner O. Packull, *Mysticism and the Early South German–Austrian Anabaptist Movement 1525–1531* (Scottsdale, Pa. & Kitchener, Ont.: Herald Press, 1977), p. 149; and Abraham Friesen, "Social Revolution or Religious Reform? Some Salient Aspects of Anabaptist Historiography" in Goertz, *Umstrittenes Täuferum*, pp. 223–243.

⁵³Cf. Littell, pp. 52–53; Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (revised and expanded ed.; New York: Oxford University Press, 1970, 1957).

⁵⁴Klaassen, "Hans Hut and Thomas Müntzer," pp. 209–227; Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers Against Anabaptists*; Harry Loewen later agreed: *Luther and the Radicals: Another Look at Some Aspects of the Struggle Between Luther and the Radical Reformers* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University, 1974), pp. 70–79.

⁵⁵Klaassen, "Was There a Consensus Mennoniticus Before 1525?," p. 258; Hillerbrand, "The Origin of Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism."

⁵⁶Loewen agreed: *Luther and the Radicals*, pp. 70–79. Calvin Pater later developed the idea into a full-length book: *Karlstadt as the Father of the Baptist Movements: The Emergence of Lay Protestantism* (University of Toronto Press, 1984).

⁵⁷Beachey, p. 227.

⁵⁸Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers Against Anabaptists*, pp. 229–232.

⁵⁹Klaassen, *Covenant and Community*.

⁶⁰Littell, pp. 21ff.

⁶¹"The Life of the Spirit in Anabaptism," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, XLVII (1973), 309–326.

⁶²"Was There a Consensus Mennoniticus Before 1525?"

⁶³"A Summary of the Anabaptist Vision," p. 104. Cf. Armour, pp. 135–137.

⁶⁴"Anabaptism as a Charismatic Movement," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, LIII (1979), 219–234.

⁶⁵Note that Anabaptist pacifism was now held to derive from discipleship rather than from Scripture (the Sermon on the Mount).

⁶⁶Wenger, *Even Unto Death*; Krahn, p. 252. Horsch starts his *Mennonites in Europe in Switzerland*. Bender, however, had postulated a separate origin in 1533: *The Anabaptist Vision*, p. 11.

⁶⁷Kühler, "Anabaptism in the Netherlands"; Vos, "Revolutionary Reformation"; both are in James M. Stayer and Werner O. Packull, eds., *The Anabaptists and Thomas Müntzer* (Dubuque, Iowa & Toronto, Ont.: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., 1980).

⁶⁸James M. Stayer, Werner O. Packull and Klaus Deppermann, "From Monogenesis to Polygenesis: The Historical Discussion of Anabaptist Origins," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, XLIX (1975).

⁶⁹I have classified Keeney as a new Mennonite. Although he saw the Anabaptists almost in Benderite terms, in the 1960s he moved from a stress on ecclesiology to one on discipleship, arguing that ecclesiology became dominant among Mennonites only after 1555.

⁷⁰Deppermann, "From Monogenesis to Polygenesis"; N. van der Zijpp, "The Early Dutch Anabaptists" in Guy F. Hersherberger, ed., *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision: A Sixtieth Anniversary Tribute To Harold S. Bender* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1957).

⁷¹"The Spiritual Roots of Menno Simons" in Harry Loewen, ed., *Mennonite Images: Historical, Cultural and Literary Essays Dealing With Mennonite Issues* (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, Ltd., 1980), pp. 51–59.

⁷²*The Anabaptists and the Czech Brethren in Moravia 1526–1628: A Study of Origins and Contacts* (The Hague: Mouton, 1969).

⁷³Perhaps this will allow the Baptists to be seen as the English variation of Anabaptism.

⁷⁴It is notable that Anabaptism was strongest in Reformed areas, between the Catholic and Lutheran heartlands.

⁷⁵This trend had already begun among the new Mennonites.

⁷⁶American Mennonites now tend to define themselves as the historic peace churches.

⁷⁷Hans-Jürgen Goertz, "History and Theology: A Major Problem of Anabaptist Research Today," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, LIII (1979), 186.

⁷⁸Hans-Jürgen Goertz, "Introduction" in Goertz, *Profiles of Radical Reformers: Biographical sketches from Thomas Müntzer to Paracelsus*, English edition ed. Walter Klaassen (Scottsdale, Pa. & Kitchener, Ont.: Herald Press, 1982), p. 15.

⁷⁹Note Walter Klaassen's assertion that Michael Gaismair, a revolutionary close to Anabaptism, wanted the type of society achieved by "the democratic and socialist systems of the West." *Michael Gaismair: Revolutionary and Reformer* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), p. 121.

⁸⁰This is perhaps an unfair description of the Benderite approach. See note #15.

⁸¹Abraham Friesen noted the same duality. However, unlike Goertz, Friesen argued that the ideas changed society more than society shaped the ideas. *Reformation and Utopia*, pp. 233-234.

⁸²By "Mennonites" I mean both Benderites and new Mennonites. "Later polemic writings against the Brethren such as Bullinger's works, naturally have little or no value for the determination of Grebel's theology, although they have some value for the understanding of the movement in general." Bender, *Conrad Grebel*, p. 168. Cf. also Littell, "Introduction"; Wenger, "Preface," *Even Unto Death*; Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers Against Anabaptists*.

⁸³*Mysticism and the Early South German-Austrian Anabaptist Movement*, p. 87 and *passim*. Cf. also Clasen, *Anabaptism: A Social History*.

⁸⁴*Profiles of Radical Reformers*, p. 20. C. P. Clasen (*Anabaptism: A Social History*) agrees that Anabaptists threatened the social order, while arguing that Anabaptism was primarily religious rather than political.

⁸⁵*Profiles of Radical Reformers*, p. 21.

⁸⁶They are the first two biographies. This idea appeared first in Hillerbrand, "The Origin of Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism," p. 168.

⁸⁷The vagueness of the category "radical Reformation" recalls the way the Protestants used "Anabaptist" as a catchall term.

⁸⁸"Wilhelm Reublin: A Picaresque Journey Through Early Anabaptism," p. III. The "Anabaptist" Hans Hut is in the first category, right after Müntzer and Carlstadt.

⁸⁹Packull, "The demise of a normative vision," p. 315.

⁹⁰*Anabaptists and the Sword* (Lawrence, Kansas: Coronado Press, 1972), p. 21.

⁹¹Oyer had earlier used a similar nominalist definition but argued that for *most* Anabaptists there was still a definite ideology.

⁹²See also Packull, "Gottfried Seebass on Hans Hut: A Discussion," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, XLIX (1975), 57-67.

⁹³It is possible that the greatest weakness in the syncretist viewpoint is that it assumes apocalypticism and discipleship both came from "medieval mysticism."

⁹⁴*Mysticism and the South German-Austrian Anabaptist Movement*, pp. 112-113.

⁹⁵Packull may have a point. Later, Packull would argue that it was concern for the poor and not discipleship soteriology that the Swiss Brethren got from Thomas Müntzer. "The Origins of Swiss Anabaptism in the Context of the Reformation of the Common Man," *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, III (1985), 36-59.

⁹⁶Packull suggested that discipleship was a characteristic of Swiss Anabaptism but saw no connection between this and German mysticism or Müntzer. The key is Grebel's letter to Müntzer in 1524. Packull and Stayer said that the Swiss Brethren got from Müntzer the concern for the common man, which also inspired the Peasants' Revolt.

⁹⁷Packull, "Denck's Alleged Baptism by Hubmaier: Its Significance for the Origin of South German-Austrian Anabaptism," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, XLVII (1973), 327-338.

⁹⁸"From Monogenesis to Polygenesis."

⁹⁹Clasen, *Anabaptism: A Social History*; Stayer, "The Swiss Brethren: An Exercise in Historical Definition," *Church History*, XLVII (1978), 193.

¹⁰⁰One will note the nationalism in recent Marxist studies as well.

¹⁰¹"Reublin and Brötli: The Revolutionary Beginnings of Swiss Anabaptism," in Marc Lienhard, ed., *The Origins and Characteristics of Anabaptism/Les Débuts et Les*

Caractéristiques de l'Anabaptisme (proceedings of the Colloquim organized by the Faculty of Protestant Theology of Strasbourg; The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff 1977).

¹⁰²"The Swiss Brethren."

¹⁰³"Reublin and Brötli," p. 102.

¹⁰⁴*Mysticism and the South German-Austrian Anabaptist Movement*; "The Origins of Swiss Anabaptism in the Context of the Reformation of the Common Man."

¹⁰⁵"From Monogenesis to Polygenesis."

¹⁰⁶"Revolution and the Swiss Brethren: The Case of Michael Sattler," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, LV (1981), 208-228. This is another attack on the Benderite claim of a Protestant origin for Anabaptism, especially John H. Yoder's *The Legacy of Michael Sattler* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1973). In his full-length study, *The Life and Thought of Michael Sattler* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1984), Snyder also pointed out aspects of Sattler's Anabaptist theology that were derived from Catholic monasticism.

¹⁰⁷"The Origins of Swiss Anabaptism in the Context of the Reformation of the Common Man"; "The Image of the 'Common Man' in the Early Pamphlets of the Reformation (1520-1525)," *Historical Reflections/Reflexions Historiques*, XII (1985), 253-278; "In Search of the Common Man in the Ideology of Early South German Anabaptism," *Sixteenth Century Journal*. Cf. also Stayer, "The Swiss Brethren," p. 175.

¹⁰⁸"Introduction," Lienhard.

¹⁰⁹"Anabaptists and the Sword' Revisited: Systematic Historiography and Undogmatic Nonresistants," *Sonderdruck aus Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, II (1974), 270-283.

¹¹⁰"The Modern Relevance of Anabaptism."

¹¹¹"Anabaptists and the Sword' Revisited," p. 271.

¹¹²"Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom and Let a Hundred Schools of Thought Contend," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, LIII (1973), 216.

¹¹³*Profiles of Radical Reformers*, p. 23, 13. This seems to undervalue Williams' work. It was an excellent synthesis for its day and in many ways has not been superseded — and no synthesis is ever final.

¹¹⁴Williams' term has been accepted by Benderites, new Mennonites and syncretists. One of the advantages of this term is that it is translatable into German (Goertz, *Profiles of Radical Reformers*) and French (Lienhard, "Avant-Propos").

¹¹⁵Sixteenth-century spiritualism, like sixteenth-century revolutionary apocalypticism so beloved by the Marxists, has become a field of study on its own. See, for example, Peter C. Erb, *Schwenckfeld in his Reformation Setting* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1978).

¹¹⁶E.g., Williams, Stayer, Clasen.

¹¹⁷C. P. Clasen's statistics are difficult to dispute.

¹¹⁸Horst is an exception, but he is looking for Anabaptists in England, where there was no believers' baptism in the sixteenth century.

¹¹⁹Denny Weaver's redefinition of discipleship to include sectarian ecclesiology may rightly be dismissed as a semantic attempt to avoid the issue: "Discipleship Redefined: Four Sixteenth Century Anabaptists," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, LIV (1980), 255-279.

¹²⁰"Topics For Research in Anabaptism," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, LV (1981), p. 382.

¹²¹"The Modern Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision" in Hersherberger, p. 330.