

# The Doctrine of Incarnation According to Menno Simons

Egil Grislis, *University of Manitoba*

Menno Simons (c. 1496-1561), a former Roman Catholic priest of the Premonstratensian order,<sup>1</sup> though generally reticent about his personal life,<sup>2</sup> spoke eloquently and repeatedly of his own conversion<sup>3</sup> — and spent a lifetime in proclaiming his newly found Anabaptist insights. It is only appropriate that the Anabaptists whom Menno gathered and pastored would eventually be known as Mennonites.

The central concern that runs through the 1070 pages of *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*<sup>4</sup> is with the new life in Christ, hence not only with justification but also with sanctification and the performance of good works.<sup>5</sup> Although Menno does not seek to produce anything like a systematic theology and is concerned to do very close and detailed exegesis of the Bible, he cannot and does not avoid paying attention to several doctrinal formulations and problems. Here a major theological concern of his belongs to the doctrine of incarnation.<sup>6</sup> The connection between justification/sanctification on the one hand and incarnation on the other is both historical and existential. Historically, in the Christian perspective, it was the incarnation of Christ that began, as it were, the fulfillment of the story of salvation. The life of Christ, as a powerful example, therefore serves to indicate the corresponding key elements in the life of the Christian. The existential moment, however, is thereby not to be overlooked. The believer's life also begins with the Word! In other words, while historically "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14) speaks of the incarnation, the same text, existentially, attests the ground of the new and believing existence of the Christian.

While this, in a general way, must be said to be true in regard to all Christian self-understanding, Menno's position is distinct insofar as he vigorously espouses a monophysite Christology. Since the 18th century Mennonites have returned to traditional Chalcedonian two-nature Christology, and appear at times to be slightly embarrassed about Menno's monophysite stand. The present study will seek to understand why Menno Simons preferred a monophysite Christology and what were the particular religious gains that were obtained by this approach.

I

Menno Simons' intent was to learn his embryology from the Holy Bible. He wrote: "I say . . . that we do not go to the philosophers, nor to the sensible women, who are not agreed, nor to the evidence from the creatures (to which they point us) but to God's grace. We will go to the Lord's own Word, the true fountain of all wisdom, and to the dependable witnesses of the Holy Spirit."<sup>7</sup> The results thus obtained were as follows: ". . . The man [is] a sower and the woman [is] as a receptive field, prepared by God unto procreation."<sup>8</sup> Hence "the origin of the child is from the father and not from the mother, but through the mother."<sup>9</sup> In this way conception takes place when the male seed is deposited into what Menno calls the "receptive field." Clearly, according to Menno, woman contributes no seed of her own. The conception of Christ takes place similarly, except that in place of a human father there is God the Father. Explains Menno: "The Almighty and eternal God and Father, by the strong power of His eternal and Holy Spirit, graciously prepared her virgin body (as He also prepared the senile body of Sarah) so that it was fit by faith to receive the intangible eternal Word according to the angel's announcement (just as Sarah did by marital contact receive seed of Abraham)."<sup>10</sup>

John C. Wenger, the editor of *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, admits: "In spite of his announced intention to accept simply what the Bible teaches, and to avoid all philosophical speculations on the subject, Menno did allow himself to become more deeply involved in this theory than was profitable."<sup>11</sup> Yet, according to Wenger, there is a historical explanation for Menno's unfortunate step: "Menno's generation was ignorant of the contributory role of the woman in conception. Menno is scientifically in error here."<sup>12</sup>

In defense of Menno it needs to be stated that the error was at least a learned error. As has been pointed out by Joyce Irvin, the sixteenth century carried on a debate between the followers of Aristotle and Galen.<sup>13</sup> The former denied the existence of a woman's seed, the latter affirmed it. Hence Joyce Irvin observes: "We may be allowed . . . a degree of incredulity with respect to the solely scriptural origin of Menno's embryological understanding, particularly in view of its striking resemblance to Aristotelian theory. True it is that philosophers were not agreed, as it is also true that Aristotle would disavow Menno's application of the theory. But in his fundamental scientific stance Menno represented the more traditional Aristotelianism which during this period was contending with the newly discovered Galenic theory."<sup>14</sup>

Having stated his position — regardless of its ultimate source — Menno recorded two important reasons why the traditional Chalcedonian Christology needed to be rejected. First, it would lead to totally absurd conclusions! Here, writing passionately as a former priest who believed himself to have

been thoroughly deceived by the many non-scriptural dogmas of the Roman Catholic church, Menno saw but one more instance of the same misleading. Hence he argued: "In their view, Christ would be but half a man, if the woman contributed as much to the fetus as does the man, as they assert. And we get two persons, one divine and the other human, called by them two natures or parts. And we have two sons, one the Son of God without any mother and not subject to suffering, and the other the son of Mary without any father and subject to suffering." Adding a few more observations, Menno concludes: "And there are a great many absurdities besides."<sup>15</sup>

But there is also a second reason for rejecting Chalcedonian two-nature Christology. While never going as far as Melchior Hoffman (c. 1500-c. 1543) who is reported to have exclaimed "damned be the flesh of Mary,"<sup>16</sup> he went far enough by underscoring that Mary was "of the impure and sinful seed of Adam."<sup>17</sup> If Christ actually partook of Mary's corrupt humanity, then, in Menno's view, the dire conclusion was inevitable: "They make a creature of the unclean sinful flesh and seed of Adam their throne of grace and atoning sacrifice, their High Priest, Mediator, Advocate, Intercessor, and Reconciler, and they falsely call Him the Son of God."<sup>18</sup>

The dogma of the "immaculate conception" of the Blessed Virgin Mary clears up this difficulty. It teaches that "from the first moment of her conception the Blessed Virgin Mary was, by the singular grace and privilege of Almighty God, and in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, Saviour of Mankind, kept free from all stain of original sin." The dogma, however, was pronounced on December 8, 1854, and still debated during the sixteenth century. Appeal could be made to the great schoolmen St. Albert the Great, St. Bonaventure, and St. Thomas Aquinas who ascribed the stain of original sin to everyone conceived in a natural way, including Mary, or to Duns Scotus, who supported the immaculate conception. Generally the Dominicans opposed while the Franciscans defended immaculate conception.<sup>19</sup> Menno, again, took the more conservative position of the "maculists" (although applying it in his own way).<sup>20</sup>

Having noted various points of contact between Menno and his contemporary religious thought, it is now in order to inquire into the origins of Menno's monophysite Christology.

## II

Menno himself, as has been noted, stressed the biblical foundation of his teaching. Having affirmed Christ's authentic humanity, Menno attributes it to the creative work of the Holy Spirit: Christ is, "according to His blessed flesh, conceived of the Holy Ghost." And the Bible, as Menno reads it, supports this interpretation: "The Scripture teaches that the Word became flesh and that it came forth from the Holy Ghost. John 1:14 ('And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his

glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father," R.S.V.)<sup>21</sup> While repeatedly appealing to the Bible, Menno is careful in stating his Christological perspective in order not to lose the point which he is making, namely, Mary's role — to put it in modern vocabulary — is that of a nurse-maid and not of a mother. In Menno's formulation: "Christ Jesus remains the precious blessed fruit of the womb of Mary, according to the words of Elisabeth, conceived not of her womb but in her womb, wrought by the Holy Spirit through faith, of God the omnipotent Father, from high heaven."<sup>22</sup> Without a doubt then, Christ's origin is exclusively heavenly: "Christ Jesus, as to His origin, is no earthly man, that is, a fruit of the flesh and blood of Adam. He is a heavenly fruit or man. For His beginning or origin is of the Father (John 16:28), like unto the first Adam, sin excepted."

Of course, this is an authentic miracle, according to Menno. Therefore it can be confessed, outlined as to its general contours, but not explained in detail: "God's eternal Word (also called God's seed in Scripture) descended from above and entered into Mary by the overshadowing of divine power, and beyond the understanding of man and according to the changeless plan of the Almighty and heavenly Father and the gracious promise, and by the operation of the Holy Spirit became in a wonderful way a genuine tangible man, subject to suffering, but not to destruction."<sup>23</sup> Unlike traditional early Church monophysitism, Menno's view in celebrating the heavenly origins of the flesh of Christ, and being desirous to confess the divinity of Christ — "we believe and confess Christ Jesus to be the true God with the Father"<sup>24</sup> — has at times some difficulties in interpreting this divinity. The assertion of true humanity comes more easily: "And that same Word became flesh, and fed and nourished in truly human fashion in her virgin body by ordinary food and drink (just as Isaac was in Sarah), as a regular child in her flesh and blood to the certain testimony that he was truly human and not a mere phantasm. And so He was born, as the Scriptures say, in due season, an undivided and genuine Son of God and Mary, as an ordinary child of its parents (the only exception being the absence of sexual contact)."<sup>25</sup>

Despite some inner tensions, Menno's over-all Christological position obtains its basic coherence by centering attention on the heavenly origins of the flesh of Christ. As has been pointed out by Cornelius Krahn, the traditional single miracle of a fatherless birth has now been intensified to a double miracle: Christ is without a human father *and* mother!<sup>26</sup> What are the origins of such a view?

Already in the sixteenth century the charge pointed to a "renewed Eutychianism"<sup>27</sup> i.e. a re-statement of the monophysite doctrine. Menno Simons obtained this doctrine from the followers of Melchior Hoffman,<sup>28</sup> who in turn was indebted to Caspar Schwenckfeld von Ossig. Hans Joachim Schoeps has shown,<sup>29</sup> and a more recent study by Klaus Deppermann confirms the observation,<sup>30</sup> that Schwenckfeld had gained the monophysite

views from the Greek church fathers which he had read in translation. It was Schwenckfeld's public claim that both Melchior Hoffman and Sebastian Franck (c.1499-c.1542) had borrowed this doctrine from him but in the process perverted it: "They have both drawn their error from our truth — as a spider [draws] poison from a noble flower."<sup>31</sup>

George H. Williams has cast his net more widely and allows us to see the following larger context:

The doctrine of the celestial flesh of Christ among the Radical Reformers has been generally understood both by their contemporary foes and their modern interpreters as a revival of ancient Gnostic and Monophysite Christology, and as an abortive effort within radical evangelical circles, dissatisfied with the strictly Chalcedonian Christology (despoiled by the Protestant Reformers of the associated, scholastic doctrine of the immaculate conception of Mary) to account for the postulated sinlessness of Christ and also his divine incapability of sinning. The ancient heretical Christology, originally developed by Valentinus and assimilated by Apollinarius (surviving as Pseudo-Athanasius) and by Hilary of Poitiers, was variously communicated to the sixteenth-century Radicals in these texts, or by misinterpretation, perhaps, in the texts of the anti-Gnostic writers such as Irenaeus and Tertullian [specifically, *Adversus Valentinianos* and *De carne Christi*]; and in part, indirectly, by the perpetration of the celestial flesh heresy in Bogomile and Cathar circles.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to the possibility of a re-discovery, George H. Williams wisely does not discount the probability of re-invention. He continues:

It is just as likely, however, that medieval mystical and Eucharistic language and lore explain some of the peculiarities of the doctrine in its sixteenth-century formulation. In fact, in the absence of clear documentation of patristic-heretical or medieval sectarian influence, it seems more plausible to account for the widespread and variegated outcropping of the celestial-flesh doctrine in the sixteenth century as an effort to restate the Christological problem in the language of Eucharistic piety, experientially much more real than the philosophical terms employed a millennium or more earlier, when the church was concerned to safeguard for philosophical (not Biblical) reasons the impassibility of God and for soteriological reasons to vindicate the full humanity of Christ.<sup>33</sup>

It is, of course, rather curious that the impact of eucharistic piety should be so directly felt in those circles, which explicitly rejected transubstantiation and Luther's real presence, most often retaining a Zwinglian symbolic view of the eucharist. However, since the religious mind does not always follow strict logic, the suggestion by George H. Williams ought not to be ruled out.

William E. Keeney, while cautioning that "No one has as yet clearly established the source of Hoffman's ideas" concerning Christology, is prepared to cite references to *Devotio Moderna* and Alain de la Roche on the one hand and Clement Ziegler on the other.<sup>34</sup> The latter had been active in Strassburg before the arrival of Hoffman. A similar caution is displayed by Sjouke Voolstra who sums up the situation as follows:

After his first stay in Strasbourg (June 1529 - April 1530) the incarnation doc-

trine took an important place in the writings of Melchior Hoffman. It is difficult to indicate any clear indebtedness of this doctrine to contemporaries or to know who its *patres* were. Apparently the furrier from Schwäbisch-Hall [i.e. Melchior Hoffman] formulated independently his ideas about the incarnation of Christ, as a result of conversations with Caspar Schwenckfeld and on the basis of his own Bible study as influenced by insights ascertained in the theological views of Hans Denck. A close relationship between Hoffman and Clemens Ziegler can also be shown. But any direct influence of the Strasbourg gardener [i.e. Ziegler] on the incarnation doctrine is nevertheless difficult to prove. The same can be said of Sebastian Franck.<sup>35</sup>

As these comments indicate, the search for a single root of Menno's monophysite Christology has lead to the discovery of a banyan tree. This, however, need not be seen as a discouraging insight, but rather may be viewed as a positive recognition that Menno's Christological thought was not unique to his own day. It echoed widely held sentiments and insights. Even when radical, Menno remained informed and cautious.

Moreover, it may be noted that German and Dutch mysticism on occasion spoke of incarnation in a manner that might be perceived as expressing a monophysite stance. This does not mean that there was a conscious intent to think in a monophysite manner; careful Catholic mystics ordinarily sought to avoid the charge of heresy. Yet once Menno became acquainted with the monophysite position, he may have found it more readily acceptable on the grounds that it *looked like* the already familiar insights from mysticism.

Thus George H. Tavard sums up the position of Meister Eckhart (1260-1327) as follows: "His Christological concern is bare, sharply aimed at the Eternal Word, who is both in heaven and in the faithful soul."<sup>36</sup> Then follows a quotation from Eckhart which we supply in a more recent translation: "The Father declares the Word, and either speaks within the Word or not at all. Jesus, however, speaks in the *soul*. The manner of his speaking is as follows: he reveals himself and everything that the Father has declared in him in the way in which the Spirit is susceptible."<sup>37</sup> An exalted Christ can also be encountered in the writings of Jan van Ruysbroeck (1293-1381). Notes Tavard: "His Christocentrism is that of the Eternal Word and of our own 'eternal being' in Him."<sup>38</sup>

The following passage may illustrate our concern: "But when God thought the time had come, and had mercy on the suffering of His beloved, He sent His Only Begotten Son to earth, in a fair chamber, in a glorious temple; that is, in the body of the Virgin Mary."<sup>39</sup> And in Wessel Gansfort (c. 1420-1489) one can find a similar celebration of the divinity of Christ, again in the context of incarnation: "God the Word, assuming flesh, loved the flesh he had assumed more than the whole of the rest of creation. But if he loves it more, he magnifies it more. God magnified the blessedness of the Lamb more than that of all the rest of men and spirits. God ordained and magnified the Lamb above all else as the first fruits of all creation. He ordained that the Lamb should be man."<sup>40</sup>

Obviously, it cannot be claimed that Menno had actually read any of the above passages. What may be suggested, however, is that a distinctive characteristic within the mystical literature would certainly have been noticed by Menno.

### III

Having noted the larger background of Menno's view of the incarnation, we must now reflect on the corresponding situation in regard to what Menno calls the "new birth." Here, as before, Menno developed his insights on strictly biblical grounds. Without questioning this fact, we nevertheless suggest that Menno's hermeneutical preunderstanding — established in the days when he was a Roman Catholic priest and familiar with devotional and mystical literature — served to select such cardinal insights which also played a key role in mysticism. As it very well may be expected, in the midst of many similarities (some of which we shall subsequently note) there are also distinctive differences. The typical stages of the mystic's progress, the accounts of ecstasy, the celebration of the *Seelengrund*, the immediacy of the union with God or Christ, the strict ascetic accents, the elitist spirit — all these and other earmarks are missing in Menno. His is definitely as flattened-out mysticism, if it be called mysticism at all. Or, more accurately, Menno's biblical theology is organized around the normative insights of mysticism which he found compatible with the Bible.

According to Menno the central role always belonged to the Word, ordinarily identified with the biblical text, and serving as the channel for the Holy Spirit. Menno stated: "We cannot be led to this godly gift of faith and of regeneration otherwise than by the Word of God through His Holy Spirit."<sup>41</sup> The need for this transformation is accounted for by explaining the universal human situation: "The first birth of man is out of the first and earthly Adam, and therefore its nature is earthly and Adam-like, that is, carnally minded, unbelieving, disobedient, and blind to divine things; deaf and foolish; whose end, if not renewed by the Word, will be damnation and eternal death." The only hope for salvation rests upon the possibility of regeneration or being born again: "If now you desire to have your wicked nature cleared up, and desire to be free from eternal death and damnation so that you may obtain with all true Christians that which is promised them, then you must be born again. For the regenerate are in grace and have the promise. . . ."<sup>42</sup>

An often reflected-upon mystical theme,<sup>43</sup> the "new birth" is the most basic watershed in human existence. According to Menno, the contrast needs to be stated in absolute terms:

The regenerate, therefore, lead a penitent and new life, for they are renewed in Christ and have received a new heart and spirit. Once they were earthy-minded, now heavenly; once they were carnal, now spiritual; once they were unrighteous,

now righteous; once they were evil, now good, and they live no longer after the old corrupted nature of the first earthy Adam, but after the new upright nature of the new and heavenly Adam, Christ Jesus, even as Paul says: "Nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Their poor, weak life they daily renew more and more, and that after the image of Him who created them. Their minds are like the mind of Christ, they gladly walk as He walked; they crucify and tame their flesh with all its evil lusts.<sup>44</sup>

As Menno emphasizes the central role of the Word in effecting the "new birth," it becomes clear that the Word is not a mere text which would somehow work by its own intrinsic power, but a divinely inspired Word by which, as through an open door, the believer is lead into the redemptive presence of God.

At times Menno restated the same insight Christocentrically. He writes: Christ "has aromatic healing salve very able to heal their wounds, namely, His powerful Word with which to instruct, and His crimson blood to make atonement."<sup>45</sup> Here Menno could stress the experiential dimension of the encounter no less explicitly than Meister Eckhart, who had written: "Jesus reveals himself with the immeasurable sweetness and fullness that gush out of the power of the Holy Spirit, overflowing and streaming into all sensitive hearts with an abundant fullness and sweetness. Then Jesus reveals himself with this fullness and sweetness, and unites himself to the soul, the soul flows with fullness and sweetness into itself, and beyond itself, and beyond all things into its first origin through the action of grace with limitless power. For the external person is obedient to the inner person up to the point of death, and is then in constant peace in God's service."<sup>46</sup> Yet the difference in the approach is also not to be overlooked. For Menno the medium of encounter is the Word, rather than the soul. The subjective and personal encounter with Christ has an objective foundation in the Scripture.

In comparing Menno with Jan van Ruysbroeck's account of the encounter we notice the tender beauty and reverence that exudes from the writings of the latter: "And this is called 'The Song of Joy,' which hath no words, and which no man knoweth, save him who hath conceived it in his heart. And this it is which liveth in the loving heart that is opened to God, and closed to all created things. And thence cometh 'Joyfulness,' and the same is a heartfelt love, and a burning flame of devotion, for ever reverently turned to God in thankfulness and praise."<sup>47</sup> Although Menno can also speak of a definite progress in sanctification, Ruysbroeck's immediate qualification — "This is the first and lowest mode, whereby God inwardly declareth Himself in the Comtemplative life"<sup>48</sup> — is foreign to Menno who did not record the detailed stages of the believer's progress. Most significant, however, was Menno's consistent connection between the biblical text and the experience of God's presence.

Thomas a Kempis in his eloquent celebration of the presence of God begins to move closer to the position of Menno. Thomas a Kempis writes: "O



my Lord God, most faithful Lover, when You come into my heart, all within me rejoices. You are my glory and the joy of my heart, my hope and my whole refuge in all my troubles. Because I am yet feeble in love and imperfect in virtue, I therefore have need to have more comfort and more help from you. Vouchsafe, therefore, frequently to visit me, and to instruct me with Your holy teachings (*disciplinis sanctis*)."<sup>49</sup> Menno is more specific: Instead of "teachings" which include Scripture and tradition, Menno's strict emphasis is on the Word alone.

At the same time the authentic similarities are also not to be overlooked. Like the above mentioned Western mystics, Menno always connected the presence of Christ with the immediately ensuing consolation. For example, Thomas a Kempis had proclaimed: "Blessed is the man who hears Jesus speaking in his soul, and who takes from His mouth some words of comfort. Blessed are those ears which hear the secret whisperings of Jesus, and give no heed to the deceitful whisperings of this world, and blessed are those good plain ears which heed not outward speech but what God speaks and teaches inwardly to the soul. Blessed are those eyes which are shut to the sight of outward vanities and give heed to the inward movings of God. . . ."<sup>50</sup> Menno wrote in a similar vein, except with more explicit reference: "Behold the weeping eyes, miserable world, and hear the tender voice of our beloved Lord Jesus Christ, how He wept for impenitent Jerusalem and said unto her, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes. Luke 19:42."<sup>51</sup>

The point here is not of a radical difference, as the German and Dutch mystics also followed the Holy Writ, but rather a matter of emphasis. While the overarching concerns often remained the same or were at least similar, Menno studded his statements with biblical references and quotations. Ever so characteristically, Menno asserted: "God does not cleanse the hearts through any literal water, work, or ceremony, but through belief in the Word. Acts 15:9."<sup>52</sup> Therefore Menno's description of the "new birth," as we may well have expected, will point to the Word of God as its cause, namely: "the seed of the divine Word whereby we are begotten by God from His bride the Holy Church, like unto His image, nature, and being, for where the seed is sown upon good ground into the heart of man, there it grows and produces its like in nature and property. It changes and renews the whole man, that is, from the carnal to the spiritual, the earthy into heavenly; it transforms from death unto life, from unbelief to belief and makes men happy. For through this seed all nations upon the earth are blessed."<sup>53</sup>

Menno's monophysite Christology, having stressed the exclusively divine origin of Jesus Christ, here in soteriology found a paradigmatic parallel: the transformation in the "new birth" is an exclusively divine accomplishment, and hence a most powerful expression of the *sola gratia* theme of the Protestant Reformation. But if for the magisterial reformers the power of "grace

alone” was on the human side qualified by the assertion of the paradox of being justified and yet a sinner (*simul iustus et peccator*), Menno’s monophy-site Christology spilled over into soteriology so powerfully so as to enable him to proclaim the total renewal in the miracle of the “new birth.” Hence Menno could state that “those who are begotten of the living, saving Word of our beloved Lord Jesus Christ are by virtue of their new birth so joined to Christ, are become so like unto Him, so really implanted into Him, so converted into His heavenly nature, that they do not teach nor believe any doctrine but that which agrees with the doctrine of Christ; they practice no ceremonies but Christ’s ceremonies which He has taught and commanded in His Holy Gospel. For how can the twig of the vine bear fruit different from that of the vine from which it springs?”<sup>54</sup>

Here we are dealing with no marginal but a central insight. As is well known, Harold S. Bender regarded regeneration “as the true source of the powerful dynamic for holy living and discipleship in the Anabaptist movement.”<sup>55</sup> Moreover, it was Bender’s firm conviction that here one found the true distinctiveness of the Anabaptists. He stated: “The Anabaptists lived on the ‘resurrection side of the cross.’ Their theology and ethics were resurrection theology and ethics. The new life wrought by God’s regenerated grace was essential to them; men must die with Christ to sin and be risen with Him to new life. They delighted to repeat the appeal of Rom. 6:4 ‘to walk in newness of life,’ a phrase which might well be taken as the Anabaptist motto. They saw this new resurrection life as one in which the Holy Spirit works with power in continuous growth to perfection.”<sup>56</sup>

Acknowledging Bender’s point, we may also note the Christocentrically understood “new birth” was a key insight of Western mysticism. A good case in point is Ruysbroeck. He defined the coming of Christ in specifically three ways: “In the first coming He became a man, for man’s sake, out of love. The second coming takes place daily, often and many times, in every loving heart, with new graces and with new gifts, as each is able to receive them. The third coming we shall see as the coming in the Judgement, or at the hour of death.”<sup>57</sup> The anonymous Rhineland mystic, known only as “A Friend of God” in *The Book of the Poor in Spirit* also stressed the central and Christocentric role of the “new birth”: “Let no one be guided by a light unless it is similar to Christ, and let those who want to travel the road of an undeceived life turn their reason away from things toward Christ’s action and Passion. Let them sink themselves in it, for then they will be born again as a newly born child craves milk to drink; then will the eye of reason be anointed with the oil of divine grace in which, pure and clear, it will apprehend the naked truth and in which false light can no longer deceive it. Reason immersed in anything other than Christ’s Passion is not anointed with the oil of divine grace.”<sup>58</sup> A similar interpretation may be found in Wessel Gansfort: “The straightest and shortest way between us and God is sweet and pi-

ous meditation on the Lord Jesus, since indeed the Father, the Saviour, and the Comforter in a blessed company will come and make their abode with us." And this encounter, according to Wessel Gansfort, involves the "new birth": "Now saying that 'Jesus is Lord' is the result of the knowledge of him that is begotten in the heart. And these words come forth from the heart of him who speaks them, cleansing him of all his former polluting sordidness."<sup>59</sup>

In approaching the "new birth," Menno, characteristically, made more explicit the role of the Bible, outlining the following intense steps of the scriptural encounter: "First, there must be the preaching of the Gospel of Christ (Matt. 28:10); then, the hearing of the divine Word (Rom. 10:17); thirdly, faith by hearing the Word (Rom. 10:17); fourthly, there must be the new birth by faith; fifthly, baptism out of the new birth (Titus 3:5), in obedience to God's Word; and then follows lastly the promise."<sup>60</sup> These "promises" or the effects of the "new birth" Menno also described by a variety of familiar scriptural expressions, namely, the new-born are "converted,"<sup>61</sup> and thereby "conformed to the image of God."<sup>62</sup> They are "born of God," "rightly baptized in the Spirit" and therefore "heavenly-minded and godly,"<sup>63</sup> hence "a new creature in Christ."<sup>64</sup> By contrast, those who are "not born of God . . . become not one with Christ".<sup>65</sup> They remain in the fallen condition shared by Adam: "Without the new birth all we do is of the nature of the earthly Adam, of sin, evil, blindness, transgression, the devil, and eternal death."<sup>66</sup>

This entire transforming process can also be described with such biblical categories as "repentance" and "faith". What Menno then outlines are not so much successive steps as biblical synonyms for one and the same saving occurrence. For example, "if you repent, and if you believe, if you are born of Him"<sup>67</sup> and, similarly, "the birth from above and true repentance must take place,"<sup>68</sup> refer to one and the same event.

Among Menno's scriptural terms with which he interprets the "new birth" there are also some that have had a very prominent role in Western mysticism. The most widely known here is *illumination*, that is, the various uses of the metaphor of light. We note, for example, how important is light for the thinking of Ruysbroeck: "The first thing is that, if a man will see bodily and outwardly, he must have the outward light of heaven, or some other material light, to illuminate the medium, that is, the air, through which he will see."<sup>69</sup> Now "the light of Divine grace"<sup>70</sup> serves a corresponding role. On account of this light it is possible to speak of "illuminated reason"<sup>71</sup> and in the discussion of the inward call to note that "the highest degree of the most interior life" can be described by joining the metaphors of light and darkness: "This inward call is an inundation of the essential brightness, and this essential brightness, enfolding us in an abysmal love, causes us to be lost to ourselves, and to flow forth from ourselves into the wild darkness of the Godhead. And, thus united without means, and made one with the Spirit

of God, we can meet God through God, and everlastingly possess with Him and in Him our eternal bliss.”<sup>72</sup>

Other Western mystics in employing the metaphor of light have stayed close to biblical thinking. “A Friend in God” puts it this way: “Christ is the true light which enlightens all the faculties of the soul. As He says: ‘I am the light of the world’. [John 8:12]. Hence, he who desires the light of truth must place his reason in Christ for he who has become enlightened elsewhere has more a false than a true light.”<sup>73</sup> Yet not all use of biblical material has been without some problems for later interpreters. Thus Thomas a Kempis, contrasting Moses and the prophets with Jesus Christ, attributes illumination to Christ only: “They declare your commandments, but You help to their performance. They show the way, but You give strength to walk in it. They do all outwardly, but you illuminate and instruct the heart within.”<sup>74</sup>

Menno’s biblical understanding of illumination is predicated on a trinitarian activity of God, and hence can avoid a narrow contrast between the Old and the New Testament. Characteristically Menno speaks not only of the “illumination of the Spirit”<sup>75</sup> but also of “those who are taught of the spirit of the Lord, illuminated and drawn by the Father.”<sup>76</sup>

And in so far as illumination referred to the process of regeneration, Menno was not averse to singling out several specific instances. A good example is provided in his autobiographical comments. Menno noted: “Through the illumination and grace of the Lord I increased in knowledge of the Scriptures daily.”<sup>77</sup> This was followed by two significant and supernaturally supplied insights: “I obtained a view of baptism and the Lord’s Supper through the illumination of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>78</sup> Finally, a state of transformation occurred: “And so I, a miserable sinner, was enlightened of the Lord, was converted to a new mind. . . .”<sup>79</sup>

This, of course, was not the conclusion of the story, but only its beginning. Already traditional Western mysticism had always in some way sought to connect the “new birth” with an ensuing new ethical life. “A Friend of God” explicated as follows: “Another path to spiritual poverty, in which man contemplates God’s wonderful riches, is by walking in the footsteps of Christ and following Him in every possible way. By this path one receives all the divine light and all light of grace necessary to lead one on to a perfect, contemplative life.”<sup>80</sup> Often enough, however, the sequence suggests that good works must be done in preparation for grace. Thomas A. Kempis, characteristically, suggests: “He who follows Me, says Christ our Savior, walks not in darkness, for he will have the light of life. These are the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by them we are admonished to follow his teachings and His manner of living, if we would be truly enlightened and delivered from all blindness of heart.”<sup>81</sup>

A similar-sounding statement can be found in Menno: “We are all taught that we must hear Christ, believe Christ, follow His footsteps, repent, be born

from above. . . .”<sup>82</sup> However, since Menno repeatedly lists his insights in rows of synonyms, it may not be assumed, that, in terms of time sequence, good works come before regeneration. There are other passages where we can be without doubt that Menno has emphasized the priority of grace: “Since the believing or regenerate act rightly before God and diligently seek after and fulfill His holy will according to the grace they have received, therefore we must confess that we cannot be led to His godly gift of faith and of regeneration otherwise than by the word of God through His Holy Spirit.”<sup>83</sup>

The “new birth” then, a traditionally well known idea, receives additional attention by Menno, as he explicates his Christological convictions on a soteriological level and comes to proclaim that the turning point is a decisive act of God — in Christ’s incarnation and in our regeneration.

#### IV

In appreciating Menno’s position, however, we might well be on guard so as not to overstate its uniqueness. Western mysticism also knew how to speak of regeneration in biblical language. What Menno accomplishes, however, is important: traditional insights are now measured by the strict rod of the biblical truth. As a result Menno succeeds in employing checks and balances that enables him both to evaluate traditional material and to re-shape his own insights. And the need for the latter is also real, namely, Menno’s monophysite Christology while helping to cast his soteriology in a *sola gratia* pattern, also tended to lead Menno into overstatements as to the actual accomplishments in sanctification. In an early tract entitled *The Spiritual Resurrection* [c. 1536], Menno proclaims that the believer is “begotten by God . . . of the seed of the divine Word.”<sup>84</sup> The results Menno viewed as thoroughly astounding: “Man is renewed, regenerated, sanctified, and saved . . . and so united and mingled with God that he becomes a partaker of the divine nature and is made conformable to the image of His Son.”<sup>85</sup> Evelyn Underhill in her famous study *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man’s Spiritual Consciousness* has gathered a lengthy list of exuberant statements describing the “unitive life.”<sup>86</sup> Conscious of the limits of human language in describing supernatural dimensions of experience, she has nevertheless established the legitimacy and defended the profundity of such ultimate concerns.

Menno, having at times written in a more abstract metaphysical language, ordinarily prefers more concrete and ethically directed expressions. In some passages he closely echoes the anonymous Rhineland mystic, known as “A Friend of God,” who had written:

If man follows Christ as He has gone before us, his spirit also becomes one with God. . . . And this union of man with Christ implies that he do all things as Christ did them when he was man, in so far as it is possible and he is able. . . . One might, however, say: Since Christ is God and man, how can a mere human

have an action in common with Him? There are two kinds of action in Christ. The one is divine, such as, to walk on sea, perform miracles and signs, to fast forty days. Such actions do not pertain to us, and we should not try to perform them. The other kind is human — to be detached, spurned, insulted, to suffer hunger and thirst, to endure pain. Also the virtues that Christ had — humility, patience and gentleness. These actions pertain to us, and we should adopt them and execute them, for by them we become one with Him.<sup>87</sup>

Menno in restating such a position rather closely, underscored the scriptural foundation of the believer's life. Menno wrote:

All those who are born and regenerated from above out of God, through the living Word, are also of the mind and disposition, and have the same aptitude for good that He has of whom they are born and begotten. For what the nature of God or Christ is, we may readily learn from the Scriptures. For Christ has expressly portrayed Himself in His Word, that is, as to the nature which He would have us understand, grasp and follow and emulate, not according to His divine nature, seeing He is the true image of the invisible God, the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, who dwells in ineffable light, whom none can approach or see, but according to His life and conversation here on earth, shown forth among men in works and deeds as an example set before us to follow so that we thereby might become partakers of His nature in the spirit, to become like unto Him. So Christ is everywhere represented to us as humble, meek, merciful, just, holy, wise, spiritual, long-suffering, patient, peaceable, lovely, obedient, and good, as the perfection of all things; for in Him there is an upright nature.<sup>88</sup>

Following Christ, according to Menno, the believer will necessarily have undergone a total re-orientation.<sup>89</sup> Ruysbroeck had similarly declared: "Now God sees the dwelling and the resting place which He has made within us and through us; namely, the unity and the likeness. And He wills to visit this unity without interruption, with a new coming of His most high birth and with a rich pouring forth of his fathomless love; for He wills to dwell in bliss within the loving spirit."<sup>90</sup>

In Menno's early thought such re-orientation was total and complete. Hence he did not hesitate to speak of sinlessness. "Then when they have conformed to the image of God and have been born of God and also abide in God, they do not sin, for the seed of God remains in them; and they have overcome the world."<sup>91</sup> Later, in 1541, Menno avoided the affirmation of actual sinlessness, although in his description of the regenerate person he came very close to it. Menno wrote: "Those are begotten of the living, saving Word of our beloved Lord Jesus Christ are by virtue of their new birth so joined to Christ, are become so like unto Him, so really implanted into Him, so converted into His heavenly nature, that they do not teach nor believe any doctrine but that which agrees with the doctrine of Christ."<sup>92</sup> Yet when directly confronted with the charge of sinlessness, Menno rejected it, and underscored his own limits, pleading, "not to consider me, a poor, miserable sinner, to be more than a mere humble servant of Jesus Christ, and a dispenser of His mysteries according to the faith given me of Him, miserable

sinner that I am, on account of my unclean, greedy, proud, vain, idolatrous, and carnal life which I formerly led, who still to this day am found sinful, defective, and faulty before my God. . . .'<sup>93</sup> And what Menno said of himself, he also attributed to his followes, — certainly not on the grounds that he had now succeeded in committing some outstanding sins, but rather because he had allowed himself to be corrected by the Bible: "Do not understand, most beloved, that we deem ourselves so clean and unblameable as to be without sin. No, not at all, dear brethren, for I know full well that the holy John teaches, saying: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." I John 1:18. For as James says: "In many things we all offend." Jas. 3:2. "Yes, dear brethren, with Paul I find the appetite to commit sin so strong in my flesh at all times that I often think recklessly, speak rashly, and do the evil which I would not."<sup>94</sup> Although the gross transgressions are indeed being avoided, still, "the life of true Christians is nothing but an endless struggle upon earth."<sup>95</sup> And in another passage Menno puts it this way: "Think not, beloved reader, that we boast of being perfect and without sins. Not at all."<sup>96</sup>

Such observations were not intended to cancel out what had been said about the reality of the "new birth" and regeneration. At the same time the corrections offer a fuller perspective, enlightened by scriptural insight.

In conclusion, it remains to be underscored that Menno's main thrust was positive and biblically supported. The new life in Christ differs from worldly existence. The grace and the Holy Spirit that the Christian has received are beautiful and rich divine gifts. They need to be celebrated in one's daily life.

In so far as Menno's monophysite Christology emphasized the divine dimension of the sanctified Christian life, it was a valuable contribution. Since Menno never intended to write a systematic theology, his piece-meal attention to specific issues as had Philip Melancthon's *Loci communes* — was a constructive exploration of the Gospel truth. The magisterial reformers and the Roman Catholic church, both merciless persecutors, had spoiled Menno's appreciation for many of the traditional insights. He cannot be blamed for all-too readily connecting the Chalcedonian two-nature Christology, with a doctrine of justification which all too readily admitted sin into Christian existence — and then went on to persecute, to torture, and to kill. Monophysite Christology seemed a better way of grasping the meaning of Christ and therefore also a more preferable way for starting to reflect on sanctification. Indeed, in a far more tolerant age it may be possible to state that for Menno in his time and circumstances, it was a monophysite Christology that insured the possession of truth and salvation.<sup>97</sup> Only shallow dogmatism and insensitivity to historical exigencies may want to censor Menno for what he believed and lived in his own day.

Of course, times have changed. With the Mennonite church it may very well be recognized that the Chalcedonian Christology has had an enduring

power and significance. Based on a two-nature Christology, later generations of believers have been able to live and celebrate the "new birth" in Christ. Yet let there be no doubt: since Christology and soteriology are correlatives, a presently perceived flaw in one will necessarily lead the community of the faithful to question and to re-write the other.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>G. K. Epp, "The Spiritual Roots of Menno Simons," pp. 51-59 in Harry Loewen, ed., *Mennonite Images: Historical, Cultural, and Literary Essays Dealing With Mennonite Issues*, Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1980. Yet, curiously enough, when Menno gives an example of various types of monasticism, he writes: "... and are called Augustinians, Franciscans, Dominicans, Bernardines, and Jacobins for their founders and masters," *Complete Writings of Menno Simons* (henceforth M S.), p. 568; he does not mention the Premonstratensian order.

<sup>2</sup>Egil Grislis, "Menno Simons' Account of His Conversion and Call in the Light of the Bible," *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 3 (1985):73-82.

<sup>3</sup>Particularly in the earlier texts, *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons c. 1496-1561*, trans. from the Dutch by Leonard Verduin and ed. by John C. Wenger, Scottdale: Herald Press 1956, pp. 31-102; subsequently referred to as M S.

<sup>4</sup>Unfortunately, there is as yet no critical edition of Menno's works. Recently published in Dutch is only *Dat Fundament des Christelycken Leers*, ed. by H. W. Meihuizen, Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967.

<sup>5</sup>Egil Grislis, "The Meaning of Good Works: Luther and the Anabaptists," *Word & World*, 6.2 (1986):170-180.

<sup>6</sup>Irvin E. Burkhardt, "Menno Simons on the Incarnation," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 4.2 (Apr. 1930):113-139, and a "Note . . . A Correction", in the same journal, 6.2 (Apr. 1932):122-123 as well as J. A. Oosterbaan, "Een doperse christologie, *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift*, 35 (Jan. 1981):32-47 are rather defensive; more helpful is Christoph Bornhäuser, *Leben und Lehre Menno Simons*, Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1973, pp. 63-74, and William Keeney, "The Incarnation, A Central Theological Concept," in Cornelius J. Dyck, ed., *A Legacy of Faith: A Sixteenth Anniversary Tribute to Cornelius Krahn*, Newton, Faith and Life Press, 1962, pp. 55-68.

<sup>7</sup>M S., p. 767.

<sup>8</sup>M S., p. 768.

<sup>9</sup>M S., p. 849.

<sup>10</sup>M S., p. 794.

<sup>11</sup>M S., p. 420.

<sup>12</sup>M S., p. 768, fn. 60.

<sup>13</sup>"Embryology and the Incarnation: A Sixteenth-Century Debate, *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 9.3 (Fall 1978):93-104.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>15</sup>M S., p. 792.

<sup>16</sup>*Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandica: Geschriften uit den tijd der hervorming in de Nederlanden*, ed. by S. Cramer and F. Pijper, 'S-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1909, 5:208, "vervloect sy dat vleesch Marie".

<sup>17</sup>M S., p. 851.

<sup>18</sup>M S., p. 882.

<sup>19</sup>*The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed by F. L. Cross, 2nd ed. rev. by F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, Oxford Univ. Press, 1979, pp. 692-693.

<sup>20</sup>Klaus Deppermann, *Melchior Hoffman: Soziale Unruhen und apokalyptische Visionen im Zeitalter der Reformation*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979, pp. 189-190.



- <sup>21</sup>M S., p. 433, 435.
- <sup>22</sup>M S., p. 436.
- <sup>23</sup>M S., p. 794.
- <sup>24</sup>M S., p. 493.
- <sup>25</sup>M S., p. 794.
- <sup>26</sup>Cornelius Krahn, *Menno Simons (1496-1561): Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte und Theologie der Taufgesinnten*, Karlsruhe: Heinrich Schneider, 1936. 9. 157.
- <sup>27</sup>Hans Joachim Schoeps, *Vom himmlischen Fleisch Christi: Eine dogmengeschichtliche Untersuchung*, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1951, p. 27, fn 1.
- <sup>28</sup>Cornelius Krahn, p. 33.
- <sup>29</sup>Hans Joachim Schoeps, p. 26.
- <sup>30</sup>Klaus Deppermann, p. 191.
- <sup>31</sup>"Sie haben beide jre jrrung ausz vnserer warheit / wie die Spinne das gifft ausz einer edlen blumen gesogen", *Corpus Schwenckfeldianorum*, ed. by Chester D. Hartranft, Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1916, 5:522-523.
- <sup>32</sup>*The Radical Reformation*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962, pp. 326-327.
- <sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 327.
- <sup>34</sup>*The Development of Dutch Anabaptist Thought and Practice from 1539-1564*, Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1968, p. 89.
- <sup>35</sup>*Het woord is vlees geworden: De melchioritisch-menniste incarnatieleer*, Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1982, pp. 209-210.
- <sup>36</sup>George H. Tavard, "The Christology of the Mystics," *Theological Studies*, 42 (1981):566.
- <sup>37</sup>*Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart's Creation Spirituality in New Translation*: Translation, Introduction and Commentaries by Matthew Fox, O.P., Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1980, p. 454.
- <sup>38</sup>Tavard, "The Christology of the Mystics," p. 568.
- <sup>39</sup>*The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage \* \* \* The Sparkling Stone \* \* \* The Book of Supreme Truth*, trans. from the Flemish by C. A. Wynschenk Dom, Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, 1974, p. 4.
- <sup>40</sup>*Principal Works*, trans. by Jared W. Scuder, New York & London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1917, 2:115.
- <sup>41</sup>M S., p. 271.
- <sup>42</sup>M S., p. 92.
- <sup>43</sup>C. F. Meister Eckhart, Sermon 21, "Three Births: Ours, God's, and Ours as God's Children", pp. 293-301; *Die Predigten Taulers*, ed. by Ferdinand Vetter, Dublin/Zürich: Weidmann, 1968, pp. 7-12.
- <sup>44</sup>M S., p. 93.
- <sup>45</sup>M S., p. 157.
- <sup>46</sup>Meister Eckhart, p. 455.
- <sup>47</sup>Jan van Ruysbroeck, *The Book of the Twelve Beguines*, trans. from the Flemish by John Francis, London: John M. Watkins, 1913, p. 80.
- <sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 80.
- <sup>49</sup>*The Imitation of Christ: A Modern Version based on the English translation made by Richard Whitford around the year 1530*. Edited with introduction by Harold C. Gardiner, S. J., Garden City: Doubleday Image Books, 1959, III:5, pp. 109-110; *De imitatione Christi libri quator*. Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1959, p. 122.
- <sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, III:1, p. 103.
- <sup>51</sup>M S., p. 315.
- <sup>52</sup>M S., pp. 707-708.
- <sup>53</sup>M S., p. 57.
- <sup>54</sup>M S., pp. 409-410.
- <sup>55</sup>Harold S. Bender, "'Walking in the Resurrection': The Anabaptist Doctrine of Regeneration and Discipleship," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 35 (1961):97.
- <sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 96, fn. 3, explains: "T. F. Torrance, *Kingdon and Church: A Study in the Theology of the Reformers* (London, 1956), 72. Here Torrance says that 'Luther's doctrine of *Anfechtung* . . . means that the believer does not really learn to live on the resurrection side of the cross.' The Anabaptists taught the opposite." Cf. Myron S. Augsburger, "Conversion in

Anabaptist Thought," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 36 (1926):243-255 and Willis M. Stoesz, "The New Creature: Menno Simons' Understanding of the Christian Faith," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 39 (1965):5-24.

<sup>57</sup>Ruysbroeck, *The Adornment* . . . , pp. 10-11.

<sup>58</sup>*The Book of the Poor in Spirit*, edited, trans. and with an Introduction by C. F. Kelley, New York: Harper & Brothers, (1954), IV:2:2, pp. 199-200.

<sup>59</sup>Wessel Gansfort, II:117.

<sup>60</sup>M S., p. 265.

<sup>61</sup>M S., p. 516.

<sup>62</sup>M S., p. 56.

<sup>63</sup>M S., p. 99.

<sup>64</sup>M S., p. 600.

<sup>65</sup>M S., p. 225.

<sup>66</sup>M S., p. 416.

<sup>67</sup>M S., p. 92.

<sup>68</sup>M S., p. 95, cf. p. 225.

<sup>69</sup>Ruysbroeck, *The Adornment* . . . , p. 5.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>73</sup>*The Book of the Poor in Spirit*, IV:2:2, p. 199.

<sup>74</sup>*The Imitation of Christ*, III:2, p. 104.

<sup>75</sup>M S., p. 105.

<sup>76</sup>M S., p. 106.

<sup>77</sup>M S., p. 668.

<sup>78</sup>M S., p. 669.

<sup>79</sup>M S., p. 672.

<sup>80</sup>*The Book of the Poor in Spirit*, IV:2, Introduction, p. 196.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>82</sup>M S., p. 101, cf. pp. 627, 1047.

<sup>83</sup>M S., pp. 270-271.

<sup>84</sup>M S., p. 57.

<sup>85</sup>M S., p. 58.

<sup>86</sup>New York: Meridian Books, 1960, pp. 413-443.

<sup>87</sup>*The Book of the Poor in Spirit*, II:1:2, pp. 121-122.

<sup>88</sup>M S., pp. 55-56.

<sup>89</sup>M S., p. 139.

<sup>90</sup>*The Adornment* . . . , p. 132.

<sup>91</sup>M S., p. 56.

<sup>92</sup>M S., pp. 409-410.

<sup>93</sup>M S., pp. 309-310, cf. 311.

<sup>94</sup>M S., p. 447.

<sup>95</sup>M S., p. 447.

<sup>96</sup>M S., p. 506, cf. p. 673, and especially pp. 563-564; Richard E. Weingart, "The Meaning of Sin in the Theology of Menno Simons," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 41 (1967):23-39.

<sup>97</sup>William Keeney, "The Incarnation, A Central Theological Concept," p. 68 offers a good defense: "Even with what would be considered a false physiology on the part of Menno, the central importance of the Incarnation protected him and others from errors more basic, which others with more accurate physiology have committed."