

The *Martyr's Mirror*: A Message for All Time

Most North American Mennonites today give little thought to the idea of religious persecution, particularly as a distinct possibility in their own lives. We live in a society that provides a great amount of religious freedom, one that allows us to go about our religious lives with little concern for interference, much less persecution.

Yet, as Mennonites, we are the spiritual—if not biological—descendants of a martyr people. For many of our ancestors the idea of religious persecution was a very real one. Anabaptists and Mennonites beginning in the sixteenth century and even into the twentieth century have been imprisoned, tortured, driven into hiding, forced to flee their homelands and killed because of their faith. Indeed, much of who we are as Mennonites today is the result of this legacy of martyrdom.

Given this heritage, it is appropriate that we continually reflect on the witness of our forebears who underwent hardship and death as a result of their beliefs. There exists perhaps no more eloquent statement to the witness of these martyrs than a massive book first published in the Dutch city of Dordrecht in 1660 entitled in part *Het Bloedig Tooneel Der Doops-gesinde, En Weerloose Christenen*, known today

as the *Martyr's Mirror*.

The *Mirror* was written by Thieleman Jansz van Braght (1625-1664), an elder in the Flemish Mennonite congregation at Dordrecht. In it, van Braght compiled the stories of Christian martyrs since the time of Christ, beginning with John the Baptist in the year 32 A.D. These early narratives, however, serve primarily to set the context for the major portion of the book, in which van Braght relates the stories of those sixteenth and seventeenth-century Anabaptists who were put to death for their faith. In these often graphic accounts of torture and death, we are given a glimpse of what it meant to be an Anabaptist during the early years of the sect's existence, and what it can mean to remain steadfast in faith against all adversity. Van Braght spared little detail in his accounts of drownings, mutilations, decapitations and burnings, and the result is an often gruesome, always troubling, yet powerful book.

Many of the stories in the *Martyr's Mirror* have attained legendary proportions as they have been told and retold throughout the centuries. We can only marvel at Michael Sattler's eloquent defense before the magistrates of Ensisheim, for which he was (continued, see *MIRROR*, page 2)

Fresno Center Acquires 1685 *Martyr's Mirror*

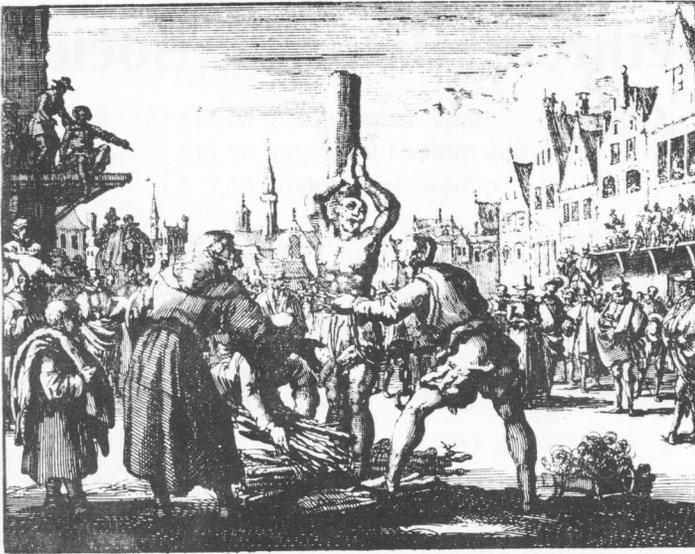
Few documents are more valued by Mennonite historical libraries than are early editions of the *Martyr's Mirror*. Yet until recently, the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies had no editions of this important work published prior to 1814, a significant gap in the Center's collection of early Anabaptist/Mennonite resources.

In February of 1987 the Center became aware of a 1685 edition of the *Martyr's Mirror* that was to be auctioned later in the month by the firm of J.L. Beijers in Utrecht, The Netherlands. The recommended value of the book, however, was far beyond the Center's acquisitions budget. Despite their inability to bid the recommended amount, the Center staff decided to nevertheless submit a much lower bid, knowing well that their chances of acquiring the book in this way were slim.

Four days before the auction was to take place, members of the Center staff met with the Historical Society Executive to discuss other Society matters. In the course of that discussion, the Executive learned of the availability of the *Mirror* and the low bid that had been placed on it. The Executive unanimously agreed (continued, see *ACQUIRED*, page 3)



Maria and Ursula van Beckum burned at Deventer, 1544. Engraving by Jan Luyken, which first appeared in the 1685 edition of the *Mirror*. (All Luyken engravings accompanying this article reproduced by kind permission of the Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society, 2215 Millstream Road, Lancaster, PA)



John Knel burned in London, 1550

MIRROR (from page 1)

sentenced in 1527 to have his tongue cut out, his body torn and pinched with red-hot tongs and then be burned at the stake. We are humbled by the witness of Dirk Willems, who while being pursued across a frozen river saw his assailant fall through the ice. Willems, who could easily have fled to safety at this point, chose instead to turn around and rescue his captor, who in turn took him into captivity on orders of the burgomaster watching from the shore. Because of his selfless act of mercy, Willems was burned to death in 1569. Hundreds of such stories may be found within the pages of van Braght's *Mirror*.

Van Braght was concerned to establish the fact that believer's baptism and nonresistance had been upheld by at least a small number of persecuted Christians since the apostolic age, and thus included only those martyrs who he believed met both these criteria. As a result, he purposefully excluded the Muensterites and other revolutionary Anabaptists, though subsequent research has shown that some Muensterites did find their way into the pages of the *Mirror*. Van Braght also included lengthy discussions of believer's baptism as practiced by the early church, as a means to show that the Anabaptists were not heretical on this point but actually in harmony with the early church.

As indicated by the preceding reference to Muensterites, van Braght's research was not always accurate. He too readily accepted dubious sources as reliable and as a result there are many mistakes in the *Mirror*. Felix Mantz, for example, the first Anabaptist martyr, is said by van Braght to have been drowned in 1526, when in fact he died in 1527. Some scholars have even claimed that the *Martyr's Mirror* is an unreliable historical source, but most historians agree that it is generally accurate with the exception of some details.

Van Braght died in 1664 at the age of 39, only four years after the *Martyr's Mirror* was published. He had no way of knowing at his death that his book of martyrs would be reissued more than twenty-five times in three different languages during the following three centuries, and become one of the most important Mennonite books ever written. In

The *Bulletin* is an occasional publication of the Mennonite Brethren Historical Society of the West Coast, 4824 E. Butler, Fresno, CA 93727-5097. Editor: Kevin Enns-Rempel

1685, twenty-five years after its initial publication, an anonymous editor released the second edition of the *Mirror* in Amsterdam. This new edition contained a few minor additions and also included 104 copper-engraving illustrations by Jan Luyken (1649-1712), a well-known Dutch artist who had joined the Mennonites in Amsterdam during the 1670s. Many of these detailed illustrations are still used in current editions of the *Mirror*. The 1685 edition was the first actually to use the words "*Martelaers Spiegel*," or "*Martyr's Mirror*," in its title.

The 1660 and 1685 editions were only the beginning of a long and distinguished publication history for the *Mirror*. It still existed only in the Dutch language prior to the mid-eighteenth century, when a group of North American Mennonites arranged in 1745 to have the book translated into German and published by the Seventh-Day Baptists of the Ephrata Cloister in Pennsylvania. Completion of the project was delayed several times due to insufficient supply of paper. Finally completed during 1748-1749, it was the largest book ever published in the American colonies. Several other German editions followed the Ephrata *Mirror*, beginning with an exact reprint of the 1748-1749 edition released at Pirmasens, Germany in 1780. Subsequent German editions appeared in 1814 (Lancaster, Pennsylvania), 1849 (Lewistown, Pennsylvania), 1870 (Elkhart, Indiana), 1915 (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania) and 1973 (Aylmer, Ontario).

The first English language edition of the *Mirror* was translated from the original Dutch by I. Daniel Rupp and published in 1837 at Lampeter Square, Pennsylvania. Some scholars consider this to be a deficient translation. In 1853 a two-volume edition entitled *A martyrology of the churches of Christ, commonly called baptists during the era of the Reformation* was published by the Hanserd Knollys Society in London, England. In 1886 the Mennonite Publishing Company of Elkhart, Indiana released an improved English translation by Joseph F. Sohm, which is still used in present editions. Since 1938 the *Mirror* has been published regularly by the Mennonite Publishing House and Herald Press in Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, where it remains in print today.

Several abridgements of the *Mirror* also have been published over the centuries. *T Merg van de Historien der Martelaren* was published in Haarlem, The Netherlands in 1699 and reprinted in Amsterdam in 1722, 1736 and 1769. In 1754 the Ephrata Cloister released an abridged version en-



Maria von Monjou drowned in the river, 1552

titled *Das Andenken einiger heiligen Martyrer*. A small collection of excerpts from the *Mirror* was published in Amsterdam in 1953 under the title *Verhalen uit de Doopsgezinde Geschiedenis*. Jan Luyken's engravings have been published separately at least three times. First published as a collection under the title *Theatre des Martyrs* (n.d.), they were later reprinted as *Schouwtooneel der Martelaren* in Amsterdam (1738). Most recently, Luyken's illustrations have appeared in *The Drama of the Martyrs*, published by Mennonite Historical Associates in Lancaster, Pennsylvania (1975).

The *Martyr's Mirror* has had a profound impact on Mennonites in different places and at different times. The 1748-1749 Ephrata edition was published in order to strengthen the nonresistant convictions of North American Mennonites in the face of impending war. It is sometimes said that the 1814 edition was published for similar reasons as a result of the War of 1812, but there appears to be no firm proof of this. Groups such as the Amish and Old Order Mennonites still make wide use of the *Martyr's Mirror*, and it is one of the few books that members of these conservative



Eighteen persons burned in Salzburg, 1528

Center for MB Studies Changes Circulation Policy

The staff of the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies is pleased to announce that most of the books in its historical library are now available to be checked out for a four week period. Prior to this time, the Center's holdings did not circulate and were available for use only in the library itself. The public is welcome to visit the Center, in the Hiebert Library of Fresno Pacific College and Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, and make use of its fine collection of Mennonite books, periodicals and archival material.

Some restrictions remain in the Center's circulation policy. Many of the older and less readily available books, most Master's theses, all periodicals and all archival material are unavailable for checkout. Despite these limitations, most commonly requested books are available to be taken out.

Those patrons who are not students at either the college or seminary will be asked to apply for a special borrowers card in the main library. This is a simple process and there is no charge for it. The Center staff looks forward to seeing many of you in the future.

groups generally own and read. The Amish have at various times used parts of the *Mirror* in their confessions of faith, as has the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite (also known as the Holdeman Mennonites). In Russia, the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites were known for their diligent reading of the *Mirror*, and they justified their withdrawal from the larger Mennonite Church in part on the basis of the standards set forth in it. P.M. Friesen cites the *Mirror* at several points in his great work on the Mennonites in Russia. It is a book that has been treasured by countless Mennonite families, carried to new homes across the sea and passed down from generation to generation.

The *Martyr's Mirror* is a book with a message for all time, a reminder that the way of Christ is the way of the cross. It is a message that we dare not forget. The words from van Braght's preface, written in 1659, are still fitting for us to remember and heed:

Receive it, then, with the same love with which it has been dedicated to you. Read it again and again, and with the same attention and emotion with which we have written and re-written it. We are fully confident that, if you do this, it will not be unfruitful to you. But, before all things, fix your eyes upon the martyrs themselves, note the steadfastness of their faith, and follow their example.

—Kevin Enns-Rempel

ACQUIRED (from page 1)

that if word could be gotten to Utrecht in time, the Society would match the amount already bid by the Center, thereby bringing the total bid into the recommended range. A telegram with this information was sent to Utrecht that same day.

After several weeks of waiting, the Center staff received what they had been waiting for—an invoice for one 1685 edition of the *Martyr's Mirror*, and word that it had been sent on its way to Fresno by surface mail. The book itself arrived in good condition a few weeks later and was officially unveiled at the 1987 annual meeting of the Historical Society.

The Center for MB Studies wishes to thank the Historical Society for its assistance in acquiring this second edition *Martyr's Mirror*, which joins copies of the 1814, 1837, 1849, 1870 and 1915 editions already in the Center collection, in addition to more current editions available for general usage. Members of the Society are urged to visit the Center and examine this rare and valuable Mennonite treasure.

Recent Center Acquisitions

- Dyck, Arnold, *Collected Works Volume II*. Winnipeg: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 1986. 508 pp.
- Miller, Michael M., *Researching the Germans from Russia: Annotated Bibliography of the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection*. Fargo: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 1987. 224 pp.
- Penner, Horst, *Die ost- und westpreussischen Mennoniten in ihrem religioesen und sozialen Leben in ihren kulturellen und wirtschaftlichen Leistungen (Band II: von 1772 bis zur Gegenwart)*. Kirchheimbolanden: author, 1987. 303 pp.
- Penner, Peter, *No Longer At Arm's Length: Mennonite Brethren Church Planting in Canada*. Winnipeg and Hillsboro: Kindred Press, 1987. 178 pp.
- Redekop, John H., *A People Apart: Ethnicity and the Mennonite Brethren*. Winnipeg and Hillsboro: Kindred Press, 1987. 198 pp.