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THE LONG WEEKEND OR THE SHORT WEEK: MENNONITE PEACE THEOLOGY, 1925-1944

PAUL TOEWS*

I

Twentieth-century Mennonites inherited a long tradition of reflection on their relationship to national societies. Ever since the sixteenth century, Mennonites have worked at fashioning a theology for understanding the appropriate relationship between the people of God and the people of the world. The theology that emerged sharply distinguished between the obligations of citizenship and those of the Kingdom. The people of God, when they were true to their calling, lived by a different ethic than did the peoples of a national culture. This ethical dualism, while forged out of a hermeneutical tradition, was also nourished by a cultural dualism. Mennonites living on the fringes of various host societies could easily think of the requirements of faith as being inimical to participation in the social system. The social isolation of the Mennonite withdrawal that emerged in Europe, and in America following the Revolutionary War, pulled apart the realms of the believers and nonbelievers. The state lived in its realm and acted appropriate to its calling, and the church, or at least the true church (which on issues of war and violence consisted of the few historic peace churches), occupied its own realm.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Mennonites' understanding about their relationship to the larger society was reasonably secure. The positions they had worked out between themselves and various host societies offered promise of continual economic and political progress within the confines of the nonresistant tradition. The Russian Mennonites lived in what they came to term the Golden Era. American Mennonites were also expectant. America had a proven record of tolerating the peaceable conscience. The memories of the Revolutionary War and Civil War—if not the social isolation coming out of those wars—had dimmed. A sense of confidence and sureness marked any expressions of Mennonites in the pre-World War I era.¹ Mennonite communities and conferences were not obliged to spend much time in articulating their peace theology or in formally transmitting the understanding to their children. It was part of the cultural and theological inheritance and, as such, was something unconsciously embedded in their self-understanding.²

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1 See James C. Juhnke, *A People of Two Kingdoms: The Political Acculturation of the Kansas Mennonites* (Newton, Kan.: Faith and Life Press, 1975), chapter 6.

2 The absence of Mennonite publishing on their peace theology in the thirty-five years (1880-1915) preceding World War I is noticeable. Harold S. Bender, in *Two Centuries of American*

The dialogue about Mennonite peace theology in the 1920s and 30s was far from serene. "The Long Weekend" conjures up one of two images: it refers either to the rest between the two outbursts of military action or to the playful and culturally unbounded ambience of the interwar years. The period was hardly playful for Mennonites. It was a contentious time. There were divergent viewpoints and sharply contested positions. It was full of anxiety. The tempo of discourse changed. At the center of these controversies was the need to redefine the meaning of the Mennonite peace witness. The urgency of this issue was recognized by the two largest conferences—the Mennonite General Conference (MC) and the General Conference Mennonites (GC)—with the reorganization of the Peace Problems Committee for the MCs in 1925 and the creation of the GC Peace Committee in 1926. What had changed? It is of course easy to point to World War I. And surely the war was one of the fundamental catalysts for the discussion. Yet there was more. At least three realities now impinged on the American Mennonite peace discussion. Collectively they required a rethinking of the peace theology of the church. The process of reconceptualizing, while begun during the 1920s and 30s, certainly was not completed before the coming of World War II. Yet the discussion does offer some insight into the changes that reshaped how American Mennonites understood the meaning of their most distinctive theological position.³

Mennonite Literature, 1727-1928 (Goshen, Ind.: Mennonite Historical Society, 1929), notes only the following books specifically dealing with peace issues: Daniel Musser, *Non-resistance Asserted: As Taught by "Christ and His Apostles"* (1886); John Holdeman, *A Treatise on Magistracy and War* . . . (1891); J. K. Zook, *War, Its Evils and Blessings* (1895); J. G. Ewert, *Die Christliche Lehre von der Wehrlosigkeit* (1899); and *Der Waffen-lose Waechter*, published periodically, 1871-1889, by Samuel Ernst. The bibliography in Amos B. Hoover's *The Jonas Martin Era* (Denver, Pa.: By the Author, 1982) reflects the paucity of such published works among the Old Orders as well.

3 The discussion of the peace theology and activity of these two decades has a rich historiographical tradition. Melvin Gingerich, in *Service for Peace: A History of Mennonite Civilian Public Service* (Akron, Pa.: Mennonite Central Committee, 1949), and Guy F. Hershberger, in *The Mennonite Church in the Second World War* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Mennonite Publishing House, 1951), both detail much of the inter-Mennonite and Mennonite Church activity in the interwar period. James C. Juhnke in *A People of Two Kingdoms* provides valuable interpretation on Kansas Mennonites. Albert Keim, in "Service or Resistance? The Mennonite Response to Conscription in World War II," *MQR*, LII (1978), 141-55, traces the discussion and negotiations leading toward the establishment of Civilian Public Service. Guy F. Hershberger in two unpublished manuscripts—"Questions Raised Concerning the Work of the Committee on Peace and Social Concerns (of the Mennonite Church) and Its Predecessors" and "The Committee on Peace and Social Concerns (of the Mennonite Church) and Its Predecessors," Guy F. Hershberger Collection, Archives of the Mennonite Church, Goshen, Indiana—traces the history of the Peace Problems Committee, as it was called in the 1920s and 30s. Rodney J. Sawatsky, in "The Influences of Fundamentalism on Mennonite Nonresistance, 1908-1944" (M.A. thesis, University of Minnesota, 1973) and "History and Ideology: American Mennonite Identity Definition Through History" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1977), provides essential categories for understanding the differing positions in the peace dialogue. I am particularly indebted to this last work.

World War I was the first reality that shaped the discussion. It came unexpectedly to Mennonites, and it came with a ferocity that could not have been foreseen. This war, like no previous one, challenged the historic commitments of American democracy to the political and religious freedom of its citizens. The war was one of the most dismal episodes in the history of American civil liberties. This, after all, was a global crusade—the war to end all wars and make the world safe for democracy. As such, it required the unwavering support of all peoples. The dissenting minorities could not stand in the way of the new reign of peace and justice that this terrible scourge of war would bring. Mennonites felt the wrath of a state bent on conformity, but so did many other dissenting peoples. Conscientious objectors were treated more harshly in this country than in Great Britain, France and Germany. Court-martial sentences were extreme. Seventeen COs were sentenced to death, 142 to life imprisonment and an additional 64 to prison terms of more than 25 years. The sentences imposed for conscientious objection were far more severe than those given for graft and wartime profiteering.⁴

The intolerance of World War I intruded into the postwar period. For the conscientious objectors the end of the war came only in 1933 when the last CO was pardoned.⁵ The indignities, abuses and physical cruelty were remembered in Mennonite homes and churches during the 1920s and 30s. Mennonite historians interpreting the war suggested that it had permanently altered the relationship between the nonresistant peoples and the militaristic state of the twentieth century. C. Henry Smith was persuaded that the future would be more difficult than the past. Governments would be less willing to make special concessions for distinctive minorities. He fully understood that democratic societies were frequently less able to accommodate special interests than autocratic rulers were. Furthermore, the American state, as particularly evidenced by the wartime experience, was not far behind the totalitarian states in making the state the supreme object of loyalty and worship. He assumed that in the next war it would be more difficult to challenge universal conscription than it had been in the past one.⁶ In 1935 Guy Hershberger likened the situation facing the American Mennonites to what the European Mennonites confronted in the nineteenth century with the growing militarization of their societies and the withdrawal of any exemption for reasons of conscience. The U.S. government could easily be tempted with the same. Hershberger was fearful because “the history of the Mennonite church seems to teach that when

4 Mulford Sibley and Philip Jacob, *Conscription of Conscience: The American State and the Conscientious Objector, 1940-1947* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1952), 14. Notes in the E. L. Harshbarger Collection (Box 4, Folder 2, Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas) vary somewhat.

5 Sibley and Jacob, 16.

6 C. Henry Smith, *Christian Peace: Four Hundred Years of Mennonite Principles and Practice* (Newton, Kan.: Peace Committee of the General Conference of Mennonites, 1938), 27-28.

the forces of militarism become too strong there is always a danger of compromise.⁷ As late as 1939 Harold S. Bender likened the prospects for the Mennonite church in a coming war to the martyr tradition of the sixteenth century.⁸ For all, the conclusion was inescapable: the tolerance that had characterized the past relationship between Mennonites and American political institutions was now less likely.

The war revealed in graphic terms the second reality. In a modern industrial society few peoples could live out their lives apart from the intrusiveness of the new order. The process of modernization increasingly brought Mennonites and virtually all other marginal peoples into closer contact with the national society. In modern societies the patterns of economic, political and cultural interaction between diverse peoples are more extensive. World War I can be thought of as the triumph of these integrating mechanisms of the new order.⁹ The war called for a united effort of all people. It was a modern war, a total war, different from earlier American wars. Mennonites could not escape this war. Edward Yoder defined the issue as the problem of "what the nonresistant Christian's place and function is in modern society, which is becoming increasingly more closely knit and integrated and compacted. . . ."¹⁰

Mennonites were not only being pulled into the national society against their will. Ever since the middle and latter parts of the nineteenth century they had also been moving toward greater participation because they saw it as a way of revitalizing their own religious traditions. American denominational patterns, institutions and theologies offered enticements to a people whose religious culture was still more bounded by tradition. What historians identify as the quickening and denominationalizing process included the adoption of many practices and theologies alien to Mennonite peoples of the midnineteenth century.¹¹ This closer contact would challenge not only the cultural patterns of isolation but also theologies cultivated by that isolation. The historic peace understanding defined the ethical obligations of a people separated from the larger society and possessing only a limited sense of identification with that

7 Guy F. Hersberger, "The Christian's Relation to the State in Time of War: II. Is Alternative Service Desirable and Possible?" *MQR*, IX (1935), 29.

8 Harold S. Bender, "Church and State in Mennonite History," *MQR*, XIII (1939), 103.

9 See William Leuchtenberg, "The New Deal and the Analogue of War," in John Braeman, Robert H. Bremmer and Everett Walters, eds., *Change and Continuity in Twentieth Century America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 81-143.

10 Edward Yoder, "The Christian's Relation to the State in Time of War: I. The Christian's Attitude Toward Participation in War Activities," *MQR*, IX (1935), 19.

11 See Theron F. Schlabach, "Reveille for *Die Stillen im Lande*: A Stir among Mennonites in the Late Nineteenth Century," *MQR*, LI (1977), 213-26; Beulah Hostetler, "Franconia Mennonite Conference and American Protestant Movements, 1840-1940" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1977).

society. While the war dampened the sense of fraternity with America, it could not undo the social movement and dialogue of the previous half century.¹²

The third reality affecting the shape of the peace dialogue was the new popularity of the peace movement. Heretofore, Mennonites had been part of the remnant carrying this demanding ethic. The pacifist conviction, while having a long history in the United States, became fashionable in the aftermath of the war. In the wave of disillusionment that swept the country following the machinations of Versailles, a series of books turned Wilsonian warring idealism into a powerful antiwar movement. Henry Barbusse's *Under Fire*, Siegfried Sassoon's *Counter-Attack*, Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, John Dos Passos' *Three Soldiers*, Laurence Stallings' *What Price Glory* and the translation of Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* all portrayed a brutal and senseless slaughter that had sacrificed one generation for little gain.¹³

The literary critique was joined by a revisionist school of historians and analysts who in the twenties and early thirties found the culprits of war in avaricious businessmen, munitions manufacturers and the merchants of death.¹⁴ The report of the Nye Senatorial Committee in 1935 lent official sanction and gave impetus to the mood of disillusionment.

William Allen White, the Kansas editorialist, wrote on November 11, 1933:

Fifteen years ago came the Armistice and we all thought it was to be a new world. It is! But a lot worse than it was before. Ten million men were killed and many more maimed, fifty billion dollars' worth of property destroyed, the world saddled with debts. And for what? Would it have been any worse if Germany had won? Ask yourself honestly. No one knows. . . . The boys who died just went out and died. To their own souls' glory—but what else? . . . Yet the next war will see the same hurrah and the same bowwow of the big dogs to get the little dogs to go out and follow the blood scent and get their entrails tangled in the barbed wire. And for what? War is the devil's joke on humanity.¹⁵

Many agreed and millions of Americans rallied to the pacifist cause. Peace organizations sprouted or enlarged their membership and became visible.

12 For a discussion of the war experience and the way in which it, together with the prewar Mennonite identification with American society, now required a new set of responses, see James C. Juhnke, "The Agony of Civic Isolation: Mennonites in World War I," *Mennonite Life*, XXV (1970), 27-30; and *idem*, "Mennonite Benevolence and Civic Identity: The Post-War Compromise," *Mennonite Life*, XXV (1970), 34-37.

13 Lawrence S. Wittner, *Rebels Against War: The American Peace Movement, 1941-1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 1-2. For a discussion of interwar pacifism, see Charles Chatfield, *For Peace and Justice: Pacifism in America, 1914-1941* (Knoxville, Tenn.: University of Tennessee Press, 1971).

14 See John E. Wiltz, *In Search of Peace: The Senate Munitions Inquiry, 1934-36* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1963).

15 William Allen White, *The Autobiography of William Allen White* (New York: Macmillan, 1946). Cited in Wittner, 3.

Prominent were the National Council for the Prevention of War, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the War Resisters League and the Fellowship of Reconciliation. In 1933 thirty-seven peace organizations united to form the National Peace Conference. Although these were not mass organizations, they collectively exerted considerable influence on the political culture of the country. One estimate of their strength suggested that between forty-five and sixty million Americans were sympathetic to the pacifist ideal.¹⁶

Some of the most visible spokespersons of the newly galvanized peace movement were within the Protestant churches. A 1929 Conference on the Churches and World Peace of the Federal Council of Churches resolved that "the churches should condemn resort to the war-system as sin and should henceforth refuse . . . to sanction it or to be used as agencies in its support."¹⁷ The 1931 poll by the religious pacifist magazine *World Tomorrow* of over 19,000 Protestant ministers revealed that 62 percent opposed the church's providing sanction for any future war. Three years later, similar polls found pacifism still increasing among clerics. The historic peace churches were not alone in the religious pacifist movement. Though they constituted a sizable number—nearly 400,000, according to the census of 1936—they had become a minority in the peace movement.¹⁸

These three realities—the war, the changed social situation of Mennonites and the new popular pacifism—all impinged on the Mennonite discussion of peace theology in the interwar years. These realities raised three different sets of troubling issues: (1) Was the ideal of reconciliation possible beyond the boundary of the church? Was it correct to assume that wars were inevitable and any attempt to restrain the state was politically naive? Did it make sense to advocate a political policy based on the cessation of war? How much political advocacy could Mennonites tolerate in their peace witness? What was political and what was religious? Was it permissible for the nonresistant community to address political concerns to public officials? (2) How much could Mennonites fraternize with fellow pacifists? The very popularity of the pacifist movement was troubling for some Mennonites. It raised questions as to how ecumenical or sectarian Mennonites were to be in the linkages and articulation of their historic position. (3) What was an appropriate theology of nonresistance for a people of citizenship in a society now more clearly militarized than in the prewar period? How could Mennonites find some breathing room in the next war? What peacetime efforts were required to protect the rights of the peaceable conscience in times of war?

16 Wittner, 15.

17 Cited *ibid.*, 5.

18 *Ibid.*, 5-18.

II

In 1925 the Mennonite General Conference (MC) was on the verge of dissolving its Peace Problems Committee. The 1919 successor to the emergency Military Committee created in 1917 to deal with World War I problems had not met during the previous biennium. Its membership of Aaron Loucks, D. D. Miller and E. L. Frey felt their tasks completed. News of the impending move to disband was relayed by D. D. Miller to his son Orié. The younger Miller found it inconceivable that the committee's tasks were complete. He persuasively counseled for continuation and was elected to the reorganized Peace Problems Committee.¹⁹

By 1925 Orié Miller was already a leader among American Mennonites seeking to give more concrete expression to the theology of reconciliation. His work for Mennonite Central Committee had taken him to Russia and Lebanon as a carrier of Mennonite theology and goods. Yet his immediate conviction that the Peace Problems Committee should be revitalized instead of shelved was nurtured by the National Study Conference on the Churches and World Peace in Washington, D.C. in 1925. The search among other communions for biblical understandings about questions of war and peace inspired the young Miller regarding the possible contribution that his own people might make to the larger world.²⁰

Miller's selection as the committee's secretary gave him the platform for defining a new agenda for the committee. In a series of articles between 1926 and 1929 he did this in a way that defined both the work of the committee and much of the subsequent dialogue in the church.²¹ His concerns were threefold. The war had shown that Mennonite boys were not prepared to meet such a national emergency. Those who returned from the camps were virtually unanimous that the church had neither prepared them nor correctly positioned itself to meet the wartime demands. Miller was distressed by what he termed the "utter lack of literature covering the Church's four centuries of non-resistant faith and practice." Other peace churches had done better at keeping the story alive. His branch of the church had not "a single book devoted exclusively to such ends."²²

The unpreparedness was more than the lack of instruction. The church had no "consistent witness against war and militarism in peace time" that it could

19 Paul Erb, *Orie O. Miller: The Story of a Man and an Era* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1969), 206; Hershberger, *The Mennonite Church in the Second World War*, 5.

20 Erb, 206-07.

21 Orié Miller, "Aggressive Peace Work," *Gospel Herald*, XVIII (Jan. 14, 1926), 858-59; *idem*, "Our Peace Message," *The College Record: Review Supplement*, XXVII (Sept. 1926), 23-28; *idem*, "Our Peace Policy," *MQR*, III (1929), 26-32.

22 Miller, "Our Peace Policy," 29.

point to in its request for conscientious objector status.²³ The church had not acted on its belief in the “practicability of love and good will as conquerors of wrong and evil.” The war had shown that the church needed to move from the negating posture of nonparticipation to an articulation of the potential social value of the peace principle. Doing that would generate greater toleration for the nonresistant position.²⁴

The second task Miller outlined was a greater interest in ecumenical conversation and peace witnessing. The church for four centuries had largely been content to “hold this light for ourselves and our children.”²⁵ Not a single book had been written to explain Mennonite peace theology to others. The moment was right for conversing with many individuals outside the nonresistant denominations. Miller’s ecumenical interests extended to the many peace societies and organizations. He urged the church to keep in touch with the larger body of peace literature and to be represented at peace conferences.

The third function of the committee was to represent the church’s position to the government. It was frequently framed as keeping in touch with pending legislation of interest to Mennonites. In actuality it provided an opening for a more active Mennonite approach to the political process.

The response, both public and private, to these new initiatives was immediate.²⁶ Bishop John Mosemann of Lancaster wrote in the *Gospel Herald* denouncing the modern peace movement as a front for modernists. It was “nothing less than a Satanic delusion, a mighty and deceptive force intended to deceive the Church of Christ and lead her headlong into the clutches of modernistic and liberalistic leaders.”²⁷ Mennonites had no business fraternizing with organizations that included the likes of Shailer Matthews, Harry Emerson Fosdick and other “semi-infidels.”

Political representation to Washington met with similar objection. A letter by E. L. Frey and Orie Miller, chairman and secretary respectively of the committee, addressed to Frank Kellog, secretary of state, and William Borah, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and published in the *Gospel Herald* (March 17, 1927), noted that the Christian policy of goodwill toward the neighbor was applicable between nations. “To the extent that a nation’s ideals are Christian, to that extent can permanent peace come between it and other nations.” An immediate response by Mosemann on March 21 worried that the course Frey and Miller were pursuing led “the Church into

23 *Ibid.*, 27

24 Miller, “Our Peace Message,” 25

25 *Ibid.*

26 This debate is carefully reviewed in Sawatsky, “History and Ideology,” chapter 7.

27 J. H. Mosemann, “The Modern Peace Movement,” *Gospel Herald*, XVIII (Jan. 28, 1926), 898.

the mire of politics, to the mire of modernism, to the mire of trust in man." Such actions resulted in leading the "church astray."²⁸

Mosemann's objections were largely rooted in his dispensational and premillennial theology. In the existing dispensation the demonic was loose and all efforts toward the promotion of peace were misguided.²⁹ Christ taught that wars and rumors of wars would continue until his return. The inescapable conclusion was that Christians were not to seek to prevent war.³⁰ The only acceptable tasks for the Peace Problems Committee were to represent Mennonite self-interest to Washington and to "show the utter fallacy of the Modern Peace Movement."³¹

Miller responded with assurances that no one could "possibly mistake my own attitude on the question of Fundamentalism." But his brand contained an eschatology that encouraged the church to engage in the work of building the Kingdom in every age.³² He also did not fear the corruption of modernism through fraternal contact with many other organizations working for social betterment. He could be faithful to the Mennonite tradition and ecumenical at the same time. His correspondence for the year 1930 included a host of agencies and organizations: War Resisters League, the National Committee on the Churches and World Peace, World Alliance for International Friendship Through the Churches, National Council for Prevention of War, Committee on Militarism in Education, League for American Citizenship, World Federation of Education Associations, Pacifist Action Committee, World Peace Union, the Commission on International Justice and Goodwill of the Federal Council of Churches, and others. Many of these received either a subscription for literature or a small donation.³³

In the Mosemann world view the Conference of Pacifist Churches was no better than the larger ecumenical organizations. The Quakers and Brethren peace leaders, as well as the representatives of the other Mennonite groups, were also of the modernistic variety. The presence of some of the "old" Goshen faculty, specifically the former president, N. E. Byers, threatened to link Miller with their now discredited ideas of "world progress, world better-

28 J. H. Mosemann to E. L. Frey and O. O. Miller, Mar. 21, 1927, Peace Problems Committee Collection, I-3-5.3, Box 9, Folder 2, Archives of the Mennonite Church.

29 J. H. Mosemann to Orié Miller, Aug. 16, 1926, and Sept. 10, 1926, Peace Problems Committee Collection, Box 9, Folder 1.

30 *Ibid.*

31 J. H. Mosemann to Orié Miller, Sept. 10, 1926, Peace Problems Committee Collection, Box 9, Folder 1.

32 Orié Miller to J. H. Mosemann, Oct. 26, 1926, Peace Problems Committee Collection, Box 9, Folder 1.

33 See Miller correspondence for 1930 in Peace Problems Committee Collection, Box 9, Folder 1.

ment and world improvement."³⁴ Mosemann's antagonism was exacerbated by Miller's membership in the Continuation (i.e., executive) Committee of the conference. Mosemann warned Miller that the continuing connection "cannot but impair your own usefulness among us in the East."³⁵ Miller resigned immediately. The committee, however, continued its connections with the Conference of Pacifist Churches and many other organizations. When John Horsch, Mennonite Publishing House editor and historian, subsequently expressed similar concerns, Miller wrote to E. L. Frey suggesting that the committee continue its representation to peace conferences but mute the publicity about attendance and remind people that the committee sent only observer delegates rather than being directly affiliated.³⁶

Horsch worked closely with the Peace Problems Committee publications but was also one of the committee's strongest critics. His concerns largely paralleled those of Mosemann. He was ever vigilant in guarding Mennonite faith against the encroachments of modernism. Mennonites, he thought, were gullible when it came to peace discussions. Precisely because the nonresistant faith was so central to Mennonite people, they were easily led into alliances with others who spoke in ways resembling Mennonite concerns. But fellow pacifists were a bit like wolves in sheep's clothing. Many of those who spoke favorably of pacifism were also unwilling to distinguish between "fundamentalism and modernism, between Christianity, Judaism and other religions."³⁷ Furthermore, the entire peace movement understood that its potential strength came only with the federation of its constituent members. The more the Mennonites fraternized with the larger movement, the more they would experience pressures for increased association and, ultimately, federation. For Horsch that price was too high.

Horsch's fears of the Conference of Pacifist Churches and the continuing Mennonite association with the Quakers and Brethren were even stronger than Mosemann's. The purpose of the conference was "to influence the conservative Mennonites in favor of cooperating with liberal Mennonites and with other participating denominations." The only appropriate response for the committee was to cease the dialogue and connection with these groups.³⁸

34 J. H. Mosemann to Orrie Miller, Nov. 4, 1926, and Dec. 27, 1926, Peace Problems Committee Collection, Box 9, Folder 1.

35 *Ibid.*

36 Orrie Miller to E. L. Frey, Oct. 25, 1927, Peace Problems Committee Collection, Box 9, Folder 3.

37 John Horsch to E. L. Frey and O. O. Miller, Dec. 18, 1926, Peace Problems Committee Collection, Box 9, Folder 1.

38 John Horsch to the Peace Problems Committee, Oct. 8, 1927, Peace Problems Committee Collection, Box 9, Folder 3. See also these writings by Horsch on the issue: "The Modern Pacifist Movement Considered in the Light of the Writings of the Early Church Fathers," *Gospel Herald*, XIX (Oct. 28, 1926); "A Few Questions Regarding the 'Conference of Pacifist Churches,'" *Gospel Herald*, XIX (Oct. 20, 1927).

The conflict between these ecumenical and sectarian approaches to the larger peace movements in American society engaged a substantial part of the 1935 Mennonite Conference on War and Peace held at Goshen College. Melvin Gingerich and Harold S. Bender spoke for the Mennonite ecumenical understanding while John Horsch represented the sectarian position.

For Gingerich the division between religiously based and secular peace organizations was not always clear. Many agencies, among them the American Peace Society and the Socialist Party, included persons who were deeply religious or included religious concerns in their charters. Mennonite suspicion of them was warranted. In times of national crisis and war their positions were easily compromised. Furthermore, the Mennonite conviction that lasting peace was predicated on religious conversion was surely right. Yet the hostility of Mennonites toward these movements was unwarranted. The historical record was full of examples of the beneficial work of both quasi-religious and secular peace societies. The curbing of social evils was the business of many civic organizations as well as the church. Their contributions should not easily be dismissed. If they had been able to reduce "the burning of witches, slavery, drunkenness," should Mennonites not at least "refrain from condemning and totally disregarding these peace organizations"?³⁹

In their political lobbying and educative activity these organizations worked on issues important to the religious pacifist community. They could offer perspective and understanding not available through the resources of the small Mennonite denominational family.

The point of the Gingerich analysis was not to promote cooperative work with these organizations. Within the constraints of the time, that would have pushed against the boundaries of conservative Mennonite credulity. An attitude of tolerance and respect for their contributions was in order. In fact, every Mennonite minister's library should contain some of the literature of these peace movements.⁴⁰

John Horsch's contribution to the question of linkages was limited to a discussion of the appropriate relationship between Mennonites and other religious pacifists. They were to be rejected both because of history and theology. Their momentary flirtations with pacifist inclinations were betrayed by a long history of providing sanction for war. Their history of embracing war, with their curious ability to separate the Christian from the responsibility of wartime actions, was so ingrained as to render almost improbable the possibility of substantial change. While these churches were now anxious to repudiate the twentieth-century forms of warfare, they were not ready to

39 Melvin Gingerich, "The Difference between Our Peace Program and the Program of Other Peace Movements: I. Non-Religious Peace Movements," *Report of the Mennonite Conference on War and Peace* (Goshen, Ind.: Goshen College, 1935), 15.

40 *Ibid.*, 15-16.

repudiate their own history with its twisted logic.⁴¹ Thus, only the Mennonites could be trusted as the “defenders of the vital Christian principle of nonresistance.”⁴²

Harold S. Bender, whose reputation in 1935 was still being made but who would soon be a dominant voice in such discussions, was forthright in calling for the church to assume greater linkages to people beyond its own boundaries. He framed the issue in irresistible mission terms: “Does the Word of God require that believers teach the world the Gospel principles on peace and war?” Thus stated, the issue was part of the larger question: “What testimony has the Christian for the World?”⁴³ Bender’s response was a rejection of the fundamentalist limitation of the church’s witness only to conversion. The biblical injunctions were clear to “teach all nations to observe all things whatsoever” . . . and “not shun to declare the whole counsel of God” (Matt. 28:19; Acts 21:27). Those who insisted that the church’s only task was to preach salvation had been influenced by “Plymouth Brethren and extreme premillennial groups.”⁴⁴

The righteousness that the church called people to was not, however, to be confused with political lobbying, social reforms or attempts to Christianize the social order. Bender was clear on the teaching obligations. Yet he also hedged on the question of any real collaborative or political work. Mennonites would be ecumenical in their witness but sectarian in their alliances.⁴⁵

The position, represented by Mosemann and Horsch, that insisted on the separation of politics from nonresistance and the separation of Mennonites from other pacifists would only congeal as the Mennonite Church moved toward the latter thirties and the war. The separatist posture would continually object to the political activity of the Peace Problems Committee, the Mennonite Central Peace Committee, the historic peace church connections and finally Mennonite Central Committee as it negotiated the particulars of the Civilian Public Service (CPS) system. The continual problem with them was that they yoked together Mennonite Church people with others, including other Mennonites. The position that ultimately triumphed was forecast by the thinking of Orié Miller. But its finest practice and articulation awaited the inauguration of the CPS system and the publication of Guy F. Hershberger’s *War, Peace, and Nonresistance* (Herald Press, 1944).

41 John Horsch, “II. The Difference between Our Peace Program and the Program of Other Religious Peace Movements,” *Report of the Mennonite Conference on War and Peace* (Goshen, Ind.: Goshen College, 1935), 16-20.

42 *Ibid.*, 20.

43 Harold S. Bender, “Our Peace Testimony to the World—Goals and Methods,” *Report of the Mennonite Conference on War and Peace* (Goshen, Ind.: Goshen College, 1935), 35.

44 *Ibid.*, 36.

45 *Ibid.*, 39-40.

III.

The 1926 General Conference Mennonite Church (GC) meeting in Berne, Indiana, appointed a peace committee consisting of H. P. Krehbiel and A. J. Neuschwander. It replaced the wartime Committee on Exemption. The task of the committee was explicitly to cooperate with other pacifist churches and organizations whose principles were harmonious with those of their own church. The ecumenical instructions reflected the more tolerant tradition among the GCs.⁴⁶ In one of the major addresses of the Conference J. H. Langenwaller strongly endorsed both conference and congregational affiliation with the Conference on Pacifist Churches, reading the literature of the larger peace movement and bringing the imperatives of the peace witness to American political institutions. He noted that "the world has reached a point where every effort must be made to spread the idea of world peace as a practicable goal of human effort; and to study the necessary conditions of peace."⁴⁷

If there was generally a greater willingness in the General Conference to work with other Christians, there was also a determination in at least one wing of the church to clearly distinguish between political and religious pacifism. H. P. Krehbiel, a prominent member in both the General Conference and Western District Peace Committee, well represented that position. His antipolitical concerns were firmly in place in the late twenties when he began planning for what eventually became the 1935 Historic Peace Church Conference. Krehbiel, writing to Rufus Bowman of the Church of the Brethren, counseled that the peace churches could contribute what came naturally from them "if they abstain from political programs and anti-military propaganda and devote their whole thought and endeavor to the cultivation and propagation of the spirit of peace."⁴⁸

The first suggestion by Krehbiel for the 1935 conference was made in 1929 in "An Overture to the Historic Peace Groups of the World." The Overture was the work of Krehbiel, though the meetings of the Conference of Pacifist Churches no doubt nurtured his convictions that the moment was right for such a gathering. This first overture recounted the history of the peace churches, which had kept alive at great cost the "absolutist" teachings of Jesus. The price they had paid for being a people of peace was isolation from the larger society and from each other. Each group and each individual had been forced

⁴⁶ *Minutes and Reports of the Twenty-Fourth Session of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America* (1926), 17.

⁴⁷ J. H. Langenwaller, "What Should Be the Relations of Our General Conference Toward the Conference of Pacifist Churches?" *Minutes and Reports of the Twenty-Fourth Session of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America* (1926), 253-65. Quote is on page 259.

⁴⁸ H. P. Krehbiel to Rufus Bowman, Jan. 7, 1933, H. P. Krehbiel Collection, Box 28, Folder 171, Mennonite Library and Archives.

to work out their own understandings without the encouragement, instruction and support of like-minded individuals and groups. The long history of persecution had now ended, and the "friends of peace" could touch each other. With the politically enforced isolation now past, it was time to lift the self-imposed sectarian isolation.⁴⁹

The basis on which such a fraternity could best work was outlined. It would be a meeting of individuals representing different groups, with no authority to commit their respective communions. There would be no organized system of cooperation, only the voluntary interest of committed individuals. The theological charter included four elements: (1) "laying the Christ-foundation of the spirit of peace, upon which may rest and out of which can grow the will to peace for human society"; (2) the historic biblical faith as summarized in the Apostles' Creed; (3) a historic as well as present commitment to nonresistance; and (4) a "non-political" character. The first three elements in the charter needed some qualifying explanations. The last one required only a hyphenated word. Its meaning was clear.⁵⁰

The revisions in the Overture from 1929 to 1935 resulted in the basis being more christological than historical. But the revisions only reflected what Krehbiel thought was a larger change. The older gathering of peace churches—the Conference of Pacifist Churches (1922-31)—worked under the pacifist label. At the last of these conferences, the 1931 conference at Mount Morris, Illinois, Krehbiel delivered an address entitled "What Is a Pacifist?" that differentiated between political pacifism and Christian peace. The obligation of Christian people was to win "the souls of men for Christ" and then teach the "love-life." The attempt was to sharply separate the political pacifists from the Christian "Amitists"—Krehbiel's word for this quest for the ideals of Christ.⁵¹ It was a different version of the Mennonite way of segregating Mennonite nonresistance from popular pacifism.⁵²

The meeting of the Historic Peace Church Conference in Newton in the fall of 1935, the largest public inter-Mennonite peace gathering since World War I, reflected a mixture of religious and political concerns. The conference was a series of discussions rather than the presentation of formal addresses. The objectives of the conference were to study together the biblical basis for Christian peace; to "seek recovery of lost ground on Peace Conviction and attitude";

49 "An Overture to the Historic Peace Groups of the World," Krehbiel Collection, Box 28, Folder 170.

50 *Ibid.*

51 H. P. Krehbiel, *What Is a Pacifist?* (Newton, Kan.: Herald Publishing Co., 1931); H. P. Krehbiel, *The History of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America* (Newton, Kan., 1938), II, 634-35.

52 Juhnke, *A People of Two Kingdoms*, 136-37. Consult Juhnke for a further discussion of Krehbiel's intellectual development.

and to explore what might be the appropriate role of the historic peace churches, given the shape of impending military dangers.⁵³

The only records of the proceedings, kept by Krehbiel and his secretary, reveal that the delegates quickly moved from the biblical basis to the impending dangers facing the peace churches. The findings statement also reflected the preoccupation with political dangers rather than biblical backgrounds. Three of the four sections explained the concept of patriotism, detailed the establishment of a Joint Committee of the Historic Peace Churches and called for a "Plan of United Action in Case the United States Is Involved in War." The latter two sections joined the peace churches in a fashion that proved to be the forerunner of the National Service Board for Religious Objectors.⁵⁴

The inclusion of the second article, "Our Concept of Patriotism," suggested just how clearly the conference recognized that their peace understandings were both political and religious. At issue was the need for a concept of citizenship that linked the pacifist ideal to the performance of patriotic duty. Pacifists were also affectionate toward the nation-state and interested in her well-being. The statement made the linkage by suggesting that the "application of the principles of peace, love, justice, liberty and international goodwill" all contributed to the "highest welfare of the country." It was an ideal that the nation should adopt and by which it could regulate its affairs. The ideal had relevance for the nation-state because it was the "only foundation for stable government." Pacifists were the "true patriots" because they had the courage to stand for these correct principles.⁵⁵

This pacifism was neither separatist nor sectarian. It was the highest form of statecraft. It had relevance for the building of international harmony and breaking the cycle of war and violence. Yet, framed as it was in terms of patriotism, it was hardly offered as a political agenda to policy makers. It was rather an expiation for the continuing charge that the peaceable people were marginal citizens. Another resolution positioned the historic peace churches against the grain of their society. The delegates resolved that "we cannot cooperate in military service" if a future war were to come.

If the resolutions of the conference were more ecumenical than those of many Mennonite gatherings in the interwar years, the attendance and reporting of the conference showed the same wariness regarding collaborative activity. Of the 79 delegates and visitors in attendance, 47 were Mennonites. The Brethren were represented by 15 people and the Friends by 14. The Mennonite Church delegation consisted of Orié Miller, Harold S. Bender and

53 H. P. Krehbiel to O. O. Miller, June 26, 1935, Krehbiel Collection, Box 28, Folder 172.

54 "Secretary's Report of the Conference of Historic Peace Churches, October 31-November 2, 1935," Krehbiel Collection, Box 28, Folder 173.

55 *Ibid.*

three people from Hesston—Paul Erb, Milo Kauffman and Maurice Yoder. Miller and Bender were the regulars at such interchurch meetings. The Hesston people seemed to have come because of proximity. Other members of the Mennonite Church Peace Problems Committee did not attend. The two Mennonite Brethren attending, P. C. Hiebert and P. S. Goertz, were two-thirds of the MB Peace Committee. They were hardly representative of the Mennonite Brethren. One taught at Sterling College, a Presbyterian school, and the other was dean at Bethel College. Other Mennonite conferences were not represented. Forty of the 47 Mennonites were General Conference delegates and visitors.⁵⁶

The conference was not reported in either the *Gospel Herald* or *The Mennonite*. It was left to Krehbiel to report the event in his *Mennonite Weekly Review*. Even his coverage was surprisingly minimal. The October 16, 1935, issue carried a small announcement of the coming conference at the end of the editorials in the middle of page 2. The reporting of the conference in the November 13 issue was also on the editorial page. It came in several parts, including a lengthy description of the previous Conferences of Pacifist Churches, the "Basis for the Conference," the invitation to the event, and the tentative program. The resolutions were omitted. Front-page news in that November 13 issue was the normal community reporting. Special news included a report on the annual convention of the southwest Minnesota district Christian Endeavor Societies and the early cold wave sweeping into the Midwest. The event that historians subsequently fingered as a major one went largely unnoticed by the contemporaries.⁵⁷

H. P. Krehbiel was not the only voice in the General Conference or in Newton. Others entered the dialogue from differing starting points and offered alternative analyses. E. L. Harshbarger, history professor at Bethel College from 1933 until his premature death in 1942, was one of those counter voices. He had studied Mennonite history at Bluffton College with C. Henry Smith. His graduate training at Ohio State University put him in touch with the revisionist school of scholarship. He spoke as a student of international relations. He could analyze American wars as both Mennonite victim and revisionist historian critical of much American foreign policy. He was interested in the tradition of Mennonite peace theologizing but linked it to social science perspectives.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ See recent assessments by Donald F. Durnbaugh, ed., *On Earth Peace: Discussions on War/Peace Issues Between Friends, Mennonites, Brethren and European Churches, 1935-1975* (Elgin, Ill.: Brethren Press, 1978); and Robert Kreider, "The Historic Peace Churches Meeting in 1935," *Mennonite Life*, XXXI (June 1976), 21-24.

⁵⁸ See Mark Unruh, "E. L. Harshbarger: Mennonite Activist" (Bethel College student paper, 1982).

He also spoke with churchly credentials. From 1935 to 1942 he chaired the General Conference Peace Committee. He succeeded H. P. Krehbiel in that position. The change of committee leaders was more than the normal rotation of conference positions. With Harshbarger's coming there was a discernible change of mood. The pace of peace activities quickened. He was the quintessential GC progressive. He moved the church toward a more political witness. He gathered around himself some of the next generation that emerged with the war and the administrative tasks of the Civilian Public Service system.

His "Mennonite Program for Peace," published in *The Mennonite* on April 7, 1936, was in part a response to the Historic Peace Church Conference only six months previously. The conference had revealed the Mennonites as "the most backward of all the historic peace churches." The Mennonite position had ossified. It was reflexively followed but without critical examination of its meaning. It had neither programs, agencies nor institutions that embodied it.⁵⁹

The second limiting factor was the belief that if the church were more attentive to the conversion of people the result would be no more war. Harshbarger's response was categorical: "By what stretch of the imagination can we hope to abolish war by that method only when we have been evangelizing for 400 years and wars have become larger, more numerous and more deadly?"⁶⁰ Even the most arduous evangelistic efforts in the coming years could not avert another global war.

His own proposals did not eschew evangelism but, rather, to that strategy added education and the building of international alliances. These tasks, rightfully understood, belonged to the church. He was committed to helping his people understand the nature of international disputes. Knowledge about the causes of war would show they were dishonorable. In the Harshbarger revisionism they had to do with collecting debts, protecting investments and securing colonies. Exposing these indecent causes would unite people of all nations and create the "will to peace."⁶¹

Harshbarger's most explicit contribution to nurturing this "will to peace" was the Kansas Institute of International Relations at Bethel College, 1936-1940, one of eight such institutes conducted under the auspices of the American Friends Service Committee.⁶² The purposes of the institutes were educational—to secure accurate information on national and international

59 E. L. Harshbarger, "Mennonite Program for Peace," *The Mennonite*, LI (Apr. 7, 1936), 2.

60 *Ibid.*, 3.

61 *Ibid.*, 2-5.

62 The history is well described in Theodore Loewen, "Mennonite Pacifism: The Kansas Institute of International Relations" (Bethel College student paper, 1971).

problems from specialists working in those fields and to translate that information into intelligent democratic participation.⁶³

Persuading Mennonites to support the institute entailed much more than an appeal to education. The institute was projected as responsive to a deep need of interwar Mennonites. Harshbarger and his supporters solicited support from the ministers of the church by noting that it was "the first time in the history of the Mennonite church that the Mennonites are taking a positive and constructive step to help in the promotion of world peace." The church had sacrificed much to avoid participation in war; now it should sacrifice to prevent war. The institute was to be the beginning of a new "active peace program."⁶⁴ If the institute was moving Mennonites into the political arena, it would serve Mennonite self-interest as well. This new activism could cushion future requests for military exemption. The letter of appeal asked, "Have we as Mennonites any more right than the non-Mennonite or anybody else to ask the government to exempt our sons from military service so long as we have failed to do our utmost to help prevent another war? Let us become active and satisfy ourselves as well as prove to the world that we are sincere and not hypocritical in professing to have conscientious scruples against war."⁶⁵

Self-interest notwithstanding, the institute was to be a short-lived venture. Four years after it began, the accumulated financial deficit and community and constituent pressures required that Bethel withdraw its support.

The Harshbarger ecumenical and activist vision seemingly failed. Yet the failure of the institute should not be thought of as the Mennonite rejection of participation in the political order. In 1940 the United States was on the edge of the war. Mennonite peace energies were increasingly drawn into politics. But it was the politics of negotiating for the shape of the eventual Civilian Public Service system.

In the face of the war both the politically and religiously separatist posture and the politically activist position faltered. The war required collaboration with others and made the aspirations of the reformers once again the casualty of history.

IV

This discussion on the nature of the Mennonite peace witness was the first modern discussion. It was a discussion bounded by the memory of World War I and the coming of World War II. It took place during a time when both

63 E. L. Harshbarger circular letter, 1935, E. L. Harshbarger Collection, Box 12, Folder 2, Mennonite Library and Archives.

64 G. R. Gaeddert, secretary of the Institute of Ministers and Members of the Mennonite Church, Jan. 4, 1936, Krehbiel Collection, Box 27, Folder 240.

65 *Ibid.*

militarism and pacifism were central to the American imagination. Loud voices shouted for the national ear on both sides of the issue. It was not an easy time to think through the responsibilities of a peaceful people in a militaristic world. The discussion contained varying positions and was frequently contentious. Twenty years is hardly long enough to refine an appropriate theology. It was a short week. Yet the Mennonites could draw on four hundred years of reflection.

In 1940 and subsequent years the discussion became less contentious, for many understandable reasons. It was appropriate to close ranks. Energy was drained off into negotiating for the CPS system and subsequently into managing the system. There was an air of exhilaration as Mennonites began to tackle the administrative and organizational challenges of the system. American Mennonites had not previously managed something of this scope—something requiring this kind of political savvy, organizational skill and financial commitment. Colleges, publishing houses and mission programs by comparison were weekend jobs.

The discussion became less contentious because some of the issues disappeared. The CPS system once again made the historic peace churches a separated fraternity. They were the privileged. They were permitted by the government to run their own camps, and thus they were largely isolated from other pacifists.

The discussion also became less contentious because Guy F. Hershberger offered a way out of the impasse between a non-political/sectarian nonresistance and a political/ecumenical pacifism. *War, Peace, and Nonresistance*, published in 1944, defined a position that could hold for the next generation. Hershberger's work was a conceptual triumph. It emerged out of the convergence of wartime necessity and the new scholarship of the church. The position of biblical nonresistance that he defined was clearly nonpolitical. He wrote that "the outlook of the New Testament is entirely unpolitical" and "has nothing to say about how the affairs of state should be conducted."⁶⁶ The early Anabaptists had understood this. They were "altogether nonpolitical in faith and practice."⁶⁷ Biblical nonresistance did not seek to give direction to the state. Even conscription was a legitimate right of the state so long as the religious dissenters were recognized.

This nonpolitical posture embodied a prophetic witness that simultaneously gave it pragmatic relevance. By invoking the successes of historic pacifism Hershberger could link together political inactivity with political witness. It was a radical two-kingdom theology but one that made a contribution to the

66 Guy F. Hershberger, *War, Peace, and Nonresistance* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1944), 49.

67 *Ibid.*, 73-82.

social order. Donovan Smucker, reviewing the book in *The Mennonite*, described Hershberger's theology as a "new Biblical social gospel." It was "freed from the fallacies and illusions of the Rauschenbusch-Fosdick school" but found in the Great Commission and the parable of the Good Samaritan a new "urgency to bind up the spiritual and physical wounds of the world."⁶⁸ Smucker forecast the way *War, Peace, and Nonresistance* helped move the peace theology of the church from its inactive and self-protecting posture to more active forms of reconciliation. It was an important part of the larger Mennonite reorientation toward greater political and mission activism that accompanied the World War II experience. The withdrawal impulse long characteristic of Mennonite history, the political isolation yearned for by those who found politics alienating from their theologies, had been recast as socially useful and politically significant.

Hershberger surely drew from Mennonite history and Mennonite theology in his articulation of biblical nonresistance. But he also drew from American history. He was trained as an American historian. He knew the long American tradition of prizing the dissident who built the model community that stood separate from and over against the dominant society. That kind of reforming politics has roots in the very origins of the country. The American Puritans chose the nonviolent way to witness to their faith. Rather than fight, as those who remained eventually did, they chose to build the "city on the hill."

Much of Hershberger's career was devoted to building an alternative community.⁶⁹ In time he would find a different metaphor as arresting as the "city on the hill." Mennonites were to be a "colony of heaven." Defined in this fashion, the doctrine of nonresistance was both Mennonite and American. It was acceptable to a people wishing to retain their disengagement from political activity. For others, this linkage of social withdrawal to social reformism allayed lingering worries about political parasitism. Some Mennonites could now more easily be ecumenical, because they had defined their own political contribution. Under attack in the war years, Mennonites both redefined their peace theology and found a rightful place within the American political system.

⁶⁸ Donovan Smucker, "A Review of *War, Peace, and Nonresistance*," *The Mennonite*, LIX (Dec. 12, 1944), 11.

⁶⁹ For a discussion of the concept of "alternatives" in Hershberger's thought, see Theron F. Schlabach, "To Focus a Mennonite Vision," in John Richard Burkholder and Calvin Redekop, eds., *Kingdom, Cross, and Community: Essays on Mennonite Themes in Honor of Guy F. Hershberger* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1976), 15-50.