

reunion

Baptism, January 25, 1525—Then And Now

By Marlin Jeschke

WALKING IN THE RESURRECTION

By Joseph Yoder

On Sunday, January 24, 2010, we remembered the first baptisms of the Anabaptist movement at Menno-Hof. It was January 25, 1525 that a small group of radical followers of Jesus could no longer accept the slow reforms of Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich, Switzerland. They decided to make a clean break from the State church in order to radically follow the teachings of Jesus and Paul from the New Testament. Issues like *separation of church and state*, *Christian pacifism*, *discipleship*, and *believer's baptism* were key points for this radical Christian group that wished to return to a more primitive Christianity.

This group became known as the *Anabaptists*. This was little more than a nickname meaning *dreaded rebaptizers*. They did not accept infant baptism (see Marlin Jeschke's article). They were led by Conrad Grebel, Felix Mantz and George Blaurock.



Our public event 'Walking in the Resurrection' consisted of a walk to the courtyard where we remembered the first baptisms of the Anabaptists, followed by the dungeon room where

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In Matthew 28: 19, 20 Jesus gave his disciples the command to teach all nations and baptize those who believe. And so ever since Pentecost (Acts 2) the Christian church has baptized those who renounce the world and commit themselves to the way of Christ. From the days of the apostolic church baptism has been the rite of entrance into the Christian Church. All conversions and baptisms in New Testament times reflect adult decisions, as did baptisms of Anabaptists in radical Reformation times.

A believers church historian's study of the development of baptism in the first five centuries of the church reports how infant baptism seems to have begun—with parents wanting sick or dying children to be safely gathered into the church before their death. It wasn't standard practice, however. As late as the 300s A.D. numerous children out of Christian families were not baptized in their infancy or childhood but only in adult life, in some cases after several years of education.

But as we know, infant baptism eventually became universal practice by the Middle Ages, though there were adult pagan converts coming into the church in central and northern Europe nearly a millennium after the time of Jesus, some of these converts being ancestors of today's Mennonites and Amish. It was Anabaptists who in 1525 recovered the vision and practice of baptism as a personal decision by those who had reached the age of accountability and committed themselves to the way of Jesus.

The Catholic rationale for regular infant baptism was Adamic sin (as taught by Augustine (354-430 A.D.) and the need of the sacrament of baptism to assure infants of eternal life. Infant mortality was high at this time, as we know. But one major reformer, John Calvin, offered a quite different reason for infant baptism. "We baptize infants," says Calvin, "not to bring them into the church, but because God has placed them in the church by his sovereign grace."

Calvin's line of thought reflects a profound biblical truth. If adult converts establish Christian homes and, as Paul enjoins, bring their children up "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4), that means such children have the privilege, like Timothy, of knowing the holy Scriptures from their childhood, "which are able to make [them] wise unto salvation" (1 Timothy 3:15). Their challenge, when they reach the age of accountability, is not to make a 180-degree turn to renounce their past life within the Christian community and turn to some other way. Their challenge is, rather, to "own" the faith in which they were reared, although that does call for a rejection of the alternative, the way of the world. In the churches of the first centuries even children or youth coming out of Christian homes went through the same ceremony as adult converts, being asked to "renounce the devil and all his works."

What the age of accountability is for those reared in Christian homes is a debatable question. And also what constitutes serious upbringing in the faith. The church can make mistakes in two possible ways. One is failing to take the task of Christian nurture in earnest, assuming our children will just sort of automatically "join the church" without them having to take seriously a

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the consequences of this radical movement were briefly discussed. It is heartening to realize the price those early Jesus followers paid. The major part of the evening was spent in the lecture room with a panel from four of our major Anabaptist groups explaining how baptism is practiced in their groups. The four groups were Amish, Beachy Amish, Conservative Mennonite, and Mennonite Church USA. This program was moderated by John Rempel, a Menno-Hof board member and seminary professor from Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana.



2010 will see a number of public special events at Menno-Hof most of them centered on the theme of baptism. The film, ***The Radicals***, will be shown on **March 20 and 21 at 7 p.m.** This story of Anabaptists, Michael and Margaretha Sattler, is one of the painful yet exhilarating sagas in human history. This dramatic film tells the story of those who were unwilling to compromise their faith even though it meant death. We hope you come enjoy the film and popcorn.

Early summer will bring an original play written by Joel Kauffmann. ***The Same Amazing Water the Cows Drink***, (a play about believers' baptism) features events surrounding the first believer's

We were called to renew our intensity of how we train and disciple new believers. One of the challenges of the evening was to Mennonite Church USA. We have thousands of educated and baptized Mennonite youth living in urban areas that are unchurched. How can the church be more accountable to this group and call them to a more serious discipleship. The event was well attended by area Anabaptists.

MENNO-HOF SPECIAL EVENTS

baptisms in 1525 and then walks one through our spiritual history. This thoughtful, entertaining and sometimes humorous play will be produced and presented by our own local Jones Family. Play dates are **Wednesday Youth Night, June 23, Thursday and Friday, June 25 and 26 at 7:00 p.m.** and **Sunday, June 27 at 6:00 p.m.**

A September date for your calendar is **Sunday, September 12, 2010 at 5 p.m.** when Menno-Hof will host the 2nd Annual **Singspiration**. There will be special groups and a cappella singing in the tradition of the Amish Church, Amish Mennonite Church, Conservative Mennonite Church and Mennonite Church USA. Plan to join us for a wonderful time of singing praises to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.



New Look for Gift Shop

Changes have brought a new look to our gift shop. We are now offering locally crafted items produced by local persons. Joy Kauffman King, our volunteer gift shop manager, has created a number

of pleasing displays of the quality items offered for sale. We carry merchandise from the Harlan J. Miller Family—fruit butters and Amish peanut butter; Edith Lambright—baskets, goat milk soaps; Sarah Yoder—pot holders; Lonnie Yoder—wood items such as mug trees, wall trees, and towel hangers; Delton Bontrager—wooden cutting boards, marble solitaire games, candle holders, wall plaques; Michael M. Zehr—turned wood bowls, plates, trays, and pens; Junior & Rosetta Bontrager—beeswax candles; Nettie Miller—handmade greeting cards; Ruby Knepp—Amish dolls, pillows, potholders, and marble rollers; Elaine Jones—quilted wall hangings and pin cushions; Eric Strader—pottery bowls, pitchers, etc.; Regina Lambright—lotions, lip balms, and liquid soaps; David and Linda Martin Family—hand-woven rugs; Anna Mae Yutzy—Amish dolls.

We invite you to come and shop!



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decision to reject the world and embrace the way of Jesus. The other mistake is idealizing sensational or dramatic conversions of notorious sinners, giving the church's youth the impression they must pass through a period of rebellion and alienation in order to have an authentic kind of "adult" conversion like that of the prodigal son reported in Luke 15, or a Charles Colson in recent times.

The church should not, of course, forget or neglect evangelism or mission directed toward non-Christians in the world around us. Indeed, seeing adult converts turning from a life of sin and getting baptized in our congregations is a most useful reminder to the youth of our congregations that there are two ways, as Jesus pointed out, one that leads to life and a broad one that leads to death. No one can escape making a choice, because moving into adult life without making a choice to follow Christ is effectively to make a choice not to follow Christ.

Mennonites, spiritual descendants of the Anabaptists, have become more aware in modern times of this privilege of their children to grow up within the church rather than in a pagan environment. A sign of this is their adoption of the practice of child dedication rather than infant baptism, and that, I believe, for two reasons. First, baptism in the New Testament signifies a personal faith decision, and that requires the age of accountability. Second, infant baptism seems to

slip a little too easily into ethnic Christianity in spite of the practice of catechism in infant baptism churches. Catechism runs the risk of degenerating into a puberty ceremony, although the baptism of Mennonite youth at puberty is at risk of slipping into this also. Perhaps that is why our Amish and Hutterite friends, also heirs of the Anabaptist movement, baptize their young people in their teens and stress the seriousness of baptism as a vow to really follow Christ. In view of the risk of ethnic Christianity, Mennonites, like other believers church people, have answered that God has no grandchildren.

It has not been easy to keep faith with what the New Testament teaches us on baptism and with what our Anabaptist forebears died for. For that reason the Menno-Hof tour is helpful not only for outsiders to learn about Mennonites and the Amish community but for us Mennonites and Amish folk to reacquaint ourselves with our spiritual roots. As one Menno-Hof board member said to me recently, more Mennonite congregations should bring their baptism classes for a tour of Menno-Hof to see what our heritage teaches us about the seriousness of baptism.

Marlin Jeschke, writer and author, is retired from Goshen College where he was a professor of religion and philosophy. He and his wife, Elizabeth, volunteer at Menno-Hof and live in Goshen Indiana, where they are active members of College Mennonite Church.

MENNO-HOF MEMBERSHIP

Our membership list has grown the past seven years. We are again offering membership to each of you with several changes. The annual renewal date will be March 1. As a member you will receive the following benefits:

- The joy of supporting an organization with similar values to your own
- Free admission for you, your family, and friends
- 15% discount on all books and gift shop items
- Our quarterly newsletter *Reunion*
- Monthly E-mail message from the Director
- E-mail alerts for upcoming events and special promotions
- Entry to special **By-Invitation-Only** events

Please enroll me as a 2010-11 member of Menno-Hof as indicated below. Annual (March 1 renewal for all members)

Individual \$35.00 Six free admissions for you, family, and friends

Family \$50.00 Ten free admissions

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STREET _____

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Enclosed is my check to Menno-Hof for \$ _____

MAIL TO:

Menno-Hof, PO Box 701, Shipshewana IN 46565

DIRECTOR'S DESK

"On January 22 Goshen College announced that it will play an instrumental version of the national anthem before select sports events on campus, followed by prayer." (*Mennonite Weekly* 2-8-10)

As the parent of two Goshen College graduates I have always valued the radical approach to following Jesus that has been part of Goshen College. So this announcement that Goshen College will now begin to play the national anthem before select sporting events is very troublesome to me. I will raise a few questions that come to my mind on this issue realizing that this is neither complete nor definitive. Perhaps this is simply part of keeping the conversation going and our long tradition of seeking to discern God's will as Anabaptists.

- Why play the national anthem and follow it by prayer—is this a form of idolatry asking God to condone our national sins?
- I consider radical followers of Jesus to be good citizens of any country and they need not show their citizenship by playing the national anthem; an 1812 war song.
- One of our core values is peacemaking. Should we not carry our patriotism more lightly so we can fully embrace our global citizenship?
- Our allegiance is to the Kingdom of God. Is our radical following of Jesus diluted when we also claim allegiance to a nation state?
- We are in the midst of two wars. As Christian pacifists are we not complicit with these wars when playing the national anthem?
- We are part of the global church. With our brothers and sisters we pay allegiance only to God.

I raise these questions to all my brothers and sisters, whether you would agree with these premises or not. I welcome dialogue. My E-mail is [jyoder@mennohof.org](mailto: jyoder@mennohof.org).

—Joseph Yoder

THANK-YOU The staff, board and director of Menno-Hof wish to thank all of our faithful supporters who help Menno-Hof carry on its story and message of the Amish Mennonite story. But in a larger context, it is the message of the Good News of Jesus. Many lives are affected and changed as they visit Menno-Hof and dialogue with our staff and volunteers. This is a place of mission, education, culture and story. Thank you to the board members, staff, volunteers, donors, members, businesses and churches who help us keep the doors open for this wonderful ministry. There's still time to donate for this year.



MENNO-HOF

AMISH-MENNONITE VISITORS' CENTER

P.O. Box 701

Shipshewana, Indiana 46565

*See and Hear
the Amish-Mennonite Story*

AN INVITATION

We invite you to help in the ministry of Menno-Hof with your tax-deductible contribution. Menno-Hof works at telling the story of how God works in people's lives, past, present and future. Your help in telling that story is greatly appreciated.

Comments: "The informative movies, hands-on experience, and friendly staff provided an enjoyable tour."

"I enjoyed being able to interact with elements of sight, narrations, and being able to independently choose the speed of my tour at different points."

Visitors:

May 1988–January 2010: 825,967

Reunion is published quarterly to keep our friends informed of happenings at Menno-Hof. Direct questions or comments to Joseph Yoder, director, at [jyoder@mennohof.org](mailto: jyoder@mennohof.org)

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