The "Why" of The Christian Exponent

The Spirit of Progress

Christian Courtesy

The Gospel of God
Our Bi-weekly Sermon

The Reason Why
From the Diary of a Relief Worker
In this Issue

The June issue again features the Radical Reformation and Mennonite Bibliography. The 1985 bibliography has reached a record length, but includes a new feature to assist readers who find it inefficient to consult the multitude of sources. The first section of the bibliography contains only a few pages and lists resources published in 1985 and 1986. Books acquired by the various contributing libraries from earlier years are listed in a second, longer section. Thus the bibliography still represents the acquisitions of major Mennonite libraries in 1985, but readers interested in the most current materials may consult only the first section.

Janeen Bertsche is a student at Bluffton College with majors in religion and psychology. She prepared her paper on the "Views of Atonement in the Christian Exponent" for J. Denny Weaver's class on the "Christian Faith" in 1984, and it won third prize in the John Horsch Mennonite History Essay Contest at Goshen College. After graduating this spring, Bertsche intends to marry (June 21) and attend AMBS.

In the December issue last year, John B. Toews, Professor of History at the University of Calgary, provided "a portrait of Mennonite singing in Russia in the 1860s" by translating and editing selections from the Jacob Epp diary. In this issue Toews uses Epp’s diary and the diary of Dietrich Gaeddert to add insights into the Mennonite migration from Russia in the 1870s. Gaeddert resided in the Molotschna settlement and migrated to central Kansas where he became the elder of the Hoffnungsa Mennonite Church. Most of his diary is in the Mennonite Library and Archives. Epp lived in one of the "Hebrew Colonies" of the Chortitza settlement. His diary is in the Mennonite Heritage Center, Winnipeg. Historians continue to debate the significance of the political, economic and religious factors which influenced the 1870s migration, and these diaries reveal more of the complexity of the situation.

After a March issue containing an abundance of photographs, the size of these two articles and the bibliography did not allow for illustrations in this issue. The September issue will return to a more normal format.

Indexed with abstracts in Religion Index One: Periodicals, American Theological Library Association, Chicago, available online through BRS (Bibliographic Retrieval Services), Latham, New York and DIALOG, Palo Alto, California.
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Views of Atonement in the Christian Exponent

by Janeen Bertsche

During the 1920s, the fundamentalist-modernist controversy reached a climax in the Mennonite Church. The Christian Exponent, published from 1924-1928, served as the progressive Mennonites' voice in the conflict. Within this periodical can be found discussion on many of the issues and doctrines being debated both in the Mennonite Church and in the wider American controversy.1

One of the “fundamentals of Christian truth” accepted by the conservatives was the substitutionary atonement theory, referred to as the “blood atonement.”2 The Christian Exponent in its first issue acknowledged and accepted this theory as “indisputable fact.”3 However, later pages of the periodical indicate that the writers were greatly influenced by the moral influence view of atonement, a position taken by most liberals of the time. Although the Christian Exponent allowed many viewpoints on atonement to be expressed, including some that could have been branded as liberal, none of the attacks made on the publication (for example, by Mennonite fundamentalist John Horsch) charged them with presenting an incorrect view of Christ's saving work. Atonement apparently, was not one of the issues vehemently debated among the Mennonites in the 1920s.

Early twentieth century fundamentalism, according to Paul Toews, was “an interlocking movement to codify doctrine, centralize church authority and rigidify cultural nonconformity.”4 Fundamentalism was primarily a religious movement, a defense of the traditional “fundamentals” of the faith,5 but “theological questions and social issues were intertwined.”6 In the Mennonite Church, the fundamentalist conflict developed to its height between 1913 and 1928. Several of the progressive administrators and faculty of Goshen College resigned during the early upheavals and made their way to Bluffton College and Witmarsum Theological Seminary in Bluffton, Ohio.7 From there, the progressive group began publication of a biweekly, the Christian Exponent, in January 1924. Intended as an alternative to the official publications of the conservative main body of the (Old) Mennonite Church,8 the Exponent was used by the Goshen exiles, as well as many other midwestern Mennonites, in their open-minded search for truth, to express a wide spectrum of viewpoints on church issues and beliefs.9

Publication of the Exponent was looked on very unfavorably by the conservatives, and some charged the Exponent writers with disguising modernism as Mennonitism.10 Graybill, Schlabach, and Toews, however, do not consider the group as modernists, but as progressives with “liberal inclinations.”11 Both the conservative and liberal views of atonement were expressed in the Christian Exponent, although very few articles dealt only with the atonement. Surprisingly, some of those who dealt most with the atonement issue during the paper’s publication combined the substitutionary and moral influence theories of atonement, often without reconciling the differences between the two views.12

The fundamentalist or traditional view of atonement as it was expressed by Christian Exponent writers will be examined first. Salvation was at the heart of the fundamentalist message.13 The human heart was viewed as inevitably sinful and in need of “redemption and regeneration by the Spirit of God and the blood of the sinless Lamb of God.”13 As explained by Paul Whitmer, Christ as God-Man was able to redeem humankind and reconcile us to God.15

A. J. Neuenschwander stressed the divinity and sinlessness of Jesus in his sacrificial view of atonement:

The nature of man, the nature of the fall, and the nature of sin, makes a Saviour of Divine nature and character a necessity. As far as God saw it wise to reveal it to us, we know that there can be Salvation through no other way than by the way of the Divine Son of God. It is by this Son becoming human, that through His perfect life and acceptable sacrificial death, He could bring Salvation to all men.16

Other writers expressing fundamentalist views of Christ’s atoning work included Wilbur Miller, Wilmer S. Shelly, and John F. Funk. Miller stated that Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God and gave his life “in payment for the sins of the world.”17 Shelly viewed Christ as our mediator and sacrifice: “We are all prodigals who can only return to our Father because Christ is our mediator and because He consents to associate with us. Christ’s message, Christ’s sacrifice, is not for the faultless, if there are any such, but for the fallen and lost . . . .”18 To gain our salvation, said Funk, we must accept Christ as “the propitiation for our sins” and the sins of the world.19

The substitution theory of atonement is most clearly and explicitly explained by M. M. Horsch. According to Horsch, the fall of man was caused by Satan. Sin is “enmity between God and man” and “inculpable by man.”20 The results of sin include ruin, darkness, damnation, and death: “God’s mandate is irrevocable; it stands today and will stand to the end of time.”21 Out of love, God conceived a great plan of salvation. He gave his “eternal, everlasting only begotten of the Father and one with Him, as a substitute for sinful, fallen man.”22 As Horsch stated, “it took the Sinless One, the Righteous One, to suffer in our stead, in a vicarious way. Of His own free will He became our substitute and God laid upon Him the iniquity of us all.”23

Christ’s death wiped out the curse of sin and damnation and re-established “sweet and loving harmony between the creator and His creatures; between God and man.”24 If we come to the cross in childlike faith and true repentance, we can make Christ’s sacrifice ours—his blood purifies us. Once this step is taken, God no longer sees our
was to be interpreted by Love."33

the realm of Fear and showed how it
completely to God's will, so that God's

godly person, for he submitted himself
urging him to contribute to God's pur-

pose in the world.27

to God's eternal purposes in the world.39 and this revelation pro-
duced fellowship and communion with
God and right attitudes toward other
persons.40 Lester Hostetler, editor of
the Exponent from 1926 to 1928, also
stressed Jesus' revelation of God's
character.41 "In Him they see God....
In Him was God."42 Jesus shows God
as loving, forgiving, and sympathizing.
According to Hostetler, "the heart of Christianity is Christ. He came
to bring a new life and a new way of
living."43 "He has opened up to us the
vision of God and the way to eternal
life."44

From the perspective of A. M. Eash,
pastor and superintendent of the 26th
Street Mennonite Church and Mission
in Chicago,

The mission of Jesus was to make the
Father known. God had not been known to
the world as a God of love and mercy,—a
kind Heavenly Father. To the man of Jesus'
day, He was a God of justice and power,
whose presence could not tolerate the savor
of sin and whose right arm was the symbol
of power and authority. . . . They feared
Him because of their own sins and revered
Him for His great holiness. To make known
the tenderness, sympathy, mercy and love
of God, Jesus came among men. To make
this revelation He recourse to living a life
and rendering helpful service rather than to
abstract teaching.45

Christ's revelation of the character of
God was more important than his death
on the cross, which resulted from his

taking the place of others to his way of life. Because he
chose ideas different from the world's,
had to pay a price.49 Jesus' "sacri-

cial love" was the only way to redeem
the world, even though it meant facing
death.50 J. W. Kliewer likewise por-
trayed the crucifixion as a rejection of
Jesus' perfect ethical standards, saying
that "the Cross of Christ stands for the
highest ethical conceptions...even more
than of God's severity with sin."51

J. E. Hartzler viewed the death of
Jesus as consistent with the loving,
sacrificial self-giving of God's character
as revealed by Christ. God does not take
delight in "the destruction of sinners," but in their understanding of his purposes
and love.52 Payson Miller echoed this view of the understanding of God's purposes:

To a child who loves his parent, con-
sciousness of having wronged the father's purposes will be sufficient punishment for disloyalty. . . . To a child who loves his
parent, consciousness of the effects of his deeds upon the father's purposes will be sufficient motive for loyalty. A child who
loves his parents will not be guided in his conduct by expectations of penalties, or hopes of
rewards . . . but simply by love for his
parents.53

Thus, the moral influence theory em-
phasized the Christian lifestyle which resulted from knowing God's true character and purposes. "This Truth once implanted in men's hearts and minds would produce life of the right
kind."54 Jesus' unique contribution to
the world was the dedication of his life
to persuade persons to change from
their ways of error.55 Jesus lived and
taught a righteous life, wrote I. R.
Dettwiler, and showed that this life was
attainable by all persons:

he omits all rules, and sets his own life side
by side as the example, inspiration and
power through which all may reach it.
His appeal is based on love, not on
demands, on persuasion not on force
through a possible blessedness in days
when supremacy of legalism obscured the higher
conception of righteousness.56
According to Detweiler, the way of the cross, which was consistent with Jesus' life, was the finishing work by which he became the universal ruler, the spiritual Messiah for all. Jesus' blood cleanses us from all sin if we follow his way of life, and we are filled with the character of Christ. Detweiler summarized the moral influence theory by saying that “Jesus believed thoroughly in the power of a perfect life. And the way He did it was to sum up and express the real spirit of His perfect life. This life would draw all men unto him. ” 69

Several of the Exponent contributors who dealt with atonement combined aspects of the substitution and moral influence theories. Vernon Smucker, who served as editor of the Exponent from 1924 to 1925, had basically a liberal view of atonement. Jesus lived to love, and his death was the ultimate expression of love. Jesus reigns in our hearts “not by coercion but by the compulsion of love.” 60 We are called to apply the principles and teachings of Jesus to our lives and relationships. 61 This lifestyle shown by Jesus differed from the world’s standards, and Jesus’ death was the result of humankind’s rejection of his way of living. 62 A hint of the classic (Christus Victor) theory entered Smucker’s view of the resurrection, which proclaimed Christ as victorious over death and the grave, and eventually over sin as well. 63 Although Smucker rejected the fundamentalist view of the final conquest between God and Satan as a terrible, literal war, 64 he presented a more serious view of sin. Humankind is marred by sin, helpless without divine assistance, and unable to work out its own salvation. 65 This traditional, conservative view of human nature must be balanced with Smucker’s liberal view of Jesus’ work.

A. R. Eschliman’s view of atonement was even more complex. Christ was sent to earth by the Father to show us the way to God, but he left it to us to work out this salvation. Christ became our high priest in order to allow us access to God, and he intercedes with the Father for us. 66 In addition, Christ’s blood cleanses us from all sin (a “blood atonement” view), 67 and the resurrection was “a vindication and completion of Christ’s redemptive work.” 68 Now that Christ has broken the power of sin and death, the believer obtains the dynamic energy of Christ which enables him/her to live and triumph over all obstacles, including temptation of the world, sin, and death (the classic view). 69 Eschliman also emphasized our knowledge of God. In Christ we see a way to live up to God’s ideals, and we are freed from the law of sin and death. 70 Further, as we see more of God’s truth, we come to love and adore him. As a result of this knowledge and appreciation, “we become ‘wise unto salvation’” (a moral influence view). 71 Evidently, the combination of theories resulted from Eschliman’s equal emphasis on Christ’s life, death, and resurrection: “It is the whole fact of Christ, and not any particular experience taken alone, which is the power of God unto salvation.” 72

A. F. Tieszen presented a mixed view of atonement focusing on the death of Christ. His death is a ransom for many; his blood and life were given for the forgiveness of our sins. Yet, salvation comes “not because the wrath of a monarch has been appeased, but by accepting and acknowledging the love of the Father,” 73 which was manifested in the life, teaching, and spirit of Jesus, as well as in his death. According to Tieszen, Christ’s death saved those whom he could not win through his life. “In the cross center His teaching, the glories of His life, and the purpose of His coming.” 74

P. P. Wedel’s view of atonement was closer to the substitution theory. Sinful humanity deserved death and eternal punishment, but Jesus came to us out of God’s grace to redeem us from our sins, to seek and to save the lost. 75 “He died on the cross to reconcile us with God. In faith we accept the atoning work of Christ and receive pardon and are justified. God no longer sees us as sinners, He declares us just for Jesus’ sake.” 76 However, Christ came to show us a new way of living, as well as to give us pardon. Christ revealed God’s love and led a pure, holy life as a pattern for us to follow. 77

From 1924 to 1927, A. E. Kreider served as the Sunday school editor for the Christian Exponent. Many of his lessons explored Jesus’ work; thus, Kreider’s view of atonement can be pieced together even though he never wrote explicitly on the atonement. Kreider himself stated how difficult it was to summarize Christ’s gospel (why he worked and died) into words, much less a creed. Only the experience of the Holy Spirit can show us the fullness of Jesus’ message. 78

Kreider wrote that “the God whom we worship and who is above and over all things, is like Jesus. Jesus, the Son, has revealed the Father.” 79 Jesus is the true representation of God, the “Word” through whom the Father speaks to us. 80 Because the Father made himself known in Jesus, faith is made easier and more dynamic. 81 Jesus has shown us the light, driving back “the moral and spiritual darkness of this world. Jesus has revealed to us what God can do and what He will do for us.” 82 “The gospel of God was embodied in the character of the Christ. Truth—the living, saving truth—comes through personality, the personality of Jesus of Nazareth.” 83 “The Jesus of our gospels is a natural, human, appealing manner taught of the Father’s character of love . . . Jesus’ words . . . strike responsive human notes in the souls of men.” 84 This aspect of revealing God’s character such that men are drawn to him resembles the moral influence theory.

Kreider’s view of sin and the cross, however, drew more from the traditional theories of atonement. Human nature has been sinful since Adam. 85 On the cross, Jesus bore all of the sin and wretchedness of humanity. 86 His life was given as a ransom for many, 87 “as a sacrifice for the redemption of the world.” 88 “The Christ of Calvary is our Saviour. His blood cleanseth us from all sin.” 89

Why would Jesus lay down his life for the world’s redemption? First, the way of the cross was God’s way, and Jesus yielded himself in perfect obedience to God’s purposes: suffering, sacrifice, and death. 90 Second, the cross shows the depth of Jesus’ love and God’s concern that we be redeemed. “In His death He accomplished that which His life alone had failed to accomplish.” 91 Third, through his death the world could be redeemed and reconciled to the Father. 92

Kreider summarized his view of Jesus’ work on the cross:

The world’s greatest need has been satisfied in Jesus Christ. He is Deliverer and Saviour. Calvary gives us a picture of sin at its height. Jesus Christ waged the struggle to the end. He gave His life, shed His blood. But not in vain. He triumphed. The bondage of sin, of our baser nature has been broken. He lives as the resurrected One. Through Him we have the assurance of forgiveness of our sin and victory over its power. 93

Not only can we be victorious over sin but also over the fear of death. 94 This concept comes from the Christus Vic-
tor theory of atonement.

Jesus also came to teach humanity a new way to live, said Kreider. Christ and the Gospel stories have the power to change the characters of men and women. Jesus' life and message were intended to bring about a moral and spiritual transformation in the lives of his followers, and all who heard his message. Jesus taught that the saved life is controlled by perfect love and manifested in Christ-like deeds. Jesus' moral perfection stirs and empowers by its gracious influence. Kreider stated that in Jesus we find "comfort, courage, inspiration, hope, life—in one word, salvation." By saying that salvation was brought about by Jesus' life and influence as well as his death, Kreider has combined the moral influence and sacrificial views of atonement.

The final example of the combined theory of atonement is found in several articles by A. S. Rosenberger. He stated:

Jesus Christ was the greatest teacher that the world has ever known. He has brought to man the highest standards and ideals and by His own life showed that these were liveable. . . . [However] Jesus is more than a human teacher and example. He is the divine Son of God who came as Saviour of the world. Jesus came to help humanity but was rejected. "The Sinless One received the penalty of sin." He gave his life as a ransom, fulfilling his divine mission of salvation. "The cross was not a tragedy but a part of the plan of God, and stands as a glorious symbol of a Father's love giving to the uttermost for the salvation of His people." According to Rosenberger, Jesus is now "influencing and transforming the hearts and lives of men in the task of building the Kingdom." "Jesus is Saviour because he does save men from sinful to righteous lives."

Overall, these "combined views" of atonement contain the serious nature of sin and the substitution or sacrificial view of Christ's death from the conservative/traditional position, and the work of Jesus as the revealer of God's character and example for Christian living from the moral influence theory. In much the same way, these two concepts are balanced within one person's position without noticeable conflicts; the Christian Exponent presented both the fundamentalist and liberal views of atonement and those in between. The Exponent made no comments on the differences between the theories and adopted neither as its official position, despite Smucker's claim that the "fundamentals" were accepted as fact. A better statement of the Exponent's presentation of beliefs would be Lester Hostetler's remark that "we are propagandists for the religion of Jesus but not for any particular brand of theology." Fundamentals in the Mennonite Church were not comfortable with many of the views presented in the Christian Exponent, but atonement does not appear as an issue of controversy. In his book, Modern Religious Liberalism, John Horsch set up the substitution theory of atonement in classic fundamentalist form as the only acceptable viewpoint. He rejected the moral influence theory, and, in The Mennonite Church and Modernism, he quoted and attacked S. K. Mosiman's view of Christ's work, saying that Christ's death for sinful man is a theological doctrine taught by Jesus and the New Testament. However, the quote of Mosiman is not from the Exponent; in fact, an Exponent article written by Mosiman says that we can be reconciled to God through the sacrifice of the Son of God, which does not fit the moral influence view of atonement. The main point, however, is that John Horsch and other conservatives never mentioned the Exponent views of atonement. The main controversies over Exponent positions dealt with interpretation or views of scripture, the authority of the Church, and the cultural restrictions based on non-conformity, not on theories of atonement.

Fundamentals created an articulated theology, which included the "blood atonement." Fundamentalism was also utilized by conservative Mennonites, "to define and distinguish a theology by which they could identify themselves to themselves and to others." Toews further explains that some of the progressive Mennonites adopted "hints of theological modernism" and others refused to use the explicit, strict, categorized doctrines of the fundamentalists. This freedom of exploration can be seen in the views of atonement presented by Christian Exponent writers. Why atonement was not an issue more debated between Mennonite conservatives and progressives poses a question difficult to answer. Perhaps the label of modernism served as a smokescreen for other tensions relating to authority, attitudes, and cultural restrictions. The analysis of this paper, in support of the theories of Theron Schlabaugh and Paul Toews, demonstrates that there was little theological modernism in the Mennonite Church. The hints of theological liberalism that can be seen in Christian Exponent views of atonement were balanced by more conservative views, perhaps keeping the Exponent from open attack, though not from suspicion.

ENDNOTES


7 Toews, p. 241.


9 Graybill, p. 20.

10 Juhnke, p. 18. See also Graybill, p. 19.

11 Graybill, p. 19; Schlabach, p. 114; Toews, p. 247.


13 Hordern, p. 60.

14 "Mabel Grab, "The Burden of the True Missionary," Christian Exponent, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Feb. 27, 1925), p. 70. Gosh was a foreign volunteer from Preston, Ontario. She was educated at the Bible Institute, Toronto.

15 Paul E. Whiteman, "Good Times and Good Joy," Christian Exponent, Vol. 1, No. 26 (Dec. 19, 1924), p. 410. Whiteman was educated at Goshen College, 1903-1904; Oberlin College and School of Theology, 1904-1906; and the University of Chicago, 1916-17. Positions included: professor of English and Bible at Goshen 1908-16; Dean of Goshen 1913-16; professor of Bible at Bluffton College 1917-21; Dean and professor of Church History at Wintersm University Theological Seminary 1921-31; pastor of Zion Mennonite Church, Bluffton, OH (from Who's Who Among American Mennonites, North Newton: Bethel College Press, 1948.)


17 Wilmer S. Shelly, "Jesus and Sinners," Christian Exponent, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Jan. 3, 1928), p. 14. See also "Jesus, the Suffering Professor" (5:7, p. 105) and "Jesus the Saviour" (5:13, p. 205). Shelly was educated at Bluffton College and Wintersm University and served as pastor of the First Mennonite Church in Wooster, OH. He wrote the Sunday school lessons for the Christian Exponent during 1928.

MENNONITE LIFE


Christian Exponent, Vol. 1, No. 8 (Apr. 11, 1924), p. 120.


Christian Exponent, Vol. 1, No. 8 (Apr. 11, 1924), p. 120.


Christian Exponent, Vol. 1, No. 8 (Apr. 11, 1924), p. 120.

Nonresistance and Migration in the 1870’s: Two Personal Views

Edited and translated by John B. Toews

Few issues pertaining to the history of the Mennonites in Russia have been so extensively debated or documented as the migration of the 1870’s.1 Perhaps the sheer complexity of any migration ensures an almost perpetual argument as to its origins and causes. In any such setting, there are restraints and opportunities, as well as a variety of political, economic and religious situations. In one form or another all of these factors influenced the migration of one-third of the Mennonites in Russia to North America.

Interpretations of the first Mennonite migration from Russia have taken several directions. In his monumental compilation, P. M. Friesen viewed the emigrants as extreme conservatives who, ignorant of Russian language and culture, feared assimilation in any form.2 Aware of Russia and things Russian, these “progressive” Mennonites saw their forefathers as victims of a narrow religious-cultural tradition which caused them to flee from an outside world they neither understood nor even wanted to. Others have argued that the migration was related to a widespread but unstated desire for economic betterment. At least one contemporary observer saw the majority of the migrants as blatant opportunists.3 There is other evidence to support this contention. First, the severe tensions between landed and disenfranchised landless Mennonites demanded a safety valve. Secondly, settlement in the United States offered no guarantee of military exemption, yet two-thirds of the States offered no guarantee of military exemption, as the migration of the 1870’s.1 Perhaps the prevailing fear was genuine and cultural life style of the Russian setting: closed communities; self-government; private schools. When participants later reflected on the reasons for the migration, the verdict was unanimous—“for conscience sake!” It meant a pacifism which included not only exemption from military service, but the terms of settlement itself. Freedom of faith was associated with a definite religious-cultural identity and a well developed social system. Later memoirs3 penned by emigration leaders portray men living in a self-contained community, genuinely frightened when confronted by the demands of the Russian state.

Dietrich Gaeddert was born in 1837 in Alexanderwohl, Molotschna. As a young man he received a moderate education under the tutelage of Heinrich Buller, a minister in the Alexanderwohl church. In 1862 he began to teach in the Rueckenauf village school. Not long after, he left for Fuertenerwerder. In his brief diary entries, Gaeddert left a detailed account of his life as village teacher and minister. He chronicles the activities of everyday life as well as the more cataclysmic events—accidents, illnesses, deaths, village fires. For him, church and community are one. He reveals himself as an affirmation of individual whose affection for his people finds expression in his unflagging service on their behalf. The original diary is housed at the Mennonite Library and Archives, North Newton, Kansas.4 It begins in 1860.

Whereas Gaeddert records Mennonite life in the Molotschna settlement, Jacob Epp does so for the Chortitza district. Not far from Chortitza in the Kherson region lay the so-called “Hebrew Colonies.” Mennonites from Chortitza, including Epp, had been settled in these villages to serve as model farmers for the less experienced Jewish settlers. Epp’s diary, except for occasional references to Jewish-Mennonite squabbles, portrays the pattern of daily life as it existed in any Mennonite colony. As a traditional minister, his jurisdiction included all...
widespread. When Epp first heard that “everyone in Russia had to render military service” on November 18, 1870, he noted that “the judgments of God are already approaching!” On the last of the year (1870), he pondered the “cloud of tribulation and affliction” which threatened. His apprehension was apparently shared by many of his fellow ministers. When they met on February 11, 1871, elder Dyck, in his sermon, expressed the fear that “God had allowed this punishment to come because of our sins.” The second speaker, Heinrich Epp, referred to Mennonite mothers who “gazed into the dark future with deep apprehension.” The next day, a special service was held in Chortitza to “beseech the blessing of God for the journey.” For Epp, Privilegium had a narrow definition—complete exemption from military service. As 1872 drew to a close and the issue remained unresolved, he spoke of the “dark thunder cloud” (December 31, 1872) which was gathering. The issue was simple—“our freedom of faith is in danger.”

In 1873 Jacob Epp learned that other Mennonites did not share his anxiety about the future. In mid-January he still spoke of the “general consensus” for migration (January 15, 1873). By the end of the month he complained that many “in our Chortitza congregations” did not take the existing threat “very seriously.” There were, nevertheless, others who had already sold their farms and were leaving by late February, 1873. By the end of the year, the preparations for departure were rather widespread.

Some clarification of those for and against emigration occurred early in 1874. Villages like Chortitza, Einlage, Kronsweide and Neuohchfeld refused to participate in a special service in the spring. Todtleben was something of a water carrier. In the emigration story. There was also a popular term for members of the ecclesiastical officialdom. It could also be a title of respect for a senior male in the community. Ohnmittels - The room of the church in which the ministerial council usually met. Sinitztaetsdienst - A form of alternative service which implied medical duties in the army.

NOTES


December 17, 1870

An elder conference was held here regarding military service. It was decided to get more information and to continue the Brandeschaft. Another conference is to be held in the new year. Then steps are to be taken to discharge the obligation of military service.

January 8, 1871

Today there was an elder conference regarding the question of nonresistance. We have elected two men, elder Sudermann of Berdjansk and elder Goertz of Steinfield. They are to deal with the question if [pastor] Hahn in St. Petersburg agrees. Jakob Peters of Pordenau and Barkmann of Halbstadt are to acquaint our Brethren in the Old Colony with the matter so that they can also elect a few men.

January 10, 1871

Bruderschaft . . . the congregation was informed of the danger to our nonresistance and of the delegates to be sent. They are to remember these men in prayer. We were urged to change our ways.

January 22, 1871

Today there was an elder’s conference again. Many ministers came together on account of St. Petersburg (the actions of St. Petersburg). There were representatives from the Old Colony and Berghai. Almost all the elders were here. The teacher Franz Isaak, Peter Goertz, the secretary Janzen and elder Leonhard Sudermann of Berdjansk were elected to travel to St. Petersburg. Now we think there will be peace. God grant it!

July 4, 1872

In the forenoon, father and I drove to the Rudnerweiche church where there was Bruderschaft. First it was decided to send a delegation to St. Petersburg as soon as possible to petition the tsar to continue to uphold our exemption from military service. Second, it was decided that the monies needed should be collected voluntarily. Third, the question of footwashing would need further study. Fourth, the elder earnestly admonished the Brethren to stop the wrangling and quarreling and to deal with one another in love. Then the Lord would also give his blessing to the negotiations with the authorities.

December 27, 1872

There was a large Bruderschaft in the Rudnerweiche church. First elder Peter Goertz of Steinfield held a short
On Sunday forenoon we fetched the entire Cornelius Dalke family for lunch. Afternoon we drove with them to Neukirch. I lent Cornelius a horse to drive to the railway station. We have taken our leave of them.

**Jacob Epp Diary**
(Mennonite Heritage Center, Winnipeg, Manitoba)

1870

**November 18, 1870**
On Wednesday at 15:00 hours [my] brother Diedrich Epp returned from his journey to Chortitz . . . . He brought disturbing news: in future everyone in Russia will have to render military service just like in Prussia! How can our Privilegium help us now, which exempted us and our posterity from military service in perpetuity. Can it protect us against the commands of higher authority? Oh I fear our community is facing a dark future for the judgments of God are already approaching!

**December 31, 1870**
Only one cloud of tribulation and affliction threatens our faith. It relates to our freedom [from military service], but [so far] the government has told us nothing. We have richly deserved punishment, for the life in our congregations is more worldly than Christian . . . . What will the new year bring? God alone knows.

1871

**February 11, 1871**
On Thursday a conference for all the ministers (Lehrer) of the Chortitz and Kronswede congregations was held in the Chortitz church. By mistake the brethren in Neuendorf, Schonhorst and Neuhorst were invited to a Bruderschaft (brotherhood meeting), and we saw many, many sleights arriving. Preparations for a service had to be made immediately. The church stove had to be heated and arrangements made for the singing.

The reason for the ministerial conference which I attended related to a consultation on the forthcoming journey to St. Petersburg. The [deputation] hoped, if possible, to avert the threatening danger of military service. For this purpose the Chortitz and Kronswede congregations elected our beloved elder Gerhard Dyck and my brother Heinrich Epp. Now they wished to bid farewell to all their fellow ministers. Elder G. Dyck had attended a conference in the Molotschna where those congregations elected elder Leonhard Sudermann of Berdyansky, Peter Goerzon of Rudnerweid, the minister Franz Isaac of Ohrloff and the district secretary Hermann Janzen. The Molotschna delegates wanted the approval of the Fuersorge Comitae, as proposed by our elder and so wanted to travel via Odessa. In Charkov one delegation would wait for the other at a predetermined lodging.

We sent the district head Isaac Lehn and the former district head Jacob Hamm to the Fuersorge Comitae in Odessa on our behalf. A telegram from them had arrived informing us that they had [safely] arrived, spoken with the president who authorized the journey and who gave permission for the absence of the minister Epp. They now wished to leave for St. Petersburg and present their credentials to the minister of defense. They carried a petition for the minister with them and a [similar] one had already been presented to the governor of Ekaterinoslav. As soon as the travellers from Odessa return, elder Gerhard Dyck and [my] brother Epp will begin their journey to St. Petersburg.

After we had entered the church and sang several verses, elder Dyck stepped behind the pulpit and talked about the purpose of their journey. God had allowed this punishment to come because of our sins. He urged the congregation to an earnest return to God through Jesus Christ. Then God would give his blessing for this journey. All were also to implore God to direct the heart of our gracious tsar so that the threatening danger might be averted. All hearts were stirred. Following the prayer, the elder invited brother Heinrich Epp to speak [whose words] were no less moving. Lord give your blessing! In his address, the brother observed that mothers also participated in this matter on account of their little sons. They gazed into the dark future with deep apprehension. He urged that during their absence the brethren speak [to the mothers] that, so they too would pray to God. If you at home persist in believing prayer, you can accomplish more than we in St. Petersburg. He also mentioned that every night before they went to sleep and every morning when they got up they should think in love of the [families] left behind and include
them in their prayer. Once more the elder summoned the congregation to prayer. After we had sung he closed the meeting.

A beautiful, moving service. Oh that the Lord would accompany them with his blessing! Various matters were discussed in the "Omnistuebchen." It was decided to hold a service tomorrow morning. Friday, in the Chortitza church in order to beseech the blessing of God for the journey. It was to be announced in all villages (except Neudenhorst, Schenhorst and Neuhorst who were present) and everyone was invited to participate. Elder Peter Klassen of the Kronswieder church had not come. Only [their] ministers Heinrich Pauls, Cornelius Pauls and Cornelius Friesen were present. The service tomorrow morning will probably be very large. After we had wished both the grace and blessing of the Lord God we parted from one another.

March 30, 1871

In the afternoon I received a letter from brother Heinrich Epp dated March 28, a part of which reads:

"We have returned home from our St. Petersburg journey safely and in good spirit. The prayers of the brethren have not been without results. The angels of the Lord have protected us and removed many difficulties along the way. It was not us but the Lord. Praise and thanks to him. I do not have time for a detailed account since I have to prepare a sermon for tomorrow morning. You and the rest of the people will have to be satisfied if I picture the overall highlights.

We left here on the morning of February 16. On February 20 we reached the railway and on February 24 arrived safely in St. Petersburg. The Molotschka deputies were already there: elder Leonard Sudermann from Berdjansk, the two ministers Franz Isaac and Peter Goertz and the district secretary Herman Janzen. On February 27 we had an audience with the minister of State Domains, Selene, whom we handed a petition written in Russian. The minister seemed like a stern man but was well disposed towards us. He promised to accept our case but could not give us any reassurance. The nonresistance question rested with the highest levels of government and any promises he made would be premature. President Eringer [of the Fuerrorger Convent], who was also in St. Petersburg and still is, later said that we had left a good impression with the minister. That too was grace from God.

After this we had an audience with Count Heyden, the president of the commission preparing the military law. The two elders had already been to see him. They want to free the Mennonites from military or weapon service but deploy them for service there for another year and a half or two years. Consequently we still had a respite of 24 or 25 years.

We also spoke with senator Heyde. The two elders, but not I, also visited a member of that commission, the secretary? Gerne Gross and the General Governor from Odessa, Ketzehor. We wanted to see the tsar in order to present our petition to the father of our land but were advised against this by those who seemed to have our interests at heart. They felt we would spoil matters with those highly placed men who are now well disposed towards us. We therefore desisted. As requested we are preparing a small memorandum which we will present to Count Heyden, the senator and the Ministry of State Domains. When you come here or [perhaps] even sooner I will give you a copy of our petition.

We also saw the tsar taking a promenade in his summer garden. Unexpectedly he spoke to us and asked where we were from, who we were and why we had come. After we had informed him he uttered, "Ah," and stepped into his carriage and drove away. Judging from his questions he almost seemed to know we were Mennonites. We left St. Petersburg on March 8 and arrived home on the evening of March 17."

May 15, 1871

When I still lived on the Island of Chortitza as a school teacher, several neighbors paid me a visit. When the conversation turned to our Privilegium, the opinion was expressed that it was given to us in perpetuity and that the freedom guaranteed in it were forever. They were upset when I remarked that if changes occurred in the land, the government could always revoke it. Someone said that as long as a descendant of tsar Paul I, God rest his soul, sat upon the throne our Privilegium was inviolable! I answered that nothing in this world is forever, only God's Word. This Privilegium was given to us but it could also be taken away. Only the Privilegium given to us in Jesus and sealed with his blood was irrevocable... How quickly the time has come when our Privilegium has lost its worth! . . . By our sins we have deserved what God has brought about. Tsar Paul signed the Privilegium with his own hand in the year 1800. His son Nicholas approved it and under the government of Alexander it loses its worth!

December 31, 1871

The Privilegium which guaranteed religious freedom to our congregations appears to have lost its worth.

1872

September 8, 1872

From 14:00 to 17:00 hours all village mayors (now called Dorfsaetze—village elders) and the ministers of the Chortitza and Kronswieder congregations together with their two elders gathered in the Chortitza church. I was also present. The reason: the Molotschka Ohms had already left for St. Petersburg because of the military [service] question. The discussion centered on whether we too should send someone and if so who. It was decided to telegraph Pastor Hans in St. Petersburg to inquire about the status of the matter and to ask his advice as to whether one should come now or later. [Once his answer arrived] we would meet for another consultation. For the closing Acht blijf mit deiner Gnade was sung and the assembly dismissed with prayer.

October 21, 1872

In the evening brother Diedrich Epp and his wife returned from their trip to Chortitza. He said that elder Gerhard Dyck and brother Heinrich Epp had travelled to Yalta in the Crimea in order to petition his majesty the tsar for exemption from military service and for the preservation of our religious freedom. The Lord our God bless their journey.

December 31, 1872

Again we stand at the end of the old year. If I look back and into the future my heart fills with an uneasy sadness. The sword of God's wrath is stretched over our congregations, a dark thunder cloud gathers over us. The lightning is only visible on the horizon, but the roll of the thunder can be heard from afar. Our freedom of faith is in danger. All attempts of our deputations to present our petition to the father of our land have failed. Our neighbors the Mennonites in Neuhaltenthal who purchased land close to Sophiewka and settled on it have sold it again and are ready to settle in Canada in America. A deputation is being sent there after New Year. Even among us there are stirrings for emigration in order to preserve our religious freedom. According to a letter from my brother-in-law Bernhard Warkentin, whose son is visiting there, the English government wishes to have us and the land is supposed to be very good.

1873

January 4, 1873

On Tuesday afternoon I and my neighbor Isbrand Friesen, who supplied the horses and wagon, drove to Neuhaltenthal where we arrived late and took quarters at L. Tschetter, who graciously accepted us. The reason for our journey was that we had heard that they were in possession of the new military law.
We wanted to know more about it. After coffee we went to see their minister. A number of others had also come. This congregation had sold their land to the nobleman L. Danilewski for 50 rubles per dessiatine including all buildings, cattle and implements. They retained two windmills, furniture, chickens and pigs. Only one neighbor and his son had not yet sold their 200 dessiatines.

Their other ministers had travelled to Alexanderwohl in the Molotschina colony. They want to send a deputation to Canada in America from here [so that] they can emigrate there. They took the aforementioned law with them. They nevertheless told us that we should believe them when they affirmed that the new law, once it came into effect, expressly stated that those on their own land were [subject to] personal military service and would have to perform *Sanitaetsdienst* on crown lands. I had a letter from my brother-in-law Bernhard Warkentin of Altona with me. In it he son Bernhard, who is still in America, lists a number of advantages for emigrants to America. I had to read this letter whose content was eagerly absorbed. They seem to agree with my long-held fears concerning our religious freedom! Oh how securely we formerly walked our pathway—we who were joyfully inclined to thankfulness and their love for emigration or stay has been handled too superficially and is not leading us to an awareness of our trespasses which, through sincere repentance, would lead us back to our Savior.

**January 24, 1873**

On Wednesday morning Jacob Hiebert hitched [his horses] and drove us to Pordenau in the Gnadenfeld [volost]. There was a conference and *Bruderschaft* in the church. Elder Isaac Peters led the discussions. It focused on the planned emigration and the dispatch of a deputation to America. Approximately 2000 rubles were designated for this venture and an additional 1,000 rubles added. The elder Leonard Sudermann of Berdjansk was elected as a deputy by majority vote... The deputies from Berghal, Heinrich Wiebe and the district mayor Peters were also present. The deputation is to leave towards the end of February. May God give his blessing!

**January 31, 1873**

The threatening thunderclouds which sweep over our heads are interpreted in different ways. The majority in our Chortitza congregations do not take them very seriously! Many accusations asserting that I roused the church from its sweet rest have been leveled at me. Yet my heart agrees with the author of the new song: “First to Calvary, not first to America!” Oh if in this serious time we could reflect on what best serves our peace. Then we would humble ourselves before God in true repentance and the Lord would deflect the lightning so that it will not harm us.

**February 6, 1873**

We had guests from the Chortitza colony, namely the couples Gerhard Andres and Cornelius Harms... The guests informed us that a dispatch from pastor Hans in St. Petersburg had arrived in which the Mennonite representatives were invited to come [to St. Petersburg to discuss] our nonresistance. The Molotschina deputation waited until Chortitza discussed the matter. A hurried vote in the entire district elected brother Heinrich Epp, but they did not know who the second delegate was. Well dear God acknowledge this journey by giving it your blessing.

**February 21, 1873**

I drank coffee at Johann Hoeppner’s residence who then drove me to D. Klassen in Heubuden, who was elected as a deputy to America by the *Kleine Gemeinde*. Klassen was with me at the conference in Pordenau... He told me that he was leaving for America the following week with the Hutterthal colonists.

**March 19, 1873**

The Franz Giesbrechts from Nowoshitomir who just returned from the Chortitza district told me that our deputies, elder Gerhard Dyck, my brother Heinrich Epp and Heinrich Heese from Ekaterinoslav, returned from their trip to St. Petersburg last Wednesday. They had not spoken with the tsar, only with the grand duke. The decision will be made by Easter.

**April 1, 1873**

Diedrich Epp preached. After he was finished he read a report about the work of our deputies in St. Petersburg as well as a copy of the petition given to grand duke Constantine Nikolavich. Yesterday I received both papers from brother Heinrich Epp.

**April 13, 1873**

The danger that our faith is threatened does not seem to concern many and so the interest in emigration to America has declined. We anxiously await the decision from St. Petersburg.

**August 14, 1873**

Wednesday before breakfast Enz drove us to David Klassen in Heubuden with his team. As a deputy of his church, he had returned from America a week ago. In a short time he told us many things. They have decided to settle in Manitoba. What will our church do? Put its hands on the lap and half asleep walk towards the threatening danger? Oh God help us to know your will.

**September 16, 1873**

I preached in the church in Neuosterwitz... After we had eaten lunch at D. Dyck’s we drove on to Chortitza... In the evening I went to the deacon Gerhard Loewen and met elder Gerhard Wiebe of the Berghal church and elder Johann Wiebe from Grossfuerstenlande. The conversation focused solely on the forthcoming emigration to America. The Berghal elder and the district mayor [of the settlement] Peters had been to see the governor in Yekaterinoslav about the selling of their land. The settlers had received title to their land from the government the previous year and so resale is allowed for the next three years. They are to send in a petition so that the governor...
can present it to the Imperial Council.

October 9, 1873

There was a large Bruderschaft in the church at Chortitza Tuesday forenoon. I came expressly for this purpose. The Bruderschaft was concerned with the emigration question. It was decided to take a wait and see attitude during the coming winter since the decision on the military law will soon be forthcoming. In any case another Bruderschaft would be held in the spring of 1874. Everything progressed calmly. Only Johann Hiebert of Einlage wanted concrete action. He wanted us to emigrate as soon as possible but could provide no concrete information or plan—only what he had heard. The church was filled to capacity . . .

December 31, 1873

Our elder Gerhard Dyck and brother Heinrich Epp twice travelled together to St. Petersburg in order to secure our freedom of religion. It is said that the two dear travellers were to arrive home on the evening of boxing day. I have not yet learned what they have accomplished. Many of our coreligionists in the Molotschna and here in Barsenka on the Solonne and Basawulk [rivers] are preparing to emigrate to America. Show me your will, oh Lord, and allow me to make a decision pleasing to you.

1874

February 15, 1874

On Friday morning there was a general Bruderschaft in the church in Chortitza . . . It has now been decided that we must perform a Sanitätsdienst or [if we wish] decide to emigrate during the next six years. After much discussion elder Gerhard Dyck suggested that we send a delegation during the summer of 1874. There was considerable opposition to the proposal, but it was finally accepted. Will it really be implemented? . . . Many are not for emigration, but anxious feelings about the dark future weigh heavily upon the mind . . .

March 5, 1874

On Tuesday morning there was a Bruderschaft in Neuchortitza in the home of my son [-in-law] Johann Andres. In accordance with the written request of elder Gerhard Dyck, I asked the brethren, after some introductory words and prayer, how the costs of sending the delegation to America should be covered. After much discussion there was a consensus that the levies be made [on a percentage] based on current levels of fire insurance for each farm . . .

March 8, 1874

On Friday morning there was a conference in the Chortitza church, which was the reason for my trip. Elder Gerhard Dyck presented the urgency of sending the delegation to America and asked the [village] mayors what they had decided in view of the February 15 Bruderschaft. Chortitza, Einlage, Kronswieide and Neuhofelder declared that they did not wish to send a delegation and did not want to participate in such a venture. All the others desired ‘it and would gladly bear the costs. It was decided to hold a voluntary collection for this purpose. The mayors were instructed to provide the elder with a list of the gifts as soon as possible in order to determine whether the matter will come to fruition or not. May the Lord give His blessing! It appears that we will not utilize the six free years we have been given!

March 14, 1874

Franz Dyck from Islutschistaja brought me a list of the designated gifts of each [settler] for the delegation to America . . . I received a memorandum by express rider from the Chortitza volente office in which on command of the grand marshal and H. Isprawnik, I am ordered to prepare a conscription list from my church book for all those born in 1853. I am to send this back by April 22. What of the six free years promised by our exalted monarch and of the reprieve for emigration?

April 17, 1874

All the ministers have gone to Halbstadt on orders of higher authorities. His excellency General von Todtleben has been sent by his majesty to negotiate with the Mennonites. What will good come of this? The authorities do not want to allow us to leave the land. Perhaps they will change the law so that it can be harmonized with our confession of faith.

April 22, 1874

An express messenger brought me a memorandum which announces a general Bruderschaft on April 24 in Chortitza. All church members are invited and especially those ministers who are to appear before General-Adjutant von Todtleben on Thursday evening to present the community’s decision whether to stay or emigrate. The memorandum also noted that his excellency was making special concessions to the Mennonites in the name of the all-gracious tsar: namely that they would not be used for Sanitätsdienst but for service in forestry planting, trades and similar activities. They will remain entirely unto themselves and have no outside connections.

April 24, 1874

On Wednesday there was a general Bruderschaft in the Chortitza church. In addition to the elders Gerhard Dyck, Peter Klassen and Johann Wiebe, some thirty others gathered together with a few ministers and deacons. After prayer, elder Gerhard Dyck addressed the assembly on the purpose of the gathering. The elders and teachers had been in Halbstadt on orders of his high excellency the General-Adjutant von Todtleben. The elder asserted that his excellency in the name of the all-gracious tsar offered our son a civilian service unconnected with the military establishment. They would serve

1. in hospitals
2. on the railways
3. as firemen in the cities
4. in the forestry etc.

They would remain under our spiritual supervision. Those who refused the service had complete freedom to emigrate during the next six years. In order to resolve the issue a vote was taken. Of the 560 brethren who cast their ballot, 528 voted to stay, 32 wanted to emigrate.

April 25, 1874

On Thursday at 16:00 hours his excellency the General-Adjutant von Todtleben accompanied by the Yekaterinoslav governor and other dignitaries made his appearance. A triumphal arch had been erected in front of Hermann Niebuhr’s porch with a banner from Psalm 134:3 “Bless the Lord out of Zion.” Brother Heinrich Epp had placed his students in front [of the arch] and received his excellency with the national anthem. At his request they also sang a German song. The entire yard was filled with people. He (Todtleben) wanted to speak with the ministerial council and the village mayor. Since the church was designated for this the crowd streamed in that direction. He allowed himself to be driven, walked into the church, stepped behind the pulpit and gave a speech in which he exalted the virtues of our monarch. The tumult and noise caused by the crowd pouring into the church apparently did not make a good impression upon our exalted guest, for the tone of his voice was earnest and determined. At the close of his speech, elder Gerhard Dyck thanked him and declared that the community wanted to help and had elected the work in the railway workshops (Werkstaetten). In the same tone Todtleben responded that we were not negotiating
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by Stephanie Hiebert

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