

Menno and Münster

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The great majority of the world's Anabaptists are called either "Mennonites" or "Amish," the result of a schism that occurred ca. 1700. Members of a different Anabaptist tradition are called "Hutterites." These names evoke the memories of the early leaders Menno Simons, Jakob Ammann and Jakob Hutter. The affiliated movement in the Netherlands is called "Doopsgezinden," for which the sensible and obvious English translation would be "Baptists," except that the smaller Anabaptist and the larger Baptist tradition have preferred to underscore their distinctness – the Baptist tradition that originated in England and then spread throughout the world regards itself as springing from a combination of Anabaptist and Calvinist sources.

When unified action and mutual understanding among the many Anabaptist groupings is sought, the expression is the "Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition." "Mennonite," of course, refers to the Frisian religious teacher Menno Simons (1496-1561). There is a problem in the wide appropriation of Menno's name by Anabaptists – he was neither the founder of the movement (Conrad Grebel has a better claim to that title), its most distinguished theologian (Balthasar Hubmaier and Pilgram Marpeck outrank him here) nor its most distinguished early martyr (Felix Mantz and Michael Sattler come to mind). He was more a survivor than a hero. Even before his death perhaps a quarter of the Dutch movement he had led opted to call themselves "Doopsgezinden" rather than "Mennonites," because of their irreconcilable differences with Menno. The Swiss and South German and Alsatian Anabaptists chose the name "Mennonite" in a slow and uneven process. That they often called themselves "Mennonites," and arrived in America as Mennonites (or Amish), was due rather to their increasing cultural and financial dependence on the Anabaptists of the prosperous and enlightened Dutch Republic than to any deference they paid to the memory of Menno Simons. Hence Menno's historic importance stemmed from the character of his connection with Netherlands Anabaptism. The nature of that connection is itself a historical problem.

The Anabaptism of the Netherlands and the North Sea and Baltic coasts began with the career of Melchior Hoffman. That is my opinion; it is the unanimous view of the scholars connected with the Doopsgezinde church of the Netherlands, as well as of the postconfessional scholars who write their history. Among contemporaries only Abraham Friesen seems to dissent from this view – he contends that Menno got his views on believers' baptism purely from a study of Erasmus' treatment of the Great Commission (Matthew 28: 19, 20) in his *Paraphrases on the New Testament*. Friesen's position is not without substance, Cornelis Augustijn has shown that Menno read Erasmus in Latin and had a serious theological debt to him. But the notion that Menno's thought and the early Mennonite tradition comes primarily from Erasmus can be a device to deny the obvious

debt to Hoffman. In the 1520s Hoffman, a furrier by trade, was a lay missionary for the Reformation in the Baltic region. As early as 1526, he was foretelling the end of the world for 1533. The disorder, riots and iconoclasm connected with Hoffman's lay apostolate got him into trouble with university-educated Lutheran clergymen, as the Lutheran Reformation became increasingly established in the Baltic lands.

Hoffman's rivalry with the Lutheran pastors inclined him increasingly to non-Lutheran doctrinal positions. The first and most obvious of these was a denial of Luther's doctrine of the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the elements of the Lord's Supper. This standpoint, which Hoffman took in the Flensburg Disputation (1529) in Holstein, got him expelled from Scandinavia and the Baltic lands. Since Hoffman's belief that the bread and wine were symbolic memorials of Christ's sacrifice was taught widely in Switzerland and south Germany, he was welcomed by the Reformers of Strasbourg. Strasbourg was in the late 1520s a very tolerant place that welcomed the widest variety of Christian dissenters. There Hoffman met not only refugee Anabaptists, some of whom claimed the gift of prophecy, but also non-Anabaptist radical intellectuals whom modern scholarship classes as "Spiritualists," like Sebastian Franck and Caspar von Schwenckfeld. In these stimulating surroundings, Hoffman crafted a full-blown radical personal theology. Most striking was Hoffman's Christology, which minimized the orthodox doctrine (so important to Pilgram Marpeck) that Christ was fully human – a human creature as well as Son of God. Schwenckfeld had led the way in stressing that, even in his life on earth, Christ received his human nature in no sense from his mother Mary, but entirely from the Holy Spirit. Hoffman's teaching, that Christ's flesh came down from heaven (like Old Testament manna) and received none of its substance from his human mother Mary, emphasized the divine nature of Christ and minimized the human nature even more radically than did Schwenckfeld's teaching of a "glorified body of Christ." This unorthodox doctrine was held throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by the three-quarters of the Dutch Anabaptists who called themselves Mennonites rather than "Doopsgezinden," and was essential for Menno Simons, despite Abraham Friesen's insistence (without any evidence that I am aware of) that "Menno had it foisted on him." It is the doctrinal litmus test of Melchiorite Anabaptism, just as Christological orthodoxy is the most characteristic teaching of Marpeck's Anabaptism.

The next stress of Hoffman's theology was a two-way covenant between God and the individual human being. People were intrinsically sinful and only through the grace of the sinless Christ could they be redeemed, but this grace was extended to everyone, and the redeemed person was fully able to respond to God's grace by a regenerate life. Moreover, anyone who abandoned the covenant knowingly and wantonly (with something more than a mere stumble or slip) was irretrievably lost – here the characteristic Melchiorite doctrine of the unforgivable sin. The seal of the covenant knowingly and responsibly entered into was the baptism of the mature believer: it was a symbol of the covenant, the ring Christ gave his human bride. But Hoffman did not stress baptism as much as other Anabaptist leaders; characteristically, we know nothing about his own baptism. Always important for Hoffman was his self-understanding, following Revelation 11, as one of the two witnesses of the last days; tradition associated these two witnesses with Elijah and Enoch, the two people caught up into heaven alive. Hoffman's following of Strasbourg prophets convinced him that he was the apocalyptic Elijah. Just

exactly what would happen with the last days was murky. It had overtones of righteous violence. The prophet's immediate following would eschew all violence, but they would support godly rulers like the government of Strasbourg, who would withstand the attack of the Imperial dragon in the final tribulations. Hoffman never separated the true church and the secular government with the decisiveness of a Michael Sattler, a Pilgram Marpeck or even a Balthasar Hubmaier. A Christian ruler was not a contradiction in terms for him, but rather a source of apocalyptic hope. Much of what we know about Melchior Hoffman helps us to better understand the Münster episode, as well as the theology of Menno Simons, especially in the early stages of his calling as an Anabaptist leader.

Melchior Hoffman began baptizing adult believers in the city of Emden in 1530, while on a trip from Strasbourg to East Frisia. East Frisia was an independent principality bordering on the Habsburg Netherlands, which at that time had its capital in Brussels. East Frisia was open then to various kinds of Protestantism because of the friendly attitude of its ruler and aristocracy. The Netherlands government was trying to enforce Catholic orthodoxy but not doing so very effectively because of the stubborn local independence of its provinces and cities. The majority of religious people in the Netherlands, including many priests, were in those years sympathetic to some kind of reform. They were aware of Luther and Erasmus, without making very clear distinctions between their teachings – in general they were open to a symbolic interpretation of the Lord's Supper of the sort taught by Ulrich Zwingli, Andreas Karlstadt, and, of course, Melchior Hoffman. In these conditions Hoffman's teaching of adult baptism had easy entry from East Frisia to the Netherlands. It seems, however, that only the minority of reform supporters who were caught up in Hoffman's belief in the imminent end of the world exposed themselves to the scrutiny of government officials by the overt act of adult baptism. When a number of Hoffman's prominent followers were executed at the Hague in 1531, he was sufficiently shocked that he declared a two-year suspension of adult baptisms – that is, until 1533 when he expected the end of the world. So Hoffman's apocalyptic message spread in a more underground manner among groups of the convinced in the Netherlands and surrounding territories. Meanwhile, in the appointed year 1533 and in Strasbourg, the city he expected to be the New Jerusalem, Hoffman was imprisoned by a now less tolerant city government that was turning in the direction of Protestant orthodoxy. He remained in jail for ten years, apparently until he died.

This same year, 1533, was the year of important changes toward a radical reformation in the Westphalian city of Münster. Münster was a semi-independent city ruled by a council and an assembly of guild masters, under the overlordship of a prince-bishop. Its Reformation was headed by Bernhard Rothmann, a local cleric with strong support in the guilds and the less privileged citizenry. Impatient of orthodox Lutheranism, which was becoming dominant in all the pro-Reformation territories in Germany at the time, Rothmann and his fellow pastors opted for a symbolic view of the Lord's Supper and for a theoretical support of adult baptism (without actually putting it into practice). Münster attracted the attention in 1533 of Melchiorites from the Netherlands, like the young innkeeper Jan Beukels of Leiden, who visited in the summer; and its pastors' writings on the sacraments were presented to a gathering of Melchiorites in Amsterdam at the end of the year. Hoffman's two years were up; the prophet was languishing in prison in

Strasbourg; hence his authority was obviously on the wane. In these circumstances an unstable baker from Haarlem, Jan Matthijs, declared that he was “Enoch,” the second apocalyptic witness of Revelation 11, and that adult baptism should resume immediately. He foretold the end of the world for the next Easter, the following April, and commissioned apostles to baptize and assemble a holy people. Two of these apostles baptized Rothmann and the like-minded members of the Münster pastorate in January 1534. In the following days Rothmann and his colleagues won 1400 persons, about a quarter of the adults in the city, for the illegal Anabaptist persuasion. The following weeks were marked by great tensions between Münster’s three religious groups: Anabaptists, Lutherans and Catholics. There was no actual violence, and the Anabaptists declared their non-violent intentions, but the Bishop of Münster raised troops to besiege the city. Increasingly fearful Lutherans and Catholics drifted out of the city. With the regular council elections of February 1534, a majority of the new council were either Anabaptists or Anabaptist sympathizers. In February 1534 the Münster Anabaptists saw signs in the sky, unusual solar and cloud formations which they interpreted as signs of their seemingly miraculous deliverance. This success convinced Matthijs and his followers that Münster, not Strasbourg, was the New Jerusalem, the city of refuge where all Christ’s faithful should gather, to preserve themselves when God punished the world with fire at Easter. That the Münster Anabaptists took up arms to defend themselves is now interpreted by many scholars as the natural response of an early modern city under attack, not the fault of the teachings of Jan Matthijs. But the Melchiorite variety of Anabaptism had never distanced itself from government in the manner of Anabaptism in south Germany, Switzerland and Moravia, so it was fully compatible with ideas of civic self-defense.

Anabaptist Münster defended itself with remarkable competence, holding off the troops of the Bishop of Münster assisted by the Catholic and Lutheran princes of Germany, for sixteen months from February 1534 until June 1535. During this period its internal life became a scandal, publicized by little pamphlets that were the equivalent of the tabloid press in the early days of printing. Realizing an ideal then common among all Anabaptist groups, the Münster Anabaptists took money out of circulation and made an effort at imitating the community of goods of the early church as described in Acts 2 and 4. To order morals and provisioning in a city in which adult women outnumbered adult men by three to one, it instituted polygamy on the model of the Old Testament. Twenty-five hundred Melchiorite immigrants from Westphalia and the Netherlands replaced the two thousand Lutheran and Catholic émigrés of February 1534, and they wielded great power in the city, particularly the “prophets” Jan Matthijs and Jan Beukels of Leiden. The unstable Jan Matthijs was killed attacking the besiegers on April 5, 1534, the Easter Sunday for which he had predicted the end of the world. After that the canny and ruthless Jan of Leiden took control, first replacing the Münster council with a twelve man Council of Elders, and then, to the astonishment of the world, including the Melchiorite flock outside Münster, in September 1534 declaring himself the new King David, the only legitimate ruler on earth, pending the imminent return of Christ, the peaceful Solomon. The Melchiorites in north Germany and Netherlands found Anabaptist Münster perplexing and disturbing. Many of them had tried to heed the call to go there in March 1534, but had been turned back by government officials. They believed that something

miraculous had happened there to bring their co-religionists to power, but they had received no such signs themselves, which Rothmann's pamphlets told them to expect. So they waited – some of them prepared to defend themselves when government officials came hunting for them, some of them nonresistant.

What was the role of Menno Simons, priest in Pingjum and Witmarsum in Frisia from 1524 to 1536 and most likely the brother of Peter Simons, one of the Twelve Elders whom Jan of Leiden had commissioned to rule Münster from April to September 1534? An autobiographical fragment written late in life reveals some parts of his story, and perhaps conceals other parts. Like many Catholic priests in the Netherlands Menno was an evangelical reformer, aware of Erasmus and Luther. He had come to doubt the doctrine of transubstantiation, the official Catholic explanation of the mass, and the execution of one of Melchior Hoffman's followers in Frisia had led him to turn away from infant baptism. In 1536 he abandoned his parish and went into hiding, soon to be commissioned as an elder of the scattered Anabaptists shattered by the disaster of Münster. Was he, then, someone entirely untouched by earlier Anabaptist mistakes – a late-born savior of the movement who came in from the outside to sanctify the succession of adult baptisms that Jan Matthijs began in the last months of 1533, perhaps on the basis of his study of the Great Commission as exegeted in Erasmus's *Paraphrases on the New Testament*? This seems improbable if only because, throughout his life, he taught the characteristic doctrines of Melchior Hoffman.

In the early twentieth century the maverick Dutch Doopgezind pastor Karel Vos suggested that Menno was likely baptized and became a Covenanter in 1534. This view has been endorsed in the recent book by Helmut Isaak, *Menno Simons and the New Jerusalem* (2006). Based on suggestions by twentieth-century scholars Vos, W. J. Kühler, and H. W. Meihuizen, together with his own close textual study of Menno's writings in various editions, Isaak has proposed an order of composition of Menno's works that varies widely from the dates of publication of preserved editions, carefully researched by Irvin B. Horst. Not all of Menno's works were published when they were written. The case of "On the Blasphemy of Jan of Leiden," attributed to Menno, but not published until 1627 apparently for the first time, merits special attention. The work's authenticity has, of course, been debated. Isaak demonstrates correspondence between the text of the "Blasphemy" and other works of Menno – the *Meditation on the Twenty-Fifth Psalm*, *The New Birth*, and both the earlier and later editions of the *Foundation Book*. These textual linkages could perhaps be used to make the case that the "Blasphemy" was a particularly ingenious forgery, but for Isaak they show its genuineness. Written during the Münster kingdom, it expresses Menno's outrage at Jan's usurpation of the prerogatives of Christ; that it was never published during Menno's lifetime was due to his shame and embarrassment about its reflection of his close ties to the Münster Anabaptists. Isaak argues that Menno was well-versed in the writings not only of Melchior Hoffman but of Bernhard Rothmann as well. That Menno never, throughout his career, abandoned the Melchiorite notion of the godly ruler means to Isaak that, at the height of his influence in the 1540s, Menno had serious hopes of finding a ruler who would direct his subjects to the true religion, as did the Old Testament exemplars Joshua, Hezekiah, and Josiah. Menno was seeking his own Constantine, so to speak. According to this way of looking at Menno's trajectory, the 1550s were the decade of

disillusionment for him – supported by the Habsburg government in Brussels the inquisitors tracked down Mennonites and gave them the stark choice of recantation or death; there were an estimated one thousand Mennonite martyrs. At the same time a competing variety of Protestant, the Calvinists, moved into the Netherlands from France and Emden. They attracted aristocratic as well as bourgeois support, and in the 1560s the Calvinists were able to launch the revolt that created the Dutch Republic. The Netherlands were too hot for Menno; he left followers behind there, “suffering under the cross,” and he moved with relative freedom among followers in the Rhineland and along the North Sea and Baltic coasts. Now he accepted the fate of leader of a separated people, the “still in the land,” and issues of discipline, excommunication and marital shunning dominated his last years with their stress on the creation of a “congregation without spot or wrinkle” (Ephesians 5:27). Still, this picture is possibly over-schematized. Isaak has argued convincingly that Menno studied Rothmann, and Rothmann’s writings contain recurrent references to Ephesians 5. What Isaak has done is to raise the issues about Menno and Münster, and the trajectory of Menno’s theological and ecclesiological development. He has not given certain answers to the questions he asks, but he has introduced provocative questions into our interpretation of Menno.

In the first edition of his *Foundation Book* (1539/40), the classic statement that began Menno’s emergence as the presiding elder of Anabaptism in north Germany and the Netherlands, Menno looked back with compassion on the rank and file of militant Anabaptists who had fought in Münster, and who had fought for Münster at Oldeklooster in Frisia in March 1535 and in the Amsterdam uprising in May 1535: “I do not doubt but that our dear brethren who have formerly transgressed a little against the Lord, when they intended to defend their faith with arms, have a merciful God.” The sentence was deleted from the revised edition of the *Foundation Book* published in the 1550s. This compassion, of course, did not extend to the leaders who led these Anabaptists into violence, or to the “covenanters of the sword” who continued small-scale violence after the fall of Anabaptist Münster under Jan van Batenburg and his successors. In Menno’s eyes they were false prophets.

The leaders of a mainly peaceful remnant of Melchiorite Anabaptists who assembled at Bocholt in Westphalia in 1536 in an attempt to come to terms with the Münster disaster were a greater problem for Menno. These people, like Menno, were mostly untouched with violence, but their solutions to the crisis of the movement were mostly Spiritualist. The most important of these figures was David Joris of Delft, who made a strained but ingenious attempt to salvage something positive from the heritage of Münster. David presented himself as the “third David,” a lesser figure than King David of Israel or Christ the Second David, but nevertheless specially gifted to read the signs of the last days. Münster’s teaching on polygamy was diluted by David Joris into an overcoming of libidinal shame. On adult baptism, Joris assumed a position very similar to that of Caspar Schwenckfeld: believers’ baptism of adults was, indeed, most in accordance with Scripture, but external ceremonies were less important than spiritual realities, therefore infant baptism really did no harm. Such a position was extorted also from the imprisoned Melchior Hoffman in Strasbourg in 1539. David Joris had been commissioned as an elder by Obbe Philips, the same peaceful Anabaptist leader who commissioned Menno. In 1539, the same year that David Joris took refuge with wealthy

adherents in Antwerp, Obbe moved to Rostock on the Baltic. Menno noted in 1540 that Obbe had “fallen away,” and in Obbe’s *Confession* he made the standard Spiritualist objection that Melchior Hoffman, Jan Matthijs and their successors had erred in trying to restore apostolic baptism without the proper divine commission to do so. So it would appear that at the beginning of the 1540s Menno and Obbe Philips’ brother Dirk stood virtually alone in their effort to preserve north German and Netherlands Anabaptism from Spiritualist dissolution. This situation lends particular interest to the suggestion of Helmut Isaak that in his first writings prior to the *Foundation Book* Menno, too, was touched by the strong Spiritualist current that was sweeping Melchiorite Anabaptism after the fall of Münster. In his polemics against the Mennonites, David Joris’s son-in-law and spokesman Nikolaas van Blesdijk asked rhetorically: what was the difference between David Joris’ permission to his followers to be “Nicodemites,” and to participate in the worship of the established churches where they lived, and the practice of pregnant Mennonite women to take a trip when their babies were due, so that the neighbours would not realize that they left their infants unbaptized. Menno engaged in harsh criticisms of “corrupt sect leaders” like David Joris, and the Anabaptist future belonged to the leader who maintained some, even covert, degree of congregational organization and practice, rather than to exercise influence primarily by means of writings, as did the Spiritualist leaders.

But to preserve a church, even a minority, separated church, demanded the imposing of standards of belief and conduct. These issues proved a vexation to Menno in his later years. Adam Pastor, apparently baptized in Münster in 1534, was one of Menno’s most prominent fellow elders, a comrade in the competition with David Joris, but in 1547 Menno banned him for Christological errors, supposed anti-Trinitarianism. One of the differences was that Adam did not subscribe to Menno’s Melchiorite Christology, although he was accused also of denying the eternal preexistence of Christ before his human birth, a typical anti-Trinitarian standpoint. Ten years later, in 1557, about a quarter of the movement centered in the Waterland region of North Holland were expelled because they would not accept the rigorous banning practices demanded by Dirk Philips and a younger elder, Lenaert Bouwens, who was rapidly expanding the movement through new baptisms. The issue that brought the rift was marital shunning, which required that an excommunicated spouse be expelled from bed and board. Menno, old and infirm, was supposedly threatened with the ban himself if he should not maintain solidarity with Dirk and Lenaert. The Waterlanders tended towards a more spiritualized version of Anabaptism: Bouwens named them the “manure wagon” because of their alleged moral laxity. Characteristically, it was Waterlander congregations who raised money to support William of Orange in the revolt of the Netherlands against Spain, and thus prepared the way for toleration of the Mennonites in the Dutch Republic. They stopped calling themselves “Mennonites” and became “Doopsgezinden.” Menno spent his last years in a small landholding between Hamburg and Lübeck called Fresenburg, ruled by Bartholomäus von Ahlefeldt, a Lutheran nobleman, and perhaps a case in point of the Christian ruler in whom Menno believed throughout his life.

This lecture has emphasized, perhaps overemphasized, the odd fit between Menno Simons and the churches who now call themselves “Mennonites.” The beginnings of Anabaptism in north Germany and the Netherlands were very different from Anabaptist

beginnings in Switzerland and south Germany, yet, like the Russian and Pennsylvania German Mennonite immigrant streams in America, the two traditions gradually appropriated each other's religious heritage.

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Abstract

Menno and Münster

The world's Anabaptists are now named "Mennonites" (for Menno Simons), "Amish" (for Jakob Ammann), "Hutterites" (for Jakob Hutter), or "Doopsgezinden," although figures like Conrad Grebel, Felix Mantz, Balthasar Hubmaier, Michael Sattler, and Pilgram Marpeck made stronger contributions to the founding of the movement than Menno, Ammann, or Hutter. The wide use of the name "Mennonite" comes from the wealth and influence of Dutch churches that took Menno's name in the first two centuries of Anabaptism.

Most scholars think Melchior Hoffman founded the Anabaptist movement of the Netherlands and the North Sea and Baltic coasts. This is contested by Abraham Friesen, who thinks that Menno Simons founded the movement under the direct influence of Erasmus' *Paraphrases on the New Testament* (which Menno did read). This would make the connection of Menno and the Münster Anabaptists unimportant. The fact that Menno and the three-quarters of the Netherlands Anabaptists who called themselves "Mennonites" held to Hoffman's heterodox Christology seems to establish the connection between Hoffman and Menno. Hoffman also taught universal grace and human free will to accept it, baptism as the symbol of the covenant with God, a symbolic interpretation of the Lord's Supper, and the imminent end of the world (to occur in 1533). He thought of himself as "Elijah," one of the two apocalyptic witnesses foretold in Revelation 11. He began baptizing adults in Emden in 1530, but halted baptisms after some of his Dutch followers were executed in 1531. He was imprisoned in Strasbourg in 1533. He thought of Strasbourg as the chosen, apocalyptic city, and he never separated the true church from secular government in the manner of other Anabaptists. His following were the minority of Dutch evangelicals who shared his apocalyptic expectations.

In 1533 the Reformation in Münster in Westphalia took a radical turn. The leading Reformer, Bernhard Rothmann, with strong support from the guilds, advanced a symbolic interpretation of the Lord's Supper and opposed infant baptism. Adherents of Melchior Hoffman, like Jan Beukels of Leiden, went to Münster to observe its exemplary Reformation. Tensions rose in Münster between orthodox Lutherans, who had the support of the city council, Roman Catholics, who had the support of Münster's prince bishop, and the adherents of Rothmann.

In late 1533 Jan Matthijs, a baker from Haarlem, declared that he was Enoch, the second witness of Revelation 11, that believers' baptisms should resume, and that the world would end on Easter, April 5, 1534. Two emissaries of Jan Matthijs baptized Rothmann and like-minded pastors in Münster in early January 1534. Rothmann baptized about a quarter of Münster's adults. In February the prince bishop of Münster prepared military action against the city; Catholics and Lutherans fled Münster to avoid the siege, and Anabaptists from the Netherlands and Westphalia came to Münster seeking safety. At the end of the month the regular elections returned a pro-Anabaptist city council committed to defend the city.

The Dutch prophets Jan Matthijs and Jan of Leiden assumed leadership of Münster. Jan Matthijs was killed in an attack on the besiegers on April 5, 1534, the day he

predicted the end of the world. Jan of Leiden assumed control, replaced the city council with a Council of Twelve Elders, and in September 1534 proclaimed himself the new King David, who would prepare the world for Christ, the peaceful Solomon. He directed the sixteen-month resistance of Münster against the besieging army. Münster's community of goods and polygamy were elements of the resistance of a population with a female majority, although they horrified outsiders. Münster was conquered on June 25, 1535.

The Melchiorite Anabaptists of the Netherlands were not especially violent, rather perplexed by the events in Münster. Many followed a call to come to Münster in March 1534, but were turned back by government officials. Only a few, in Frisia and Amsterdam in the spring of 1535, responded to appeals to rise up on behalf of Münster.

In his autobiographical fragment Menno says that he was a Frisian priest whose evangelical sympathies led him to reject first transubstantiation and then infant baptism, before he left his parish in 1536 and subsequently became an Anabaptist elder. Was he, then, a late-comer to the movement, entirely untouched by excesses of Münster and its Dutch supporters?

The early twentieth-century Dutch scholar Karel Vos suggested that Menno was likely baptized and became an Anabaptist in 1534, a view supported by Helmut Issak, *Menno Simons and the New Jerusalem* (2006). Isaak draws on previous Dutch scholarship to argue for the authenticity of "On the Blasphemy of Jan of Leiden," attributed to Menno but not published until 1627; he regards it as a source for the *Meditation on the Twenty-Fifth Psalm, The New Birth*, and both the earlier and later editions of the *Fundament-book*. He argues that Menno was well versed in the writings of both Melchior Hoffman and Bernhard Rothmann. Throughout his career Menno, like Hoffman, hoped for a godly ruler to champion the true religion; and Issak makes a serious case that in the 1540s Menno thought this Old Testament ideal might be realized.

In Menno's writings he stressed not only his rejection of Anabaptist Münster but also his opposition to the "corrupt sects" which also rejected the heritage of Jan of Leiden, the militant Batenburgers and the Spiritualist followers of David Joris. Nevertheless, he expressed sympathy for those Anabaptists led astray by wicked leaders.

The 1550s, the last decade of Menno's life, was one in which he accepted the role of the leader of a separated people, the "still in the land." The Habsburg government of the Netherlands initiated fierce persecution, executing ca. 1000 Mennonite martyrs. New leaders, Dirk Phillips and Lenaert Bouwens, won large numbers of followers and partially eclipsed Menno, who left the Netherlands for safer areas in the Rhineland and the North Sea and Baltic coasts. They emphasized excommunication and marital shunning. In the attempt to preserve a "congregation without spot and wrinkle" according to Ephesians 5:27 (a conception that appears in Rothmann's writings) the numerous inter-Mennonite schisms of the next centuries began. In 1547 Adam Pastor and his following were excommunicated by Menno for Christological differences. Rejecting strict ban practices and the Melchiorite-Mennonite Christology, the Waterlander congregations in North Holland, about a quarter of the movement, dropped the "Mennonite" name in 1557 and called themselves "Doopsgezinden."

The more conservative "Mennonite" denominations and the more liberal "Doopsgezinden" received toleration from the 1570s onward, due to the success of the

Calvinist William of Orange in the revolt of the northern Netherlands against the Habsburgs.