

MENNONITE BODIES

GENERAL STATEMENT

HISTORY

The origin of the denominations classed under the head of Mennonite bodies is traced by some to an early period in the history of the Christian Church. As various changes in doctrine and church organization came about, in both the East and the West, a number of communities, unwilling to accept them and preferring the simplicity of the Apostolic Church, remained more or less distinct through the Middle Ages. These communities received various names in different localities and in different centuries, but from the time of the first General Council at Nicea in the early part of the fourth century to the Conference of Dort, Holland, in 1632, they represented a general protest against ecclesiastical rule and a rigid liturgy, and an appeal for the simpler organization, worship, and faith of the apostolic age.

Present historical authorities, however, see little or no connection between these early independent movements and the present Mennonite Church, since those who founded the body to which present Mennonite bodies trace their origin came out from the Roman Catholic Church.

The first congregation of the church now known as Mennonite was organized in January, 1525, at Zurich, Switzerland, by Conrad Grebel, Felix Mantz, George Blaurock, and others. They called themselves "Brethren" (Swiss Brethren), but were commonly known as "Täufer." Grebel and his friends had been ardent coworkers with Ulrich Zwingli, but had withdrawn from his leadership in 1523, when they had realized that he would consent to a union of the church with the state, and that a church was to be established in which the whole population of the state would be obliged to hold membership. Zwingli's program called for the introduction of certain reforms in the existing Roman Catholic State Church. Grebel and his friends did not recognize infant baptism as scriptural. Hence they baptized again those who had been baptized in their infancy. For this reason they were called Anabaptists (Re-Baptizers). In 1534 the first Anabaptist congregations were organized in Holland by Obbe Philips. Two years later Obbe baptized Menno Simons (1496-1561), a converted Catholic priest. Menno soon became the most prominent leader of the "Obbenites," as the followers of Obbe Philips were called, in Holland and North Germany.

The name "Mennonite" dates from 1550, but would scarcely be recognized in Holland, where the usual name is "Doopsgezinde," or "Dooper," the Dutch equivalent for the English "Baptist." Similarly in parts of Germany, Switzerland, and Austria, the German form "Taufgesinnte," or "Täufer," was used to indicate Baptists, although this name was not applied to all Mennonites. It was to some of the Flemish Mennonites, who, upon the invitation of King Henry VIII, settled in England and became the pioneers of the great weaving industry of that country, that the Baptists of England were largely indebted for their organization as a religious body, although it was not as "Mennonites" that they were invited to come to England, since it is known that persons of this faith were severely persecuted in England in the reigns of Henry VIII and Elizabeth along with other nonconformists.

The persecutions of the Mennonites were due to the fact that in all countries, Protestant as well as Roman Catholic, church and state were united and dissenters were not tolerated. The number of Mennonites martyred is very great. Their

Book of Martyrs (First German Edition, Ephrata, Pa., 1749; English Edition, Elkhart, Ind., 1886) is a ponderous volume. In the Netherlands the persecution was very severe, but by the second decade after Menno Simons' death his followers had increased to respectable numbers, since in many places the authorities had been slow to carry out the decrees against them. The very presence of these numerous Mennonites proved the error of the supposition that the best interest of the state demands the toleration of only one creed within its realms. Holland became the first country to throw this principle overboard and grant religious freedom. After the founder of the Dutch Republic, William of Orange, had embraced the Reformed faith he ordered the cessation of persecution there (in 1577).

In Switzerland the persecution continued well into the seventeenth century. The last martyr was Hans Landis, the most prominent Mennonite bishop of that time, who was beheaded at Zurich in 1614. Thereafter many were imprisoned and some sentenced to the galleys.

After the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) Mennonites were permitted to settle in the Palatinate, in South Germany. Many fled to this province from Switzerland. When William Penn acquired Pennsylvania from the English Crown, he offered a home to all who were persecuted for their faith. The Mennonite pioneers in America were 13 families from Crefeld, Germany, who came on the ship *Concord*, in 1683, and settled at Germantown, now a part of Philadelphia. During the eighteenth century many Swiss Mennonites emigrated to Pennsylvania. They were for the most part poor. Their brethren in Holland formed an organization for the aid of those who did not have the means to go to America and contributed liberally for this purpose. Practically all the so-called Pennsylvania Dutch Mennonites are of Swiss descent. As their numbers increased during the first third of the eighteenth century, the Mennonites spread northward and westward from Germantown into Lancaster, Bucks, Berks, Montgomery, and other counties in Pennsylvania, and from these original settlements they have since spread to western Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and farther west, and to Canada. As these early settlers came in contact with the Indians, they often found that their nonresistant principles served as a better protection than the rifles and stockades of most of the settlers, and there are but few records of injury of any kind inflicted upon them by the Indian tribes.

Since their settlement in this country a number of minor divisions have taken place among the Mennonites, occasioned by divergent views on some questions, but of late years the feeling has developed among nearly all branches that closer union and cooperation along certain common lines of gospel work would be desirable.

DOCTRINE

At a conference of some of the Mennonite groups in the Netherlands held at Dort, Holland, in 1632, a compilation of previous confessions of faith was made and called "A Declaration of the Chief Articles of our Common Christian Faith." This confession, containing 18 articles, was later accepted by the Alsatian Mennonites and is accepted by the great majority of the American Mennonite churches to-day.

A brief summary of these articles includes the following:

God the Creator of all things; the fall of man, through his disobedience; his restoration through the promise of the coming of Christ; the Advent of Christ, the Son of God; redemption has been purchased by His death on the cross for all mankind, from the time of Adam to the end of the world, who shall have believed on and obeyed Christ.

The law of Christ is contained in the Gospel, by obedience to which alone humanity is saved. Repentance and conversion, or complete change of life, without which no outward obedience to gospel requirements will avail to please God, is necessary to salvation. All who have repented of their sins and believed on Christ as the Saviour, and in heart and life accept His commandments, are born again. As such they obey the command to be baptized with water as a public testimony of their faith, are members of the Church of Jesus Christ, and are incorporated into the communion of the saints on earth. By partaking of the Lord's Supper the members express a common union with one another and a fellowship of love for and faith in Jesus Christ. The washing of the saints' feet is an ordinance instituted, and its perpetual observance commanded, by Christ. The state of matrimony is honorable between those spiritually kindred, and such alone can marry "in the Lord."

The civil government is a part of God's ministry, and members are not permitted to despise, blaspheme, or resist the government, but must be subject to it in all things and obedient to all its commands that do not militate against the will and law of God, and should pray earnestly for the government and its welfare, and in behalf of their country. Christ has forbidden his followers the use of carnal force in resisting evil and the seeking of revenge for evil treatment. Love for enemies can not be shown by acts of hatred and revenge, but by deeds of love and good will. The use of all oaths is forbidden, as contrary to God's will, though simple affirmation is allowed.

Those who willfully sin against God are to be excluded from the rights and privileges of the church, but are to be kindly exhorted to amend their ways, the object of expulsion being the amendment, not the destruction, of the offender, and for the benefit of the church. Those who, on account of their obstinacy, are finally reprovved and expelled from the church, because separated from God, must also be shunned socially, "that the openly obstinate and reprobate one may not defile others in the church," though in case of need they are to be kindly cared for, and admonished as those in need of spiritual help.

At the end of earth and earthly existence, all those who have lived and shall then be living are to be changed in a moment at the sound of the last trump, and are to appear before the judgment seat of Christ, where the good shall be separated from the evil; the good to enter into the heavenly joys prepared for them, the evil to depart forever from God's presence and mercy into the place prepared for the devil and his servants.

To the conviction that some of the requirements of civil law are contrary to the will and law of God is largely due the fact that the Mennonites have suffered so severely in past centuries, and have often been charged with being "clannish."

The Lord's Supper is observed twice a year in nearly all the congregations, and the great majority of them also observe the ordinance of washing the saints' feet in connection with and immediately after the Lord's Supper. In nearly all the Mennonite bodies baptism is by pouring.

ORGANIZATION

With two exceptions the form of church government in the different bodies of the Mennonites is the same. The local church is autonomous, deciding all matters affecting itself. District or State conferences are established, in most cases, to which appeals may be made; otherwise the authority of the congregation or of a committee appointed by the congregation is final. All decisions of State or district conferences are presented to the individual congregation for ratification. The divinely appointed offices of the Church of Christ are held to be those of bishop (sometimes called elder and sometimes presbyter), minister (pastor or evangelist), and almoner (deacon). The ministers are generally self-supporting, sharing the farming life of most of the Mennonite communities. Besides these there are teachers, male and female, as coworkers in the administration of the work.

STATISTICS

The denominations grouped as Mennonite bodies in 1926, 1916, and 1906 are listed in the following table, with the principal statistics as reported for the three periods.

As will be noted, there have been a number of changes in the names of the denominations, occasioned partly by changes in the bodies themselves, partly by a better classification. The Bruederhoef Mennonite Church is now known as the Hutterian Brethren, Mennonites; the Central Illinois Conference has dropped the "Illinois"; the Schellenberger Brueder-Gemeinde is now the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America; and the Nebraska and Minnesota Conference of Mennonites is now the Conference of Defenseless Mennonites of North America. The Amish Mennonite Church of 1906 has been consolidated with the Mennonite Church, but in its place has appeared the Conservative Amish Mennonite Church, while the Old Amish Mennonite Church has become the Old Order Amish Mennonite Church. The Stauffer Mennonites constituted a new body in 1916, as did the Kleine Gemeinde, which appears to have been included with the Krimmer Brueder-Gemeinde in 1906. The Unaffiliated Mennonite Congregations, shown for the first time in 1926, comprise various bodies of Mennonites who adhere to the tenets of the Confession of Faith adopted by the Mennonites at Dort in 1632, but have not affiliated themselves with any of the organized conferences.

In view of the influence exerted by the Amish Mennonites in the development of the Mennonite bodies, a preliminary statement of the movement is given following the summary of statistics and preceding the statement of the Mennonite Church, with which the Amish Mennonite Church as an ecclesiastical body has been consolidated.

SUMMARY OF STATISTICS FOR THE MENNONITE BODIES: 1926, 1916, AND 1906

DENOMINATION AND CENSUS YEAR	Total number of churches	Number of members	VALUE OF CHURCH EDIFICES		EXPENDITURES DURING YEAR		SUNDAY SCHOOLS	
			Churches reporting	Amount	Churches reporting	Amount	Churches reporting	Number of scholars
1926								
Total for the group	826	87,164	680	\$4,453,613	731	\$1,270,067	631	87,897
Mennonite Church.....	295	34,039	264	1,565,800	279	320,151	261	37,788
Hutterian Brethren, Mennonites.....	6	700	5	19,000	3	9,645	3	115
Conservative Amish Mennonite Church.....	7	691	7	16,845	5	2,718	6	871
Old Order Amish Mennonite Church.....	71	6,006	5	20,300	35	8,011	13	898
Church of God in Christ (Mennonite).....	26	1,832	18	78,850	18	7,705	8	436
Old Order Mennonite Church (Wisler).....	19	2,227	18	68,700	12	2,504		
Reformed Mennonite Church.....	31	1,117	28	108,800	27	20,565		
General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America.....	136	21,582	130	1,212,350	131	378,794	130	23,537
Defenseless Mennonites.....	10	1,060	10	87,200	10	37,001	10	1,386
Mennonite Brethren in Christ.....	99	5,882	90	544,643	96	229,803	93	8,560
Mennonite Brethren Church of North America.....	61	6,484	49	318,920	54	118,384	50	7,575
Krimmer Brueder-Gemeinde.....	14	797	14	54,105	14	13,543	14	1,182
Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde.....	4	214	4	6,700	4	486	3	150
Central Conference of Mennonites.....	29	3,124	24	263,000	29	100,747	28	3,614
Conference of the Defenseless Mennonites of North America.....	9	818	9	60,900	9	14,680	8	1,415
Stauffer Mennonite Church.....	4	243	2	4,500	1	180		
Unaffiliated Mennonite Congregations.....	5	348	3	23,000	4	5,150	4	370

SUMMARY OF STATISTICS FOR THE MENNONITE BODIES, 1926, 1916, AND 1906—
Continued

DENOMINATION AND CENSUS YEAR	Total number of churches	Number of members	VALUE OF CHURCH EDIFICES		EXPENDITURES DURING YEAR		SUNDAY SCHOOLS	
			Churches reporting	Amount	Churches reporting	Amount	Churches reporting	Number of scholars
1916								
Total for the group	835	79,363	661	\$2,292,424	664	\$503,972	626	79,426
Mennonite Church.....	307	34,965	276	1,014,246	281	156,069	270	37,096
Hutterian Brethren.....	17	982	12	11,100			14	605
Conservative Amish Mennonite Church.....	13	1,066	12	20,060	11	3,517	11	882
Old Order Amish Mennonite Church.....	88	7,665			4	406	5	242
Church of God in Christ (Mennonite).....	21	1,125	14	23,815	17	6,333	10	675
Old Order Mennonite Church (Wisler).....	22	1,608	18	43,900	5	185		
Reformed Mennonite Church.....	29	1,281	29	85,965	27	5,606		
General Conference of Mennonites of North America.....	113	15,407	106	544,560	107	149,237	105	17,594
Defenseless Mennonites.....	11	854	11	33,500	10	10,241	10	1,423
Mennonite Brethren in Christ.....	108	4,737	91	223,648	105	91,317	101	7,755
Mennonite Brethren Church of North America.....	53	5,127	47	131,605	53	38,101	53	7,716
Krimmer Brueder-Gemeinde.....	13	894	12	31,700	13	13,075	13	1,556
Kleine Gemeinde.....	3	171	2	3,200	2	25	4	66
Central Conference of Mennonites.....	17	2,101	16	91,500	17	21,621	16	2,059
Conference of the Defenseless Mennonites of North America.....	15	1,171	12	30,625	12	8,239	14	1,757
Stauffer Mennonites.....	5	209	3	3,000				
1906								
Total for the group	604	54,798	497	1,237,134			411	44,922
Mennonite Church.....	220	18,674	202	500,112			156	15,798
Bruederhoef Mennonite Church.....	8	275	8	9,100				
Amish Mennonite Church.....	57	7,640	52	122,275			54	6,367
Old Amish Mennonite Church.....	46	5,043	4	6,700			6	493
Reformed Mennonite Church.....	34	2,079	29	52,650				
General Conference of Mennonites of North America.....	90	11,661	84	303,400			84	12,472
Church of God in Christ (Mennonite).....	18	562	2	1,600				
Old (Wisler) Mennonite Church.....	9	655	9	17,950				
Defenseless Mennonites.....	14	967	13	16,800			13	1,102
Mennonite Brethren in Christ.....	68	2,801	57	140,747			59	3,720
Bundes Conferenz der Mennoniten Brueder-Gemeinde:								
Krimmer Brueder-Gemeinde.....	6	708	6	17,900			6	680
(Schellenberger Brueder-Gemeinde).....	13	1,825	13	13,000			13	2,550
Central Illinois Conference of Mennonites.....	13	1,363	12	25,900			12	968
Nebraska and Minnesota Conference of Mennonites.....	8	545	6	9,000			8	782

AMISH MENNONITE MOVEMENT

Jacob Ammon, or Amen, whose name gave the term "Amish" to the movement, was a native of Canton Bern, Switzerland; but, probably to escape persecution, he settled in Alsace in 1659. There was a tendency on the part of many of the Mennonites of the time, during the interval of rest from persecution, to become lax in their religious life and discipline. Ammon was the acknowledged leader of those who held to the strict letter of Menno Simons' teachings and the literal interpretation of several points of doctrine presented in the Confession of Faith, adopted at the Conference held at Dort, Holland, in 1632. Maintaining that, because they were not literally and rigorously carried out, some of the articles of the confession were a dead letter with many of the congregations, he traveled extensively, laboring to restore the communities to the spiritual life and condition manifested during Menno's ministry among them. The special point of

divergence between his followers and the other Mennonites was in regard to the exercise of the ban, or excommunication of disobedient members, as taught in I Corinthians v, 9-11; II Thessalonians III, 14; Titus III, 10, and incorporated in the Confession of Faith. The Amish party interpreted these passages as applying to daily life and the daily table; while the others understood them to mean simply the exclusion of expelled members from the communion table.

In 1690 two bishops, Ammon and Blank, acted as a committee to investigate conditions in Switzerland and southern Germany. As those accused of laxity in the particulars mentioned did not appear when called upon to answer the charges preferred against them, the Amish leaders expelled them. They in turn disowned the Amish party, and the separation was completed in 1698. Some time after this, Ammon and his followers made overtures for a reconciliation and union of the two factions, but these were rejected, and it remained for the closing years of the nineteenth century, almost exactly two centuries later, to see the steps taken that virtually reunited the two bodies, or the main part of each, for in the meantime there had been other divisions between the extreme elements of both.

At about the time of the separation, the migration of Mennonites from Europe to the crown lands acquired by William Penn in America began to assume large proportions, and included many of the Amish Mennonites, who settled in what now comprises Lancaster, Mifflin, Somerset, Lawrence, and Union Counties, in Pennsylvania. William Penn himself traveled extensively among the Mennonites in Europe, preaching in their meetings, and rendering them aid in various ways. From Pennsylvania the Amish Mennonites moved with the westward tide of migration into Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Nebraska, and other States. There was also a large exodus from Pennsylvania and from Europe direct to Canada, principally to the section westward of the large tract acquired by the early Mennonite settlers in Waterloo County, Ontario.

Toward the middle of the nineteenth century a growing sentiment in favor of closer relations between the two main bodies of Mennonites became manifest. Many prominent men on both sides, feeling that the division of 1698 was an error for which both sides were more or less to blame, used their influence toward a reconciliation. The establishment in 1864 of a religious periodical, and later the publication of other religious literature, for the benefit of, and supported by, both the Mennonite Church and the Amish Mennonites, naturally drew them into closer relationship. One result was the revival in both branches of direct evangelistic and missionary effort, which had been largely neglected ever since the migration from Europe to America. In this resumption of long neglected activities, denominational lines between the two bodies were disregarded. The establishment also of a common church school, in the closing decade of the last century, brought the most prominent men and ablest thinkers, as well as the young people of both parties, into one working body. Almost simultaneous with this, and as a natural result of it, was the establishment in 1898 of a General Conference, in which each body was accorded equal rights in all things pertaining to conference work. Subsequently, as stated above, the three conferences reported in 1906 as Amish Mennonite became identified with the Mennonite Church,¹ and the term as used at present refers to the two main branches—Conservative and Old Order—which still retain some of the beliefs and practices which were the basis of the separation.

¹ See Conservative Amish Mennonite Church, p. 860, and Old Order Amish Mennonite Church, p. 864.

MENNONITE KLEINE GEMEINDE

STATISTICS

The data given for 1926 represent 4 active organizations of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde, all rural churches in the State of Kansas. The total membership was 214, comprising 93 males and 121 females. The classification of membership by sex was reported by all of the 4 churches and the classification by age was reported by only 1 church, which had 30 members over 13 years of age. There were no parsonages reported.

The membership of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde consists of communicant members of the local congregations, who have made confession of faith and have been baptized.

Comparative data, 1926 and 1916.—Table 1 presents, in convenient form for comparison, a summary of the available statistics of this denomination for the censuses of 1926 and 1916. This body was reported separately for the first time in 1916, apparently having been included with the Krimmer Bruder-Gemeinde in 1906.

TABLE 1.—COMPARATIVE SUMMARY, 1926 AND 1916: MENNONITE KLEINE GEMEINDE

ITEM	1926	1916
Churches (local organizations)	4	3
Increase over preceding census:		
Number.....	1	-----
Per cent ¹	-----	-----
Members	214	171
Increase over preceding census:		
Number.....	43	-----
Per cent.....	25.1	-----
Average membership per church.....	54	57
Church edifices:		
Number.....	4	2
Value—Churches reporting.....	4	2
Amount reported.....	\$6,700	\$3,200
Average per church.....	\$1,675	\$1,600
Debt—Churches reporting.....	-----	2
Amount reported.....	-----	\$390
Expenditures during year:		
Churches reporting.....	4	2
Amount reported.....	\$486	\$25
Current expenses and improvements.....	\$486	\$25
Average expenditure per church.....	\$122	\$13
Sunday schools:		
Churches reporting.....	3	3
Officers and teachers.....	6	14
Scholars.....	150	66

¹ Per cent not shown where base is less than 100.

HISTORY, DOCTRINE, AND ORGANIZATION ¹

From 1812 to 1819 there was in progress in the Mennonite Church the movement which resulted in the Kleine Gemeinde (Little Congregation) in southern Russia. The cause of the division was mainly a matter of discipline, and the stricter element became finally separated from the main body of Mennonites. At various times efforts, more or less successful, were made to bring about an understanding and a reconciliation between the Kleine Gemeinde and the main body, but none were able to wipe out the division entirely. In the migration from Russia to America in the seventies, the Kleine Gemeinde had its share. The separate organization has been kept up, though there is no difference in doctrine and little difference in practice between the Kleine Gemeinde and the other Russian Mennonites. The majority of the denomination is in Manitoba, Canada.

¹ This statement, which is substantially the same as that published in Part II of the Report on Religious Bodies, 1916, has been revised by Rev. J. A. Ressler, editor of the Mennonite Year Book, Scottdale, Pa., and approved by him in its present form.