# A Complication for the Mennonite Peace Tradition: Wilhelm Mannhardt's Defense of Military Service

*Karl Koop*

Between 1868 and 1870, Wilhelm Mannhardt (1831-1880), a Mennonite leader from Provincial Prussia,[1] wrote a seven-part essay in the German Mennonite periodical *Mennonitische Blätter,* in which he addressed the question of whether Mennonites should participate in military service. He concluded that they should give up their traditional position on nonresistance. They should perform military service, preferably as medics, and those choosing to participate fully in the armed forces should remain in good standing in their congregations.[2] Mannhardt's arguments favoring military service may have appeared out of character at the time, given that only a few years before, in 1863, he had defended the traditional Mennonite position of nonresistance at the behest of the Mennonite leadership.[3] He had done so by documenting the history and practices of the Mennonites in a comprehensive volume entitled *The Military Service Exemptions of the Mennonites of Provincial Prussia*.[4] However, in that publication he wasn't

[1] "Provincial Prussia" refers to the combined province of West and East Prussia. See Mark Jantzen, "Introduction" to Wilhelm Mannhardt, *The Military Service Exemption of the Mennonites of Provincial Prussia*, trans. Anthony Epp, edited and annotated by Mark Jantzen and John D. Thiesen (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 2013), xvi-xvii. This volume was translated from the German original, Wilhelm Mannhardt, *Die Wehrfreiheit der Altpreussischen Mennoniten: Eine Geschichtliche Erörterung* (Marienburg: Altpreussischen Mennonitengemeinden, 1863).

[2] "Zur Wehrfrage," *Mennonitische Blätter* 15, no. 9 (December 1868): 74-76; 16, no. 1 (January 1869): 5-8; no. 2 (February 1869): 12-15; no. 4 (May 1869): 31-34; no. 5 (June 1869): 37-41; no. 6 (August 1869): 48-50; 17, no. 1 (January 1870): 3-4. Here I am following Abraham Friesen's translation of the essay, which is entitled "Concerning the Question of Military Service." See in the appendix to Mannhardt, *Military Service Exemption*, 297-358.

[3] Mannhardt used the term *wehrlosigkeit* to refer to the traditional Mennonite position. In Mennonite literature, the term is typically translated by "nonresistance," which is what the translator of the Mannhardt volume has done. I follow this convention, although "defencelessness" would be an equally good translation.

[4] See note 1.

*The Conrad Grebel Review* 34, no. 1 (Winter 2016): 28-48.

writing to convey his personal views. He had been a supporter of military service since his youth and was a German nationalist by 1848, when the German Confederation used mostly Prussian troops against Denmark. At the time, he wrote patriotic poetry lamenting that ill health kept him from fighting for Germany.[5] So, in the foreword to his 1863 work on Mennonite nonresistance, he intimated that the opinions contained therein were not necessarily his own and that he reserved the right to present his personal views in another setting.[6] This he proceeded to do a few years later in the *Mennonitische Blätter* essay.

Mannhardt's personal views on military conscription may have been out of step with official Mennonite teaching on nonresistance but they were not idiosyncratic within the broader Mennonite context. Since the mid-18th century, at least some Dutch Mennonites had viewed the practice of bearing arms as compatible with their religious convictions.[7] By the end of the century, Mennonites were involved in the Patriot Movement (1780-1787) that included the use of force.[8] Among the educated, several Mennonite ministers and seminary students were active Patriots, even participating in a key revolutionary organization, the Free Corps (*Vrijcorpsen*), a citizens' militia that exercised resistance against the state. One prominent Free Corps participant was Leiden Mennonite preacher Francois Adriaan van der Kemp, "an outspoken supporter of the American Revolution and a friend of the future American president John Adams."[9] According to some observers,

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[5] Jantzen, "Introduction," xxiv-xxv. For a sampling of Mannhardt's poetic writings in translation, see Mark Jantzen, *Mennonite German Soldiers: Nation, Religion, and Family in the Prussian East, 1772-1880* (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 184.

[6] Mannhardt, *Military Service Exemption*, xxxviii.

[7] See observations by the German Lutheran Simeon Friderich Rues, *Aufrichtige Nachrichten von dem Gegenwärtigen Zustande der Mennoniten oder Taufgesinnten wie auch der Collegianten oder Reinsburger* (Jena, 1743), 103.

[8] James Urry, *Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood: Europe—Russia—Canada 1525-1980* (Winnipeg: Univ. of Manitoba Press), 58.

[9] Michael Driedger, "Anabaptists and the Early Modern State: A Long-Term View," in *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism*, *1521-1700*, ed. John D. Roth and James M. Stayer (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), 536. See also Michael Driedger, "An Article Missing from the *Mennonite Encyclopedia:* 'The Enlightenment in the Netherlands,'" in *Commoners and Community: Essays in Honour of Werner O. Packull*, ed. C. Arnold Snyder (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2002), 106-107, 112-113; Nanne van der Zijpp, s.v. "Patriots and Mennonites,"

from the 1780s on, "the peace tradition among Dutch Mennonites became virtually extinct, at least among the dominant liberalist party."[10]

In other parts of Europe, Mennonite views on nonresistance were also wavering, although official pronouncements maintained the traditional perspective. For example, in southern Germany in 1803, church leaders reaffirmed the doctrine of nonresistance through their so-called "Ibersheimer Resolutions," but a number of young men inspired by the ideals of equality, freedom, and brotherhood emanating from the French Revolution chose to go to war for their country.[11] Elsewhere, as in the northwest German city of Krefeld, the Mennonite community seemed indifferent to the traditional teachings. After 1816, according to some estimates, they served in the military to the same degree as non-Mennonites.[12]

The revolutionary era and its aftermath also influenced Mennonite

*Mennonite Encyclopedia IV*; Sjouke Voolstra, "'The Hymn of Freedom': The Redefinition of Dutch Mennonite Identity in the Restoration and Romantic Period (ca. 1810-1850)," in *From Martyr to Muppie: A Historical Introduction to Cultural Assimilation Processes of a Religious Minority in the Netherlands: the Mennonites,* ed. Alastair Hamilton, Sjouke Voolstra, Piet Visser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam Univ. Press, 1994), 190. Piet Visser, "Enlightened Dutch Mennonitism: The Case of Cornelius van Engelen," in *Grenzen des Täufertums/Boundaries of Anabaptism: Neue Forschungen*, ed. Anselm Schubert, Astrid van Schlachta, and Michael Driedger (Heidelberg: Verein für Reformationsgeschichte, 2009), 369-91; Yme Kuiper, "Mennonites and Politics in Late Eighteenth-Century Friesland," in *Religious Minorities and Cultural Diversity in the Dutch Republic: Studies Presented to Piet Visser on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, ed. August den Hollander, Alex Noord, Mirjam van Veen, and Anna Voolstra (Boston, MA: Brill, 2014), 249-67.

[10] Annelies Verbeek and Alle G. Hoekema, "Mennonites in the Netherlands," in *Testing Faith and Tradition*, ed. John A. Lapp and C. Arnold Snyder (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2006), 70.

[11] For a further discussion of this context, see James Jakob Fehr and Diether Götz Lichdi, "Mennonites in Germany" in *Testing Faith and Tradition*, 115-19; John D. Roth, "Context, Conflict, and Community: South German Mennonites at the Threshold of Modernity, 1750-1850," in *Anabaptists and Postmodernity*, ed. Susan Biesecker-Mast and Gerald Biesecker-Mast (Telford, PA: Pandora Press, 2000), 120-44; C. Henry Smith, *Smith's Story of the Mennonites*, fifth ed., rev. and enlarged by Cornelius Krahn (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1981), 202-204.

[12] Jantzen, *Mennonite German Soldiers*, 111; see also Wolfgang Froese, "Weltflucht und Weltzuwendung: Die Aufgabe des Prinzips der Gewaltlosigkeit in der Krefelder Mennonitengemeinde im 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhundert," *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter* 47/48 (1990/91): 104-24.

attitudes in Provincial Prussia. While leaders endeavored to maintain traditional Mennonite privileges and exemptions, some individuals fought for the Prussian cause against Napoleon. This suggests that in the Napoleonic wars there were most likely Mennonite soldiers on both sides of the battlefield.[13] As the century wore on, even prominent persons within the Mennonite community voiced support for some form of military service. For example, Carl Harder (1820-1896), a young university-educated pastor in the city of Königsberg, distanced himself from traditional Mennonite teachings, arguing that for the sake of the state the use of weapons was sometimes necessary to maintain order and justice.[14] Perhaps the most outspoken proponent of military service was Hermann von Beckerath (1801-1870), a member of the Mennonite church in Krefeld. In 1848, he emerged at the Frankfurt National Assembly as a prime spokesperson for freedom of conscience, freedom of the press, and equal rights for all groups, including Jews. He had been elected by parliamentarians as minister of finance for the cabinet formed to lead the future German government.[15] When the issue of military exemption came to the floor, von Beckerath argued for no exceptions to the conscription laws. If groups such as the Mennonites embraced equal rights before the law, and if they anticipated benefitting from the same rights as other citizens, they should not expect to be exempted from any responsibilities, including military duty.[16]

In the end, the aims of the National Assembly were not achieved, as champions of the monarchy led by Chancellor Otto von Bismarck defended

[13] Perhaps the most publicized example was the Mennonite David von Riesen, banned for his military involvements from the Elbing-Ellerwald congregation in 1816. He subsequently filed a formal complaint against his congregation and its leadership. The case ended up at the High Court in Berlin, which ruled in 1818 in favor of the leadership. See Mark Jantzen, "Vistula Delta Mennonites Encounter German Nationalism, 1813-1820," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 78, no. 2 (April 2004): 205-11.

[14] Carl Harder, *Monatsschrift* (May 1848), 16, quoted in Peter Klassen, *Mennonites in Early Modern Poland and Prussia* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2009), 182.

[15] Klassen, *Mennonites in Early Modern Poland and Prussia*, 183.

[16] Ibid. For an excerpt of van Beckerath's speech, see Brock, *Pacifism in Europe to 1914* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972), 416. For context to events surrounding the Frankfurt National Assembly and subsequent developments, see Mark Jantzen, "Equal and Conscripted: Liberal Rights Confront Mennonite Conceptions of Freedom in Nineteenth-Century Germany," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 32 (2014): 65-80.

the status quo. During this time, Mennonites continued to negotiate terms allowing for military exemptions. As the years passed, however, their situation grew more tenuous and finally reached a turning point. In 1868, a Royal Order from Berlin allowed Mennonites to serve as non-combatants, but they could no longer avoid military service altogether.[17] As a result of this development, an estimated 2,000 Mennonites left the Vistula Delta for Russia or North America, while the majority stayed and accepted the new conditions of German citizenship.[18] Most would come to share, at least in broad strokes, the views that Mannhardt articulated in *Mennonitische Blätter*. As early as 1870, the Danzig Mennonites allowed individuals to decide for themselves how they would follow the demands of the state,[19] and by 1886, Article 7 of the Danzig church constitution was modified to read: "'Whenever the fatherland requires military service, we allow the individual conscience of each member to serve in that form which satisfies him most.'"[20]

In subsequent decades, while some would object to serving *Volk und Vaterland* in combatant roles, the general movement toward militarism proceeded at an accelerated pace.[21] According to Diether Goetz Lichdi, in World War I, "2000 Mennonites or 10 percent of their number fought in the army" and 400 Mennonites died on the battlefield.[22] Immediately after

[17] Jantzen, "Mennonites in Prussia Becoming Germans: The First Hundred Forty Years," *Preservings* 33 (2013): 28.

[18] Ibid., 29. For more background to the conflict that ensued among Mennonites during this time see, for instance, John D. Thiesen, "First Duty of the Citizen: Mennonite Identity and Military Exemption in Prussia, 1848-1877," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 72, no. 2 (April 1998): 161-87.

[19] H. G. Mannhardt, *The Danzig Mennonite Church: Its Origin and History from 1569-1919*, trans. Victor G. Doerksen, ed. Mark Jantzen and John D. Thiesen (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 2007), 205.

[20] Emil Haendiges, "Catastrophe of the West Prussian Mennonites," in *Proceedings of the Fourth Mennonite World Conference, Goshen, Indiana, and North Newton, Kansas, August 3-10, 1948* (Akron, PA: Mennonite Central Committee, 1950), 126, quoted in James Peter Regier, "Mennonitische Vergangenheitsbewältigung: Prussian Mennonites, The Third Reich, and Coming to Terms with a Difficult Past," *Mennonite Life* 59, no. 1 (March 2004): 3.

[21] For background to German Mennonite attitudes during World War I, see Walter Klaassen, Harry Loewen and James Urry, "German Nationalism and the First World War: Hermann G. Mannhardt's *Heroic Deeds and Heroes*," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 88, no. 4 (October 2014): 517-36.

[22] Diether Goetz Lichdi, "The Story of Nazism and its Reception by German Mennonites,"

the war years, Mennonite views in support of militarism softened, but as social and economic conditions grew desperate and sentiments grew more nationalistic, many Mennonites joined a new wave of patriotism.[23] After Adolf Hitler's ascension to power in the 1930s, the Vereinigung der Mennonitengemeinden im Deutschen Reich, the central organization of Mennonite churches in northern Germany, officially renounced the principle of nonresistance.[24] Not all Mennonites in Prussia were willing to take up arms, and some continued to hold, at least in their hearts, to the traditional position. Nevertheless, most Prussian Mennonites would come to embrace Germany's nationalistic rhetoric, and especially in early stages of the war effort would celebrate the Reich's victories. Only after the end of the Second World War did these Mennonites reaffirm some form of nonresistant or peace position.

These aspects of Mennonite history, together with events pertaining to Wilhelm Mannhardt, raise questions about how Mennonites today should come to terms with their history, especially with narratives falling outside normative expressions of belief. Together with the Church of the Brethren and the Society of Friends, Mennonites have long been associated with the historic peace churches. Virtually all official teachings of present-day Mennonite denominations affirm a form of nonresistant or peace position.[25]

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*Mennonite Life* 36, no. 1 (April 1981): 26.

[23] A summary of literature on how far Mennonites were warming to nationalistic sentiments in the interwar years is in Klaassen et al., "German Nationalism," 527, notes 47 and 48. For a comprehensive discussion of this topic, see Jeremy Robert Koop, "The Political Ramifications of the Two Kingdoms Doctrine in the Nazi Period: A Comparative Study of the German Christians, the Confessing Church, and the Mennonites" (Ph.D. diss., York University, 2011), especially 261-317.

[24] As recorded in the June 1934 edition of the *Mennonitische Blätter*. See Regier, "Mennonitische Vergangenheitsbewältigung," 8.

[25] The term "Historic Peace Churches" first appeared at a meeting of representatives of the Church of the Brethren, Quakers, and Mennonites in Newton, Kansas in 1935. The meeting focussed on a wide range of issues related to conscientious objection, alternatives to military service, relief efforts, and the peace witness. See Melvin Gingerich and Paul Peachey, "Historic Peace Churches (1989)," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online,* www.gameo.org/index.php?title=Historic_Peace_Churches-&oldid=88064, accessed July 5, 2014. The link between Anabaptism and pacifism was perhaps made with greatest force by historians associated with Harold S. Bender's vision of Anabaptism, and the work of Guy F. Hershberger. See Guy F. Hershberger, ed., *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision: A Sixtieth Anniversary*

In light of these realities, should Mennonites, who hold to teachings on peace, simply bracket out historical and theological narratives that do not fit their ideal? Or can these narratives provide fertile ground for further reflection?

In what follows, I outline how Mannhardt reasoned theologically in his defense of military service. I begin by broadly summarizing the historic Anabaptist-Mennonite teaching on nonresistance as articulated from the 16th to the 18th centuries. I then examine Mannhardt's writings, specifically the *Mennonitische Blätter* essay, to argue that his way of reasoning presumed a modern, individualistic mindset that failed to take seriously the Christocentric hermeneutic and ontology at the root of traditional Anabaptist-Mennonite understandings. Along the way, I hope to demonstrate the usefulness of engaging with the past, even when history may not align with current sensibilities.

**Identification with Christ**

Mannhardt's departure from Anabaptist-Mennonite traditional understandings was not due to ignorance. In *The Military Service Exemption of the Mennonites of Provincial Prussia*, he had included a fifty-seven page compendium which in his time was the most representative and comprehensive collection of Mennonite texts on nonresistance.While excluding Swiss and South-German Anabaptist sources, the collection included a goldmine of excerpts from Menno Simons (1496-1561), the *Martyrs Mirror*, various leading Mennonite figures, and representative confessional and catechetical writings adopted by Mennonite communities in the Low Countries.

A wide range of themes emerges in the compendium. Several passages, for example, maintain that the weapons of a Christian differ from those of the world. "We have no weapons," Simons is quoted as saying, "except patience, hope, silence and God's Word."[26] A quotation from the Dordrecht confession of 1632 likewise asserts that the weapons of Christians are not steel or iron but "the armor of God, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, [and] the

*Tribute to Harold S. Bender* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1957), and Guy F. Herschberger, *War, Peace, and Nonresistance* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1953).

[26] Mannhardt, "The Military Service Exemption," 215.

sword of the spirit. . . ."[27] Christians do not carry out vengeance; vengeance belongs to God. It may be that true believers must flee from one city or country to another, or suffer loss of their goods or even their lives. Rather than exercising vengeance, they are called upon to pray for their enemies. If their enemies are hungry or thirsty, they should be assured that the Christian community desires the good of all. In this way evil is overcome with good.[28] Pure love involves praying for persecutors, rendering good for evil, and loving one's enemies.[29]

An excerpt from Engel Arendszoon van Dooregeest (1645-1706), preacher of the Anabaptist congregation at De Rijp, notes that the traditional Mennonite position on nonresistance is not an innovation but was already present in the early church. Many church fathers believed that even a just war should be avoided.[30] According to van Dooregeest, war is a "sea of suffering" and a wasteland of horror. Political leaders often use the language of justice as a smokescreen or excuse to engage in conflict. Ultimately, no one benefits from war and no wars can ever be just. Van Dooregeest asserts that most military leaders admit that the rules of fair and just engagement are almost always ignored in warfare, and that many innocent persons become victims of violence and oppression.[31]

Another voice in Mannhardt's collection is that of Kornelius van Huyzen (1667-1721), a church leader at Emden.Van Huyzen observes that animals have instincts and abilities to destroy their attackers in self-defense, but humans possess "a distinct voice capable of speech and a reasonable consciousness."[32] Thus it is entirely wrong to kill a murderer, even if there is no other way to preserve one's own life, because if that person dies it will cost him his eternal damnation.[33] Turning to problematic texts for nonresistant Christians, van Huyzen affirms that the wars of Israel were ordered by God but argues that God needed these wars "to serve as the rod in His hand in

[27] Ibid., 238.
[28] Ibid., 217, 210, 232.
[29] Ibid., 217.
[30] Ibid., 241.
[31] Ibid., 242.
[32] Ibid., 251.
[33] Ibid., 252.

order to punish the nations and those who had fallen so low."[34] However, the way God directed Israel cannot be a pattern for Christians. At most, Israel's wars are a metaphor for how the new Israel, the church, is called to wage war "with the sword of the spirit" and "the word of God."[35] This new order, van Huyzen observes, was anticipated by the prophets who taught that the new spiritual Israel would be peaceful and all weapons would be banished.[36] In the New Testament he concedes there are still examples of the old dispensation, as when John the Baptist spoke to a soldier without requiring him to lay down his sword. But with the coming of Christ's kingdom, the rules have changed and Christians are called upon to follow a new order.[37] What matters in defense of the nonresistant position is the example of Christ, along with his apostles, who under no circumstances picked up the sword. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ taught the disciples that they should not resist evil but love their enemies and do good to those showing hatred. Christians are guests and aliens in the world; they have no permanent city. Their obligation is to be patient and to follow the example of Christ.[38]

The arguments of van Dooregeest and van Huyzen in Mannhardt's compendium are reiterated in various confessions and catechisms. Frequently these documents, like the Confession of Faith of the Mennonites in Prussia of 1792, formulated by Gerhard Wiebe (1725-1796) at Ellerwald, acknowledge that the OT contains much divinely sanctioned violence. There is a recognition, for instance, that the Patriarchs were called to blot out the memory of various Canaanite peoples. But Jesus inaugurated a new day in which hatred of the enemy was no longer permitted. "We should follow the lamb where he leads us," the Prussian confession states, "not repaying evil for evil or abuse for abuse but instead we should bless silently if we want to inherit blessing."[39] Thus Christians are called to avoid the office of worldly power and are prohibited from waging war. True Christians follow Christ's "nonresistant life and cross-bearing footsteps." This ethical stance is taken because they are citizens of a heavenly kingdom; they are a community of

[34] Ibid., 251.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid., 250.
[37] Ibid., 252.
[38] Ibid., 252-53.
[39] Ibid., 266.

faith "without spot or wrinkle."[40]

Kingdom theology also surfaces in excerpts from the writings of Menno Simons. There are two opposing kingdoms—the kingdom of the world and the kingdom of heaven. Because Christians belong to the heavenly kingdom, they are messengers of peace. With Christ as king, there is nothing but peace in his kingdom. "Everything that is seen, heard, and done is peace."[41] The ontological basis of this citizenship is the new birth, which implies that Christians "are flesh of Christ's flesh and bone of His bone."[42] Regenerated Christians are clothed with the garment of righteousness, and refreshed with the living water of the spirit and the bread of life which is Christ.[43] Having been born of God after the Spirit, they are substantively changed; they have a new inward disposition "of one mind and one nature with Christ."[44] In the depths of their being they have become united with him. The inward disposition of true Christians has been transubstantiated, and thus believers outwardly conform to Christ, imitating him and following in his steps.

What becomes apparent in surveying Mannhardt's compendium is that the Anabaptist-Mennonite position on nonresistance is not based simply on proof-texting, where one slate of biblical passages is highlighted at the expense of others. Rather, a particular Christocentric hermeneutic is at work in which identification with Christ—his teaching and example—is foundational and becomes the lens through which the entire Bible is read. Further, Christian discipleship is rooted in a particular ontology in which Christians are citizens of a heavenly kingdom entered through the experience of a new birth. Recipients of this new birth do not simply follow a particular law of nonresistance; they have a new identity, having been united in the very being of Christ that compels them to live in a radically different way.

This view has much in common with the classical notion of *theosis* found in patristic writers and late medieval mystics, in which the incarnation, Christ's salvation, and the new birth makes possible humanity's "deification" or "divinization"—participation in the divine nature.[45] It presupposes an

[40] Ibid., 262-67.
[41] Ibid., 224.
[42] Ibid., 218.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid., 219.
[45] One of the first scholars to talk about deification or divinization in Anabaptism may have

ecclesiology in which the church is understood sacramentally as the place where Christ is found, where Christ's presence is incarnated in the world.[46] For someone like Menno Simons, such a theology of being leads inexorably to a nonresistance posture.

When we turn to Mannhardt's writings in defense of military conscription, we see that this hermeneutic and theological ontology appears to be rejected. There we encounter a different theological lens—an altered hermeneutic and theological ontology—that inevitably leads to a different code of conduct allowing for participation in military service.

**Inner Convictions**

Mannhardt begins his argument by relativizing the past and arguing for an ecclesiology grounded in a "democratic principle." In historicist fashion, he notes that while dynamic religious communities adhere to at least one principle or "fundamental idea, on which it stands or falls," there is nevertheless "a great difference between the fundamental idea itself and its historical development, the eventual form it takes in individual doctrinal statements and its application in church rituals and confessional documents."[47] He observes that such forms and applications often do not truly reflect the original idea but are the effect and consequence of a particular context. This suggests they can be changed. Changes in religious expression are therefore possible without damaging fundamental principles. In some cases these expressions "*must* be set aside if it becomes evident that, because they rest upon erroneous assumptions, they constitute a hindrance to the relatively perfect realization of that fundamental idea."[48]

Distinguishing between a fundamental principle and convictions and

been Alvin J. Beachy, *The Concept of Grace in the Radical Reformation* (Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1977).

[46] On the Anabaptist notion of the church as sacrament, see C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 1995), 351-64. Brian Hamilton argues convincingly that the notion of the church as the embodiment of the incarnation is also found in the theology of the Swiss Anabaptist Michael Sattler. See Brian Hamilton, "The Ground of Perfection: Michael Sattler on 'The Body of Christ,'" in *New Perspectives in Believers Church Ecclesiology*, ed. Abe Dueck, Helmut Harder, and Karl Koop (Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2010), 143-60.

[47] Mannhardt, "Concerning the Question of Military Service," 299.

[48] Ibid., 299.

practices that are historically conditioned, Mannhardt challenges the claim that nonresistance is the fundamental principle on which Mennonitism stands or falls. What lies at the root of the tradition, in his view, is a particular kind of ecclesiology: a "freely self-determined, constantly renewing brotherhood of persons determined to become disciples of Christ dedicated to mutual admonition, assistance and encouragement to act ethically."[49] This brotherhood is "based on practical honesty, love, patience, gentleness, and humility, without a systematic dogmatic structure and without the binding compulsion of unchangeable creeds and confessional documents."[50] This concept of Christian community is the basis of all Mennonite teachings, including the practices of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Such a brotherhood is congregational in its polity; a "democratic principle" determines important matters pertaining to teaching and practice. Accordingly, any attempt to create a hierarchical order or consistorial constitution, or any effort by the state to interfere in a congregation's self-determination, contradicts this foundational principle.[51] While Mannhardt recognizes that for many Mennonites non-participation in warfare is a fundamental principle, he believes they are mistaken. Although Simons argued for a nonresistant position, in Mannhardt's view he did so ostensibly in relation to his critique of Münsterite fanaticism.[52] His views may have made sense in the 16th century, but changing circumstances in the modern world mean new ethical perspectives must be considered.

Mannhardt does not avoid the Bible to build his case, but he does not see the teaching of nonresistance mandated in Scripture. He believes not only that the God of the OT encouraged warfare, but that the NT upholds this teaching.[53] Neither John the Baptist nor Christ declared the use of arms to be out of bounds, nor did they require soldiers to rid themselves of their weapons. Rather, both responded positively toward soldiers, and condemned only arbitrary and illegal acts of violence. Further, Christ often used images of warfare in his teachings, and could "hardly have categorically forbidden

[49] Ibid., 300.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid., 322-23.
[53] Ibid., 301, 313.

his disciples the use of weapons, especially for purposes of self-defense given the threats posed by robber bands."[54] Rather than viewing the language of warfare metaphorically, as Simons was prone to do, Mannhardt concludes that its use in Scripture sanctions Christian participation in it.

At the same time, Mannhardt is quick to explain that the moral imperative to love the enemy cannot be ignored. He readily affirms NT writings forbidding revenge.[55] However, he insists that these texts are entirely concerned with inner motivations and attitudes. Thus killing and wounding is not, in and of itself, sin. It becomes a transgression against God only if one's attitude is vengeful and if one is not willing to negotiate or honestly seek to find alternative solutions. Pure objectives and the internalization of the gospel are what matter most.[56] While Mannhardt does pay attention to Christ's teachings, nowhere does he address imitation, discipleship, or the new birth; nor does his theological anthropology take into account the inextricable ontological linkage between Christ and Christian identity. The identity of a Christian seems to have become more world-oriented and less ontologically connected to its divine source.

As for the secular state, Mannhardt emphasizes its autonomy. He points to the story where Jesus admonishes his disciples to give to God what belongs to God and to Caesar what belongs to Caesar.[57] He interprets Jesus' words to mean that religion and politics, church and state, are two distinct spheres, and thus the state enjoys a certain level of independence; for "aside from God, it has no one else above it to judge it."[58] There may be limits to one's obedience, but ultimately the government is responsible for determining what should be done in a given situation. Without question, soldiers should obey God above any other authorities, and under extreme circumstances of flagrant injustice, an army might act against the wishes of a commanding officer. On the whole, however, "the soldier must submit to the call of the

[54] Ibid., 301-302, 313.
[55] Ibid., 309.
[56] Ibid., 304-305, 310-11, 323. This is a line of reasoning similar to Augustine's. See the discussion of intention and "readiness of mind" according to Augustine in Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Love Your Enemies: Discipleship, Pacifism, and Just War Theory* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), chapter 4.
[57] Mannhardt, "Concerning the Question of Military Service," 303, 342.
[58] Ibid., 309.

fatherland even when he personally may not recognize the justness of the war, for not he, the individual citizen, but the government leaders have the right and the heavy responsibility to decide on the matter. . . ."[59] In situations where war appears to be unjust, the soldier has the responsibility to utilize by legal means all the influence that he has to stop officials from their errors. Should these efforts be in vain, one should assume that the government has the better understanding. In this way, Mannhardt reasons, the soldier on the basis of Romans 13:4 must in virtually every case obey the authorities. If they are in error, the soldier is "relieved of any personal responsibility"[60] because of the state's presumed better understanding of things, even if this means the soldier contributes to an unjust situation.[61] In this respect the values of justice and duty become paramount. Government officials are duty bound to punish and even execute criminals, while ordinary soldiers are obligated to render services consonant with the wishes of the state.

This emphasis on duty is oriented toward the other, but it is also linked to self-preservation. At one point, Mannhardt even suggests this is an important value above all else:

> Self-defense is allowed, indeed mandated because it is only when our life and existence is a given that we are enabled to complete our duty, our divine purpose, and show good will to our neighbors. It is permitted because in the division between the two ethical interests our duty lies on the side of the more immediate interest, that of self-preservation and higher justice. Therefore the other—the care for the life of our neighbor—must recede. On the other hand, there may be instances where consideration for oneself must give way before the safety of the

[59] Ibid., 311. For Augustine, "the soldier will be innocent in carrying out even an 'unrighteous command' of the king on whom he ought to rely for the determination of just or unjust cause" (Cahill, *Love your Enemies*, 72).

[60] Ibid., 312.

[61] For an account of the state as ethically autonomous within Protestantism more generally, see John Howard Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution: A Companion to Bainton* (Elkhart, IN: Co-op Bookstore, 1983), 97-113; Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2012), 129-79.

family, the state, or another person.[62]

Thus the virtue of duty toward the other and toward the self are interrelated. Self-preservation makes possible service to the state and to society, based on the highest values of justice that come from God.

Mannhardt takes care to reiterate that he is not opposed to peace, but he insists that this is a future reality that will come about only gradually. Referring to Matthew 13:33, he notes that the kingdom of God is like leaven that gradually saturates bushels of flour, or like "a mustard seed that only gradually grows to become a mighty tree."[63] This kingdom will first need to be realized within individuals before it will be "fully realized in the life of nations."[64] And yet, from his 19th-century vantage point, Mannhardt is also optimistic that the kingdom is near. Already in the present context powerful nations are beginning to reconcile differences.[65] The kingdom of God, then, is not—as Simons would have it—associated only with believers or the church; it is also reflected in nations that pursue acts of reconciliation.

Accordingly, the traditional Mennonite position is untenable, because it assumes a present realization of the kingdom, a faulty realized eschatology that is too eager "to leap over the God-ordained stages of development."[66] Mannhardt asserts that Mennonites in bygone years developed a great political theory, but their history of quarrels and lack of inner peacefulness reveal that they have embraced the letter of Scripture yet have utterly failed to understand the genuine spirit of their tradition.[67] Thanks to their misguided convictions, the various privileges that Mennonites have negotiated with monarchs over the years have given them an unfair advantage over other Christians. They have become co-conspirators in a profoundly unjust situation.[68] Their special privileges, negotiations, and exemptions have left them socially isolated, taking on the appearance of a hereditary caste. Accident of birth now determines membership, which

[62] Mannhardt, "Concerning the Question of Military Service," 307.
[63] Ibid., 317. See also 353.
[64] Ibid., 354.
[65] Ibid., 319.
[66] Ibid., 320.
[67] Ibid., 333.
[68] Ibid., 332.

leads to unjust material advantages.[69] Such "caste-like cordoning off from the rest of the world" is manifestly injurious, in that some intermarriages between families have led to a large number of childless unions. In addition, social isolation has narrowed Mennonites' cultural and intellectual horizons. The unwillingness of Prussian Mennonites to broaden their knowledge, and their limited education, has brought harm to the wider society, which is a moral transgression.[70] As a consequence, "the absence of any breeze of fresh air entering their ranks through the exchange of conflicting ideas [has] promoted a high degree of hardening and fossilization in their religious thought."[71]

Much of the blame for this situation, in Mannhardt's view, rests with the clergy. For many years elders have held absolute decision-making power, and conference resolutions have tied the hands of congregations, limiting their ability to make decisions on their own. The conference has even garnered judicial and penal power, leading to such clerical tyranny that church members have been intimidated and will no longer voice dissenting opinions.[72] The time has come for individuals to decide for themselves how to be responsible citizens. Mannhardt concludes that Mennonites should offer themselves as medics or stretcher-bearers in times of warfare. Moreover, there is no reason that they could not also become full participants on the battlefield. While noncombatant service might seem most appropriate, bearing arms should also be an option.[73]

In this summary, we can observe the hallmarks of modernity shaping Mannhardt's reasoning as he explicitly champions the individual as the one who determines the direction of moral action. At the beginning of his work, despite linking the Mennonite fundamental principle with the discerning community (Mennonitism understood as a brotherhood of persons dedicated to mutual admonition, assistance, and ethical living),[74] Mannhardt ultimately leaves little room for collective exegesis or the wisdom of ecclesial discernment. When he does refer to the collective, he uses the language

[69] Ibid., 335.
[70] Ibid., 338.
[71] Ibid., 345.
[72] Ibid., 348-49.
[73] Ibid., 355-58.
[74] See note 51.

of a "democratic principle," sidestepping the authority of the clergy and Mennonite tradition. He may have good reason to be critical of the clerical hierarchy, but he does not put in place a sufficient alternative communal model of discernment with theological content. The "democratic principle" ultimately means that individual members are to look internally to decide how to fulfill their military obligations.

In shaping his political theology Mannhardt does not exclude theological reasoning. Like his forebears, he attends to Scripture, including the teachings of Christ that call for a peaceful attitude. But he no longer has any use for a Christocentric hermeneutic in which identification with Christ and his kingdom becomes the point of departure for how one should live in a world of conflict. He would apparently live in both spheres—in the kingdom of Christ and in the kingdom of the world—a view less aligned with the Anabaptist tradition and more in tune with the Protestant mainstream and Lutheran two-kingdom theology. While aware of his own tradition, Mannhardt cannot bring himself to accept the Anabaptist-Mennonite ontology of the new birth along with the related notions of discipleship, imitation, and the separated community. He seems to find greater resonance with the modern world where individualism and universal principles of duty and justice, based on a general notion of "God," take center stage. He has become accustomed to being a citizen of the kingdom of the world, in which inner convictions and nation-state aspirations have become determinative. It is this theopolitical starting point that must now determine whether Mennonites will become involved in military service.

**Coming to Terms with the Past**

In 1884, not long after Mannhardt's essay in support of military service, Anna Brons (1810-1902), a dedicated member of the Emden Mennonite congregation, wrote a ground-breaking modern history of the Mennonites. She praised the early Anabaptists for their refusal to take up arms, and particularly applauded the nonresistant position of Menno Simons, contrasting his behavior with the vengeful and violent actions of the radical Thomas Müntzer. She went on to commend the Anabaptists for their pioneering peace witness. In light of the current state of affairs in northern Germany, however, she concluded that a new theopolitical imagination

was required. While Simons in his day had appropriately refused to bear arms, the present context required taking up arms. Pointing to Mennonite participation in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871, she insisted that no one should have the insolent boldness to condemn.[75]

Just a few decades later, support of militarism seemed to be gaining traction. In the spring of 1915, as the First World War was raging, Hermann Gottlieb Mannhardt (1855-1927), Wilhelm Mannhardt's cousin, spoke to an audience in a hotel banquet hall in Danzig (now Gdansk) about the virtues of Germany's cause, drawing associations between the present war and Germany's history of struggles for freedom and nationhood. He reminded listeners of the long road from Hermann's defeat of the Romans in the Teutoburger Wald in 9 AD[76] to the defeat of the French in the Napoleonic and Franco-Prussian wars, and to the declaration of the new German Reich at Versailles in 1871.[77] He waxed eloquent about the sublime and lofty cultural wealth present in the German *Volk,* drawing on classic German poets while roundly condemning the stale sickness of all things foreign.[78] By this time, more than 200,000 German soldiers had died in battle, a detail Mannhardt used in his lead-up to a strident call for the audience to fight against the alien hordes seeking to destroy the German spirit. Calling to mind Germany's status as "the heart of the world," the speaker concluded with these words:

> To you German men and German women, and to you, O German youth, belongs the future. Is the struggle of this charge, to bleed and die for it, to bring sacrifices for it, worth it? God grant us now, and in the days to come in war and in peace, what

[75] Anna Brons, *Ursprung, Entwickelung und Schicksale der Taufgesinnten oder Mennoniten in kurzen Zügen übersichtlich dargestellt* (Nordon [Ost Friesland]: n.p., 1884), 329.

[76] Hermann, a name given to Arminius, a Teutonic chieftain who led a coalition of armies defeating the Romans in 9 CE. The Hermannsdenkmal, a statue more than 50 meters high, was erected in 1875 near Detmold, Germany. It still stands menacingly, sword in hand, facing westward in the direction of France.

[77] Hermann Mannhardt, "Heroic Deeds and Heroes: An Address in Time of War," trans. Walter Klaassen, in Walter Klaassen, Harry Loewen, and James Urry, "German Nationalism and the First World War: Hermann G. Mannhardt's *Heroic Deeds and Heroes*," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 88, no. 4 (October 2014): 529.

[78] Ibid., 531.

is required for it: Heroic Deeds and Heroes![79]

In little less than two decades, these sentiments of heroism would become widespread as a significant number of German Mennonites embraced National Socialism and officially renounced the principle of nonresistance.

As the Wilhelm Mannhardt story suggests, such sentiment did not arise overnight. Elements of German militarism were already in place by the latter half of the 19th century. At the time, he was perhaps one of the first Mennonites to develop a theological rationale that would adumbrate the convictions of, and give credence to, attitudes and actions which would become widespread decades later. As I intimated earlier, some of this sentiment may have been anticipated in other regions of Europe as early as the 1750s, when the Mennonite position on nonresistance started to unravel.

Much has changed over the years. In discovering the horrors and atrocities of unfettered nationalism and conflict, many Mennonites in Germany have now recommitted themselves to principles of nonresistance, even rediscovering an Anabaptist vision for peace and service. Some have expressed words of repentance, often followed by corporately initiated rituals of remorse and regret, such as the petition for forgiveness marking the fiftieth anniversary of the Second World War's end in 1995.[80] European Mennonites have encouraged peace initiatives at the ecumenical level, such as the "Decade to Overcome Violence" sponsored by the World Council of Churches.[81] This initiative, among others, suggests not just a re-affirmation of traditional views but a development in thinking from a passive posture to an active, engaging one, including a transformation in language from "nonresistance" to "peacemaking." Indeed, a significant number of Mennonites and their institutions in Europe and North America have moved "from quietism to activism" and along the way have incorporated in their language concepts such as restorative justice, conflict resolution, conflict transformation, and

[79] Mannhardt, "Heroic Deeds and Heroes," 536.

[80] See Fehr and Lichdi, "Mennonites in Germany," 129-30.

[81] See the final submission to the WCC by the Union of German Mennonite Churches (Vereinigung der Deutschen Mennonitengemeinden), titled "'Guide our Feet into the Way of Peace': Declaration on Just Peace," to the WCC Decade to Overcome Violence 2001-2011: Churches Seeking Reconciliation, www.mennofriedenszentrum.de/fileadmin/downloads/DeclarationonJustPeace.pdf

mediation.[82] Mennonites have also linked themes on peace to issues ranging from human rights to the environment. The legacy of nonresistance has not only been recovered; it has been transformed in imaginative and fruitful ways.

It may be tempting for so-called "Mennonite progressives" to remain fixated by this recent narrative, with its accompanying optimism and exemplary comportment. Surely it would be satisfying to put our confidence in this recent history, and simply disremember or dismiss expressions of belief and conduct that do not measure up to certain Anabaptist ideals. But in avoiding the uncomfortable narratives, we may miss an opportunity to learn from the past. Becoming cognizant of Mannhardt's theological reasoning may help us comprehend more adequately the kind of reasoning that many German Mennonites came to adopt during the two World Wars. Such awareness is not about justifying past destructive attitudes but about placing them into historical context, and at least beginning to recognize the enormous power of the social, cultural, and political forces of that time. This sort of remembering should, moreover, provide a heightened awareness of the forces shaping today's theological and ethical convictions and attitudes.

Examining Mannhardt's theological reasoning may also help us probe our current theopolitical imaginations. A facile biblicism or prooftexting will not bear careful scrutiny since, as Mannhardt has shown, the Bible may be used to support a militaristic view just as well as a nonresistance view. Those reflecting on Mennonite peace theology would be wise to pay attention to hermeneutical assumptions and the role of communal discernment. That said, does a traditional Anabaptist hermeneutic—a Christocentric approach highlighting the axioms of imitation and discipleship, along with a theological anthropology of heavenly citizenship—still have purchase? Menno Simons's world is not ours, but does his theological reasoning deserve our attention?

[82] See Leo Driedger and Donald B. Kraybill, *Mennonite Peacemaking: From Quietism to Activism* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1994); Rachel Waltner Goossen, "North American Mennonite Peacemakers and Their History," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 23 (2005): 91-100; Gayle Gerber Koontz, "Peace Theology in Transition: North American Mennonite Peace Studies and Theology, 1906-2006," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 81, no. 1 (January 2007): 77-96; Ervin Stutzman, *From Nonresistance to Justice: The Transformation of Mennonite Church Peace Rhetoric, 1908-2008* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2011); *Peace*, ed. Ted Koontz, *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* 14, no. 2 (Fall 2013), entire issue.

Can his proposal, along with others in the tradition, provide a theologically defensible and faithful way forward for a contemporary political theology?

Such queries require serious attention today, especially when convictions about peace in Mennonite circles may be weakening.[83] Examining Mannhardt's reasoning—and Menno's—can help us gain clarity regarding our own perspectives and presuppositions. An exploration of this kind, together with an investigation of the historical consequences of such reasoning, may also deepen our resolve to work for peace in the world.

*Karl Koop is Professor of History and Theology at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg, Manitoba.*

[83] For example, American Mennonite Brethren seem to be softening their peace position. See "USMB Delegates Approve Peace Article Revision," *Mennonite World Review*, August 18, 2014, www.mennoworld.org/2014/08/18/news/usmb-delegates-approve-peace-article-revision, accessed January 4, 2016.