



ALSO HAT GOTT DIE WELT GELIEBT (GERMANIC OUTREACH)

“Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt, dass er seinen eingeborenen Sohn gab, auf dass alle, die an ihn glauben, nicht verloren werden, sondern das ewige Leben haben” (Johannes 3:16).

In 1525 a spark of revival was lit in Switzerland and Germany. Truly born again believers began meeting together and leaving their dead religious churches. They came to be known as Anabaptists, because they applied the biblical teaching of a believer's baptism, counting infant baptism as naught. Many were burned at the stake, stretched on the rack, hung, drowned and slaughtered that they might renounce their faith. They were persecuted by the Lutherans, Catholics, and Reformers over issues such as infant baptism, separation of church and state, swearing of oaths and obedience to the Scriptures.

In the 1560's, the once vibrant, persecuted church began to apostatize. False prophets abounded, as well as rogue groups such as the Munsterites. Small issues rendered much strife, and they began to lose the vision to take the Gospel to those around them. They became an example of the saying: “When people cease to be missionaries, they become a mission field.”

Around this time, a group of Mennonites settled in the lowlands of Northern Germany. Their language was Plaut Dietsch, or “German of the lowlands”. They have faithfully maintained and guarded this language wherever they have gone since.

In search of peace and religious freedom, exemption from military service, and their own government and schools, Mennonites began to emigrate.

In 1562 the Mennonites were offered religious tolerance, military exemption, and room to grow in return for settling the swamplands of Poland/Prussia. A recent plague had decimated the population, so there was plenty of room for all and much fertile farmland to claim. The Mennonites of Northern Germany and the Netherlands accepted the invitation and immigrated to the Gdansk area of Prussia.

Although the Dutch had the lowest, least valuable land, they improved the soil so consistently that their villages in a short time not only equaled but surpassed the more elevated villages of the Teutonic Knights.

At the same time many Mennonites from Switzerland and Southern Germany packed their bags and went up the Rein River to Rotterdam. From there they booked passage to America and arrived in Philadelphia. From this group came the Amish and Swiss Mennonites which have spread throughout Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Ontario. Later another group emigrated from France and settled in Berne, Indiana.

The Low German Mennonites prospered in Prussia for about one hundred years but again began to face spiritual decline with the Separatist-Pietism movement. Pietism emphasized a more spiritualized, inward, and

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emotional approach to religion without much outward reform. A change in government began to threaten their religious freedom especially in the area of exemption from military service, which was a conviction they held strongly enough to die for.

At the same time Katherine the Great engaged in the Crimean War, in which her soldiers won and acquired a large track of land which needed to be populated in Southern Ukraine. Being of German roots herself and appreciating the hard working, peaceful Mennonites, she extended an invitation to them to come and settle her newly acquired land. Her invitation was very pleasing: freedom to worship, freedom to run their own government, freedom to operate their own schools in German, military exemption, and exemption from swearing the oath. She also gave them

175 acres of land per family, free of charge, with a 10-year tax holiday. There was only one restriction. They must not convert the Russians.

The Mennonites signed the contract, and in doing so made one of the biggest mistakes in their history. This came back to bite them in the coming years when tens of thousands of Mennonites were slaughtered in the Revolution by those that they misused and refused to evangelize.

Arriving again in a rugged new land by horse and wagon, the Mennonites set to work. In time, they turned their land into the Bread Basket of Europe. It was said that the wheat grew to the horses' backs. Colonies prospered and again they soon became the most prosperous group of immigrants in Russia. But they did not treat their local Russian neighbors very well. They often hired young Russian as slaves, hardly giving them anything in return. In one account, they even took the old slaves out and shot them when they were not strong enough to work any more. Young boys were hired to drive their well kept team to church for them, but then required to stay outside with the horses and not allowed to come in and hear the gospel. They had promised not to convert to Russians.

In one case a young Russian man, Peter Denika, was so desperate to be baptized that one Sunday when there was a group getting baptized, he slipped into line and was baptized without the ministers being aware of his identity. He then went forth and became an evangelist among his own people.

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In the early 1800's a revival was sparked by a fresh group of immigrants from Prussia. Klaas Reimer stepped out of the large Mennonite church and started the Kleine Gemeinde. The Kleine Gemeinde (Little Church) did not approve of the immoral wedding practices, dancing, drinking and similar wickedness approved of in the Gross Gemeinde (Large Church). Though this movement never became a pure church, it does have much more light and emphasizes the new birth.

In the 1860's and 1870's, the Russian government changed to a czarist government. Taking note of all the strong, hard working, prospering German men, they put out a requirement for military service. Faced again with the threat of their religious freedom being taken from them, the Mennonites sent a group of delegates

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to speak with the Russian leaders. However, after over one hundred years of living in Russia, the men still could hardly speak enough Russian to clearly communicate their appeals. Their cry was, “Wie sent Dietsch!” We want our own culture, our own language, our own church, our own schools, and no outside contact except for business.

The Russian government was offended. Here was a prosperous group of people that were so exclusive that they would not even learn the language of the land. Therefore, they refused to grant them continued military exemption.

Over the same time the Hutterite people had made their trek through Austria, Troxylvania and Moravia, finally settling in the Ukraine near the Russian Mennonite colonies.

In 1873 the Mennonites and Hutterites sent a delegation together to survey the US and Canada for possible immigration.

In 1874-1876 one third of the Russian Mennonites and all the Hutterites immigrated to North America. The Hutterites settled in North Dakota, while the Russian Mennonites settled in Kansas, Nebraska, Minnesota, the Dakotas, and Manitoba.

In the 1920's the Canadian government put pressure on them to teach English in their schools. The Mennonites panicked and once again began to look for a land with freedom in schooling. “Wie sent Dietsch!” A few years later they bought one-third million acres of land in a windblown part of Mexico. They hired entire trains to transport them to Mexico, some passenger cars, cars for their livestock, and flat cars for their farm equipment and lumber. The train dropped them off in Chihuahua, Mexico. The Mexican government allowed them their own government and

here they again exploited the cheap Mexican labor and did not evangelize. In time they have again turned a desert into a garden. At the same time there is great spiritual darkness, reducing many to fornication, drinking, drugs, and drug dealing. Many Mexican Mennonites are illiterate. The women are also forbidden to learn Spanish, as that is too much contact with the outside world.

Mennonites also fled to Bolivia in pursuit of religious freedom and a more conservative lifestyle.

During the horrors of World War II, 35,000 Mennonites evacuated Poland and Western Europe. Two-thirds of these were forced to return to Siberia, where many perished in concentration camps.

The ship “Volendach” took a group in 1927 and dropped them into the “Green Hell” of Paraguay. Here again they have turned the land into the “Garden of Eden”. The Mennonite Colonies in Paraguay produce sixty percent of the entire country’s dairy products. But their cry is, “Wie sent Dietsch!” and they are still living in their own communities, with their own government, their own schools, their own language, and are not reaching out.

Wherever these people have gone they have represented hard work and prosperity mixed with a religion full of dead works, darkness, folk medicine and witchcraft.

We are very thankful for the work of revival God has been doing among these people. There have been churches raised up in Ontario, Alberta, Manitoba, and Bolivia. However, thousands remain lost in darkness and sin. There is a great need for laborers among this harvest field, laborers that can speak the Low German language: Plaut Dietsch.

“Und Jesus trat zu ihnen, redete mit ihnen und sprach: Mir ist gegeben alle Gewalt im Himmel und auf Erden. Darum gehet hin und lehret alle Volker und taufet sie im Namen des Vaters und des Sohnes und des Heiligen Geistes...” (Mattaus 28:18-19).

—Dara Cooper