

## Is Menno in the Coach? A Mennonite Myth, ca. 1550

*Background:* In the mid-16th century, it was illegal to be an Anabaptist in the Netherlands. Menno Simons, a Dutch Anabaptist pastor, was a traveling teacher and networker among hidden groups. Because Menno was influential, political leaders wanted to silence him and offered a substantial reward to anyone who would arrest him. The following story about the itinerant Menno circulated widely and was retold repeatedly even though it may only be a legend. That the Anabaptists retold this story so frequently may point to their discomfort with the idea of telling a half-truth. In the contemporary Dutch language dictionaries an idiomatic expression for half-truth is “Menist leugen” (Mennonite lie).

*Requirements:* Five persons. Set up an arrangement so that Menno and the driver are a level above where the passenger is. Driver has no lines.

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**Narrator:** One day Menno was riding on a stagecoach. Instead of getting into the coach, he was riding in the high seat, up front with the driver. Suddenly, policemen searching for Menno dashed up on horses. One of the policemen shouted,

**Policeman:** (*directs question to Menno and the driver*) Is Menno Simons in the coach?

**Narrator:** Menno leaned down:

**Menno:** Is Menno in there?

**Narrator:** Someone from inside the coach replied,

**Passenger:** No, he’s not in here.

**Narrator:** So Menno told the police,

**Menno:** They say Menno’s not in the coach.

**Narrator:** Foiled, the horsemen rode away. (*As the policeman leaves, Menno and the driver exchange a glance.*)

**Source:** Based on C.J. Dyck, “Menno Simons and the White Lie,” *Mennonite Encyclopedia* 5 (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1990), 555.

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