

Peace, Peace: Menno Simons, 1552

Background: Menno Simons needed to defend the Anabaptist movement against critics who pointed to violent behavior by Anabaptists in the 1530s—in Münster but also in Amsterdam and elsewhere in the Netherlands. By 1552 these violent groups had withered, but they had contributed to a widespread impression that the Anabaptists were violent revolutionaries. In response, Menno spoke of the church that he encouraged as he traveled, in which the peace of Christ reigns. He critiques all use of violence.

Requirements: Two persons

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Pastor: Menno, you Anabaptists are disgusting. You are revolutionaries, against all order. If you had the chance you'd seize power and use force just like anyone else.

Menno: Not so. Let me remind you. The Scriptures teach that there are two opposing princes. The one is the Prince of peace; the other the prince of strife. The Prince of peace is Christ Jesus; his kingdom is the kingdom of peace which is his church. His messengers are messengers of peace; his Word is the word of peace; his body is the body of peace; his children are the seed of peace; and his inheritance is the inheritance of peace.

Pastor: Peace, peace ... why do you talk about peace all the time?

Menno: Because of our King. With our King and in his Kingdom and reign, it is nothing but peace. Everything that is seen, heard and done is peace.

Pastor: But aren't Christians supposed to use the sword for the sake of justice?

Menno: Well, what did Christ say? He commanded Peter to sheathe his sword. All Christians are commanded to love their enemies; to do good to those who abuse and persecute them; to give their coat when their cloak is taken; to turn the other cheek when one is struck. Tell me. How can a Christian use the Bible to defend retaliation, rebellion, war, striking, killing, torturing, stealing, robbing, plundering and burning cities, and conquering countries?

Pastor: Well, I disagree. I think that in the Bible, God calls Christians to fight for what is right.

Menno: But how? What methods does the Bible tell us to use when we fight? Our weapons are not swords and spears, but patience, silence, hope, and the Word of God. With these we fight our battle. Paul says, "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God." With these we intend to storm the kingdom of the devil and not with sword, spears and cannon. We want to bring every thought into captivity to Christ. True Christians do not know vengeance, no matter how they are treated.

Pastor: But surely when they suffer injustice and wrong Christians have to retaliate.

Menno: No, no. True Christians don't break their peace—even if they should be tempted to do so by bondage, torture, poverty, fire and the sword. True Christians don't cry, "Vengeance, vengeance!" as the world does, but with Christ they pray, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."

Source: Menno Simons, "Reply to False Accusations" (1552), in Wenger, ed., *Complete Works*, 554-557.

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