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Summary

The Duty to Teach and Teaching Duties

A study of the development of Mennonite religious training in the Lowlands (ca. 1540-1811), based on publications for religious education.

In the Lowlands Mennonite (Anabaptist) publications for religious education first appeared in 1540. Not only were Catholic books for religious training circulating here at the time but texts by Lutherans already as well. Catholics and Lutherans alike were of the opinion that religious instruction was a matter for parents, school and church, although in the historical situation of our country at the time only Catholics had the opportunity to put this conviction into practice. The two denominations were agreed on the subject matter to be taught: the four subjects of catechization, namely the *Credo*, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer and the sacraments, had primary focus in religious instruction.

The 'Mennonite' books for religious education that appeared at this time can be placed in two categories: the first consisted of publications on religious training in general, for fellow believers, and the second of writings that parents directed at their children for the purpose of religious training. In the first category, which includes books by David Joris, Hendrik Niclaes and Menno Simons, only Niclaes granted attention to the catechetical subjects. All three authors, however, put much emphasis on the obedience children owe their parents. Joris's and Niclaes's books were intended for the children themselves, which distinguished this literature from that of the Catholics and from most of the Lutheran material. The second category consisted of the letters and the testimonies that the victims of religious persecution wrote to their children. More or less all of these were included in the books on Mennonite martyrs. As an element in the total religious reformation movement of the sixteenth century, this Mennonite testimonial literature had a special position in terms of genre and content in relation to the practice regarding religious education pertaining at the time. These letters providing religious education related to the Mennonite notion of religious training, which in this period – in contrast to the Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed view – was not seen as a task for the church and its ministers, but was regarded as the exclusive, even self-evident responsibility of the parents. In terms of content, Mennonite religious training of a personal nature displayed great consistency: no knowledge of the catechetical subjects was recommended to children; virtue in general and obedience in particular were desired, and conversion, as a personal decision for faith, was expected.

From the beginning Scripture had a dominant place in Mennonite religious training. In view of the fact that solid, ready knowledge of the Bible was regarded as fundamental to further development in the children's faith, countless Bible verses were quoted and cited for purposes of argument as well as instruction.

Even after the period of persecutions, which ceased in the seventies of the sixteenth century, Mennonite materials for religious education could be separated into those directed at a general circle of Mennonite readers and those meant for their children. In that last category, it was the forms of fatherly instruction (such as that of Van Dantzich, Twisck, Van Wormerveer and P.H., all coming from orthodox streams) which took the place of martyrs' letters.

From the thirties of the seventeenth century, a few ministers produced textbooks for the benefit of parents who wanted, in home teaching, to prepare their children as 'aankomelingen' (candidates) for church membership. These textbooks by Pietersz, Jansz, Van Braght, Dirksz and an anonymous author, made up of a combination of examinable knowledge and religious convictions of the denomination of which he was a member, could be identified as the first Mennonite catechisms. Although parents were duty bound to take the initiative in home teaching, the candidate was expected to apply himself to Scripture as well, in which he or she was helped by the Bible references offered in these textbooks.

In these books there is no question of uniformity such as found with Roman Catholics, Lutherans and Reformed; the content of instruction chosen and the treatment of the material is very diverse. In these Mennonite catechisms, the four traditional subjects of catechization were frequently mentioned only implicitly, whereas much attention was given to differing viewpoints among Mennonite denominations regarding excommunication, shunning, marrying outside the denomination, foot washing, oath, position on government office and avoiding violence.

In cases where home teaching could not take place because of the death of both parents, the task – at first viewed as belonging to the sphere of the deaconry – was taken over by the church so that orphans would be instructed in the Christian religion. By this means, religious instruction for orphans, as a special form of home teaching institutionalized by the church, led gradually to religious instruction for all the children of those who belonged to the congregation. Therefore, one may speak of religious instruction conducted by the church only from the seventies of the seventeenth century in congregations of the Waterlanders (Leiden) and the Flemish (Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Leiden) and in United congregations (Utrecht and Harlem). In this period only the Old Flemish maintained home teaching as the only form of religious instruction. This situation developed against the background of Collegiantism, allegations of Socinianism, the 'lammerenkrijgh' (lambs' war) and growing confessionalism.

In this period the first textbooks for the purpose of this type of instruction by the church were published. These can be divided into two categories. The first consisted of the more Bible-oriented textbooks by Sittart, Van Weeningem and Floris. The second was represented by books by Apostool/Van Deyl, Van Eeghem and Dooregeest/Schyn/Beets, in which the subject matter was approached in a confessional way. Clearly, the dominant and controlling position of the public Reformed Church

in the society of the time had a strong influence on their confessionality. The manner of putting questions, the terminology used and the presence of doctrinal theology not originally found among Mennonites witness to a Calvinistic influence. The equally doctrinal (although less prominently so) influence of Socinianism in books by Galenus was distinguished from these. However, it was not only these influences from outside their circle that encouraged confessionality at this time. Mennonites themselves felt a need henceforth to add a degree of confessionality to their identity as Biblicists. This, after all, offered them the possibility of providing their own denomination with a clearer profile. The fact that the number of Mennonite ministers/authors with good (theological) training had increased, will certainly have been a factor here as well.

In this connection we can identify a change in identity among Mennonites during the last decades of the seventeenth century, whereby the original exclusive Biblicism was abandoned. At the same time, this new approach to the subject matter for religious education meant a softening of emphasis on points Mennonites disagreed about among themselves: where excommunication, shunning, marriage outside one's own denomination and foot washing earlier received much emphasis in the subject matter, at the end of the seventeenth century these points had a less prominent role.

In the first half of the eighteenth century, the positions of the Old Flemish, the 'Lamists' and the 'Zonists' remained more or less stable, although all three denominations diminished in membership. Due to increased respect for each other's differing points of view, fewer polemical disputes occurred.

The development of books for religious education in the context of the growing confessionality of the last decennia of the seventeenth century continued in the first half of the eighteenth century. In the various Mennonite textbooks of this period, recurring subjects were: knowing God, his characteristics, the significance of Holy Scripture, creation, the Trinity, the fall and restoration of humankind, Christology, baptism, the Lord's Supper, government, vengeance, the oath, the church, the servants of the church, excommunication, death, the resurrection of the dead, the last judgment, the punishment of the wicked and the everlasting bliss of the pious.

The first half of the eighteenth century was also a time in which pietism and a moderate Enlightenment influenced religious training. Pietistic elements are found in books by Ten Cate, Dijk, Van Komen, Hendriks and especially Deknatel. However, the developing moderate Enlightenment was clearly of even more influence: in the method applied – books with questions offering no set answers, and in the content – presenting knowledge of God from nature as well as faith based on revelation, as is the case with Kien, Van Huyzen, Schijn and Thomas. Mennonites were forerunners in the inclusion of rational-empirical findings from physico-theology in their textbooks. We find this most pronounced in the works of Kat, Verduin and Schagen. There is also evidence of the increasing influence of Remonstrant and foreign Cal-

vinist theologians, whose ideas tolerant Mennonite authors included unreservedly in their books.

In this period the Old Flemish gradually abandoned the isolated position they had until then maintained, that only home teaching was of value. Dijk, Hendriks, Waerma and Boudewijns were the first of them to take the new paths of church catechization. Thus it was that religious education provided by the church became a generally accepted form of faith transference among Mennonites by the middle of the eighteenth century.

Although membership and congregations continued to diminish among the Mennonites after 1750, the institutionalized distinction between the Old Flemish, the 'Zonists' and the 'Lamists' nevertheless remained intact to the end of the century. Their 'genootschappen' (societies) contributed important notables as increasing numbers of Mennonites gradually began participating in the affairs of society in the eighteenth century. Teyler's Genootschappen and the 'Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen' (Society for the Propagation of Public Well-Being) were prominent examples. At the same time, many authors and editors of 'Spectator' magazines were Mennonites – for instance, the minister Van Engelen – which led to their having a significant role in the Dutch Enlightenment.

In the second half of the eighteenth century Mennonites joined others in their desire for a political voice, with the result that many of them chose the party of the Patriots, in which they often had a position of leadership. When the Batavian Republic was instated. Mennonites, like representatives of other denominations previously excluded from public office, shared participation in the new government with Reformed believers.

Against the background of these events, two unrelated developments with respect to Mennonite religious training came to the fore. In conservative groups – such as the rightist 'Zonists', Frisians and Old Flemish – great effort was made by many to try to stop the loss of traditional values among the youth. A significant number of new textbooks were produced by people from these groups, such as van Dijk, Luytjesz, S.B. Hoekstra, Waerma, B.S. Hoekstra, Van Dokkumburg, Valter, Ris and Gorter. At the same time, the moderate enlightened approach being applied to religious instruction material became the established one among Mennonites, as seen in the works of the Harlingen ministers, Wagenaar, Wagenmaker, Hulshoff, Tichelaar, Hovens, P. Beets Pzn., Van Oosterwijk Hulshoff and F. Hoekstra. The constantly recurring themes of reasonableness, moral virtue and duty, with citizenship, patriotism, knowledge of God from nature and physico-theology were to form the ingredients of their subject matter.

Some of the latter now became interested in general pedagogical insights like those provided earlier by Locke and by the German Philanthropists. As a result, from the fifties of the eighteenth century onward, a new point of interest appeared in enlightened Mennonite educational literature, namely the training of a child as such. These

new views were recognizably present in works of Verwer, Van Oosterwijk Hulshoff, P. Beets Pzn. and F. Hoekstra and in works of the 'Nut' authors. They were averse to teaching doctrines and showed specific interest in moral duties, with the result that they became torchbearers for a development in Mennonite religious education, stimulated by father and son Nieuwenhuizen, Van Rijswijk, Tichelaar and Van Gelder, that welcomed a more general civic orientation.

Although the extent of the involvement of Mennonite ministers – namely Van Rijswijk, Tichelaar, Van Gelder, Floh and P. Beets Pzn. – in the early phase of national education was remarkable, considering their relatively small numbers in the totality of ministers in the Netherlands, Mennonite Influence in religious and moral training in the national elementary education of the time was practically non-existent.