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Summary

A History of Mennonite Hymns (1793-1973)

From Particularism to Ecumenicity

AIM, OCCASION AND QUESTION TO BE PRESENTED

The aim of this study is to describe and explain the history of Mennonite hymnology in its origins, development and reception from the *Christelyke Gezangen* (1793) (=Christian hymns) up to the introduction of the *Liedboek voor de Kerken* (1973) (=songbook for the churches). Musicological and prosopographical aspects are not included.

In the twentieth century, much academic research has been done on the hymn in the Protestant tradition. The interest of the last decades in particular has given rise to new insights from historical, cultural and theological perspectives. However, a study of the Mennonite hymn is absent, which may be considered, at the least, a striking circumstance. After all, Anabaptists have developed their own, independent hymnological tradition since the time of the Reformation. Moreover, it is a very large body of songs: by 1800 about 150 songbooks with a minimum of 15,000 songs had been published – a result of, on one hand, the vehement internal divisions, and, on the other hand, the love-hate relationship with the dominant Reformed Church. In the following years, until 1973, another twelve songbooks were published, including a draft and a test collection. This study aims to fill in this gap and in that way complete the picture of the hymnological tradition and its development in the Protestant part of the Netherlands. Certainly also because Anabaptist practice in terms of theology, dogmatics and ecclesiology, and perhaps of poetry and liturgy as well, developed differently than that of ‘mainstream’ Protestantism.

The question to be researched, is: ‘How can one explain the circumstance that Mennonite “hymn culture” changed from a tradition informed by their own specific denomination to one becoming generally Protestant in nature, resulting in the *Liedboek voor de Kerken*?’

MOTIVATION

Most hymnology studies scarcely touch on the social and cultural-historical background of songbooks, let alone provide explanatory analyses of hymnological, liturgical and

theological developments. This holds true for the rare articles concerning the Mennonite hymn. In the nineteenth century, Mennonite professors J.G. de Hoop Scheffer and S. Cramer, for example, published, respectively, the articles 'A Short History of Church Singing among the Mennonites in This Country' and 'Contributions to the History of Our Hymns and Our Church Singing.' Other nineteenth-century Mennonite ministers reviewed newly published Mennonite and other Protestant hymnals, but no more than that. In the twentieth century P. Visser wrote an extensive article on the history of psalm-singing among Mennonites. At the same time, he put together the catalogue *Het lied dat nooit verstomde* (1988) (=the song that was never silenced). Currently this work is referred to both inside and outside Mennonite circles as the source for an accurate picture of the Mennonite hymn. This catalogue consists of a general overview and a limited selection of Mennonite collections. All publications named include inventories, summaries and commentaries but no systematic research into the genesis and the reception, nor a study of liturgical use of songs or of their theology, and contemporary criteria for testing and selection remain unexamined.

PERIODIZATION

The time frame 1793-1973 is inspired by new liberalizing and emancipating developments in Dutch church life. These are connected with impulses to renewal in political, intellectual and cultural areas resulting from the influence of the Enlightenment and the founding of the Batavian Republic. Separation of church and state (1796) would lead to new theological insights and directions in the nineteenth century, while the ecumenical appeal would resound increasingly in the twentieth century after a phase of social politicization and ecclesiastical compartmentalization. The development of Dutch Anabaptism cannot be viewed separately from these impulses and processes, and their effects are without doubt also evident in the insights regarding hymnology and its production.

PLAN

Three Mennonite songbooks from the mid-eighteenth century will be studied as introduction to the *Christelijke Gezangen* (1793 and 1796) in order to discover changes in theology in a period of transition from traditional to enlightenment language and from confessionalism to anti-confessionalism. Further, songbooks from other traditions published in the same period as the Mennonite collections will be studied for the purpose of comparison: five Lutheran, four Dutch Reformed, two Calvinist, three liberal, one Remonstrant, and a few other songbooks of Dutch and foreign origin.

Each chapter is divided into four sections. It begins with a general overview of social, cultural and ecclesiastical history based on contemporary literature, followed by a descriptive section concerning the genesis of the relevant songbooks. This is followed by

the study of practical theological sources on developments in liturgy and on the use of song texts in – handwritten – sermons. The last section, on theology, analyzes to what extent Mennonite theology of the time is reflected in the respective songbooks.

Chapter 1 (1793-1810) describes the genesis of five songbooks which were, at least in part, a product of the period of the dominant Dutch Reformed Church. There is a treatment of the influence of politics and Enlightenment theology on song texts and also of the development of new views on liturgy as an alternative for general religious ‘decline’.

Chapter 2 (1810-1870) deals with the effect of the transformation from a liberal climate to a Biblical-orthodox spirit. It describes the repercussions of this for three songbooks that had their origin in the time of restoration, romantics and new forms of nationhood. It also discusses liturgical forms during a phase in which the Mennonite conference presented itself as a denomination equal to the Dutch Reformed Church.

Chapter 3 (1870-1944) describes how the Mennonite conference became firmly rooted in modernism and the continuing influence this had on the character of Mennonites as a liberal church denomination. The rise of the *Nederlandse Protestantenvond* (1870) (=Dutch alliance of Protestants) – an association of liberal Mennonites, Lutherans, Dutch Reformed, Remonstrants and non-churched – led to the question, among Mennonites, as to what, exactly, ‘Mennonite’ is. This finds expression in the tension in the field of hymnology between two Mennonite song collections that appeared more or less at the same time. In connection with this question of identity, attention will be given to, among other things, unusual experiments in liturgy and surprising impulses from abroad. The latter gave rise to a process of revitalization that had a permanent effect on national and international ecumenical relationships. Cooperation in the field of hymnology was an important result of this.

In Chapter 4 (1944-1973), the post-war period of reconstruction and social democratization, these connections are consolidated in a liberal-ecumenical song collection with its own orthodox supplement. A Mennonite test collection was put together expressly for the purpose of acquainting congregations with a few new songs; these were later chosen for the inter-confessional *Liedboek voor de Kerken*. In the area of liturgy, a *Kanselboek* (=preacher’s manual) was published, which for the first time offered Mennonite preachers a guideline for church services.

Chapter 5 describes the changes, turns and transitions that explain developments in Mennonite hymnology between 1793 and 1973.

ELEMENTS OF THE RESEARCH AND CONCLUSIONS

From a Multiple Use of Anti-confessional Songbooks to an Inter-confessional Songbook

The Mennonite congregations of Haarlem and Amsterdam are the greatest producers of songbooks for their own use as well as for the whole conference. The traditional use of psalms with only a few songs for baptism and the Lord’s Supper in the late eighteenth

century explains the need for the addition of songs more suited to evangelical themes and Christian feast days. By far the largest number of songs in Amsterdam's "Lamist" and "Zonist" collections (*Christelijke Gezangen* 1793 and 1796 respectively) derived from poets of the "Patriotist" poetic societies, who were not all Mennonites. In that respect these collections were inter-church in character, even though the committees for choosing hymns determined the content themselves.

The autonomy of congregations allowed for each congregation to publish its own songbook. Thus it happened that six congregations produced five songbooks between 1793 and 1810. Most of them were spread all over the conference, so that various songbooks were used. Because of this, ministers were required to adapt their choice of song every time they led a service in another congregation, and it made singing at inter-congregational gatherings problematic. It is therefore not to be wondered at, that an increasing need was felt for a common hymnal.

In the nineteenth century, new songbooks often drew from an existing repertoire, but also from Dutch Reformed, Lutheran and foreign collections, and ministers, too, wrote new songs and translated or re-wrote old ones. At the same time, use of Dutch Reformed, Lutheran and inter-church song collections, and thereby also ecclesiastical jargon, gradually increased, while production and use of Mennonite collections steadily decreased. The reasons for this have to do with quality and competition, but also with changes in theology and confessionalism. This resulted in a gradual transformation from Anabaptist particularity to Anabaptist ecumenicity.

This history of songbooks, therefore, reveals a process of convergence. The *Vereenigde Doopsgezinde Gemeente* (=united Mennonite church) of Amsterdam (1801) sang from "Lamist" and "Zonist" *Christelijke Gezangen* (1793/1796), and the *Uitgezochte Liederen* (1810) (=selected songs) are a product of Leyden and West-Zaandam. The congregations of Haarlem and Amsterdam strove for a common song collection (1845) as well, but this attempt failed on account of theological positions and language use. This led to the divergence of Haarlem's *Christelijke Kerkgezangen* (1851) (=Christian church hymns) and Amsterdam's *Christelijke Liederen* (1870) (=Christian songs).

A new development occurs when liberal Mennonites, Remonstrants, Dutch Reformed and Lutherans cooperate on the song collections of the *Nederlandse Protestantenvond: Godsdienstige Liederen* (1882) (=religious songs), "*Vervolgbundel*" (1920) (=sequel collection) and *Liederenbundel* (1943) (=song collection). In 1943 the *Vrijzinnig Protestantse Radio Omroep* (=liberal Protestant radio broadcaster) and the *Vrije Gemeente* (=free congregation) were added. Finally, this anti-confessional Protestant flank converged with confessional Protestants in the *Liedboek voor de Kerken* (1973).

Exceptions are Haarlem's *Doopsgezinde Liederen* (1895) (=Mennonite songs) and the *Gezangen ten gebruike van Doopsgezinde Gemeenten* (1897) (=hymns for use in Mennonite churches) by the ministers J. Sepp and H. Boetje, who represented the particularity that still remained: the former was intended to preserve traditional nineteenth century Anabaptism from oblivion, the latter was intended as a Mennonite supplement for congregations who sang from other Protestant collections.

Typification

Mennonite songbooks are typified in terms of: enlightened, orthodox, specifically Mennonite, general Protestant, and ecumenical. In general, any association with Reformed teaching must be avoided. For this reason, words in song texts such as “taking oath”, “church”, “halleluiah” or songs about original sin must be removed or altered. Freedom of conscience and toleration were typical Mennonite jargon.

Amsterdam’s “Zonist” *Christelijke Gezangen* (1796) appears to be more enlightened than the “Lamist” *Christelyke Gezangen* (1793). This stream, traditionally confessional, adapted the traditional teaching on reconciliation to enlightenment thinking. In this way, Christ was transformed from “Security” or “Ransom” to “Example” and “Teacher of Morals”. The “Lamists”, however, traditionally liberal, retained the reconciling blood of Christ. In so doing, they maintained orthodox faith longer than the “Zonists”. In 1943, two of the 138 congregations still sang from the “Lamist” collection and from the “Zonist” one.

Due to the extensive contributions of the noted poet Aagje Deken, Haarlem’s *Christelijke Gezangen en Lieder* (1804) (=Christian hymns and songs) can be called “Patriotist” and enlightened. This collection quickly became outdated and was not very popular. Only one of the 125 congregations still sang from it in 1895. Zwolle’s *Vervolg op de Christelyke Gezangen* (1808) (=sequel to the Christian hymns) adopted songs from the eighteenth century but also added new song texts. The collection is a mix of enlightened and traditional songs. In 1895 this collection is no longer seen anywhere.

The poetical and tolerant character of the pluralistically compounded *Uitgezochte Lieder* (1810) made this songbook into a general Protestant one. In 1943, two congregations still sang from it.

Haarlem and Amsterdam’s draft (1845) was rejected because of its enlightened and, on that account, old-fashioned character. Haarlem’s *Christelijke Kerkgezangen* (1851) may be called innovative. This hymnal marked the first appearance of the term “brothers and sisters” as an expression of congregational consciousness. It also includes a few translated songs from foreign collections, which gave it an international image. In 1895, one congregation still sang from it.

Amsterdam’s *Christelijke Lieder* I (1870) was conservative. Under the influence of the romantics, Jesus was transformed from “Friend” to “Saviour” again. In 1943, one congregation still sang from it. *Christelijke Lieder* II (1870), compounded out of Dutch Reformed and Lutheran songbooks, was more popular. Three congregations still sang from it in 1943.

Doopsgezinde Lieder (1895) was conservative. Music notation was isorhythmical and popular song texts were included unchanged. Three congregations still sang from it in 1943.

Gezangen ten gebruike van Doopsgezinde Gemeenten (1897) was modernist. This collection included both song texts of renewal and much-loved songs, adapted. Music notation was rhythmic. In 1943, 51 congregations sang from it! Seventy congregations sang from the *Godsdienstige Lieder* (1882) of the Nederlandse Protestantenbond! This indicates that the Mennonite repertoire was both explicitly liberal and general Protestant.

Under the influence of right-wing modernism, the Mennonite supplement (1944), as part of the liberal *Liederenbundel* of the Protestantenbond (1943), took approximately 50% of its songs from the Dutch Reformed collection (1938). In this way, it provided an orthodox supplement to the *Liederenbundel*. In 1950, 119 of the 153 congregations and regional groups sang from it.

Psalmen en Liederen (1963) (=psalms and songs), an experimental collection as preparation for the *Liedboek voor de Kerken* (1973), included new Mennonite songs as well as ecumenical ones. In 1973, 47 of the 140 congregations sang from it. It was renewing and ecumenical.

The Mennonite songs in the *Liedboek* are, for the most part, new and have an Anabaptist-historical character. In 1978, 103 of the 138 congregations sang from it.

Reader/Song Leader and Organist

Although musicology is not considered, some attention is given to music notation. Until the late eighteenth century, music was usually notated rhythmically, and after that, according to “the short way of singing” – a form of notation newly introduced by the Dutch Reformed Church. This method was necessary for improving congregational singing. In the nineteenth century notation depended on the theology or the custom of the congregation: either isorhythmic (conservative) or rhythmic (liberal). In the twentieth century notation is primarily rhythmic.

From the sixteenth century congregational singing was accompanied by a song leader, who was frequently also the Scripture-reader as churchgoers entered. It depended on the congregation as to whether he or the preacher chose readings and songs. Sometimes preachers made up reading rosters to prevent arbitrariness. On these, for instance, no psalms of cursing appeared.

Halfway through the eighteenth century, the church organ was introduced (Utrecht 1765). In this Mennonites adapted themselves to the dominant Dutch Reformed Church. It was the “Zonists” originally conservative but now more enlightened, who held a fervent plea for this “worldly instrument”: In the Bible there was no objection to music; congregational singing would be accompanied better; humans had received the senses for the purpose of enjoyment. The song leader probably only beat time, and he had to adapt himself to the rhythm of the organist. At the end of the nineteenth century, the reading was sometimes replaced by a short period of organ playing. This increasingly became the custom, so that, in the first half of the twentieth century, when it was difficult to fill vacancies for the function of song leader/reader, it was abandoned.

Theological

The texts of songs have been studied with reference to the concepts justification and sanctification. The phrases “for us” and “for me” have been taken as indications for justification, virtues and duties for sanctification. Mennonite historiography has scarcely pursued the views on this critically. Justification and sanctification acquire

a different accent in Mennonite teaching tradition than in the Lutheran *Augsburg Confession* and the Reformed *Heidelberg Catechism*. As opposed to Lutheran and Calvinist *forensic* justification, in which sanctification is given simultaneously, Mennonite tradition formulates an *effective* justification, in which man declares himself prepared to cooperate in the process of sanctification by acceptance of and obedience to God's grace: cooperation that is expressed in habits and behaviour. By tracing the concepts justification and sanctification in Mennonite collections and comparing these with each other and with other Protestant collections, it has become evident which element received the most emphasis and which social and theological influences were instrumental in this.

The ideal of virtue was characteristic of eighteenth-century society. We see this reflected in the "Patriotist" and enlightened Mennonite songbooks between 1793 and 1810. Of all the Protestant songbooks, these include the greatest number of songs about virtue. In this way Mennonites emphasize an *effective* justification. This coincides with what was taught in religious education: and so one sang what one taught. A Biblical-orthodox climate dominated the Mennonite conference in the period 1810-1870. The effect of this is clearly seen in the songbooks: here the stress is less on virtues and more on redemption in Christ. At the same time, Reformed jargon came into use. *Forensic* justification came to be accented more: one sang what one taught. Between 1870 and 1944, in particular in the second half of the nineteenth century, Mennonites were influenced by modern theology and new forms of nationhood. Then too, new duties were introduced, such as self-sacrifice and subjection to government laws and the power of the state (provided freedom of conscience was guaranteed), but none appeared in the songbooks. However, songs of the fatherland were included, and songs about love of fatherland as well. And yet, what was taught, was sung: the stress on love of God, one's neighbour and oneself was seen in texts of songs about widows, orphans, the distressed, and the disadvantaged, which *effective* justification implies. In the post-war period 1944-1973, the effects of right-wing modernism were evident in religious education as well as in songs. It is striking that the *terms* justification and sanctification were no longer taught, but the *content* was. Sanctification was stressed by Mennonite theologians, because this was regarded as a good approach to accentuating ethical norms in society. At the same time, orthodox theologians pointed to the importance of justification; what was taught, therefore, was sung. In comparison to other Protestant songbooks, however, Mennonites put more stress on sanctification. In this way, *effective* justification remained typical.

The Influence of Other Protestant Songbooks on Mennonite Ones

It can be ascertained that, in terms of *selection*, in the main more Mennonite than general Protestant songs were sung. The number of songs from other Protestant songbooks added up to much less than 50%, except in the supplement (1944), which included as many as 66%. As well, in terms of *use* of songbooks, it is justified to conclude that the singing was "Mennonite". It appears that, until 1895, the "Zonist" *Christelijke*

Gezangen (1796) was the top hit. The use of this Mennonite collection surpassed even other Protestant collections.

Why is it that Mennonites sang more Mennonite songs than general Protestant in the nineteenth century? In the first place, Mennonite was: universal Christianity. Even if one poses that song collections with texts by non-Mennonite poets had a general Protestant character, it was the Mennonite commissioners who determined content, who corrected and authorized. Secondly, Mennonites had a long tradition of hymnology which was not given up lightly: among nineteenth century Mennonites, church singing was confession in song, as Professor R. Koopmans (1770-1826) put it. Thirdly, the nineteenth century was a century of religious debate, of new Protestant streams and of a consciousness of Mennonite ecclesiastical history. In their hymns, Mennonites preserved typical characteristics such as adult baptism, refusal to swear oaths, and tolerance; at the same time, there was hesitation about using ecclesiastical jargon such as halleluiah. The fourth point was the presentation of themselves, the need to be distinguished from others.

A change came in this after 1895. Under the influence of the modernist stream, the *Nederlandse Protestantenbond's Godsdienstige Liederen* (1882) enjoyed preference far beyond all others. The result was that, around 1924, the singing was more general Protestant than Mennonite. This trend carried through and culminated, as far as selection goes, in the Mennonite supplement (1944) and, as far as use goes, in the success, alongside of the already popular *Godsdienstige Liederen*, of its "Vervolgbundel" (1920). In short, the Mennonite conference began singing general Protestant from 1924 to 1973. The curtain had dropped on their own specific songbook culture.

The Influence of Mennonite Song Collections on Other Protestant Collections

Until halfway through the nineteenth century, Lutherans, with respectively 7% (1826) and 3% (1857) borrowings, were more interested in Mennonite songs than were Dutch Reformed, who had adopted only 1.6%. Historical as well as literary and confessional reasons could have had influence in this. In view of the background of the Dutch Revolution, the image of a body that endangered the state clung to this formerly dissident and "Patriotist" church denomination, which the Dutch Reformed had filed in their collective memory. The songbooks were stamped with the seal of emancipation because of songwriters who frequently had origins in the "Patriotist" poetry societies. Furthermore, the Dutch Reformed had access to their own songwriters who produced test collections as preparation for the *Evangelische Gezangen*. In these, this church was assured of hymns that had passed the test of Reformed articles of faith, so that no ecclesiastical disunity such as had earlier taken place among the Lutherans (1790) need be feared. The Dutch Reformed, therefore, rejected spiritual songs that were averse to any form of dogmatism, and thereby, in their view, unsuitable for pedagogical purposes. For this reason, anti-confessional Mennonite hymns, placing great stress on sanctification instead of on justification, and sometimes presenting Jesus as extremely enlightened, could not be considered for the Dutch Reformed hymnal.

The Lutheran synodal collection (1826) was the hymnal of the left wing of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The 7% Mennonite songs is explained by both the common “Patriotist” background and their spiritual affinity as enlightened ones. The adoption of the song “The Christian knows no force, he allows freedom in the way of thinking to every man” is illustrative.

Of historical significance is that Remonstrants learned to sing hymns via Mennonites. On the basis of their selecting only Mennonite songs for their first collection (1848), besides the fact that they shared a common “Patriotist” past and toleration, Remonstrants could convincingly be called spiritual relatives.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, history and confessionalism as motivation for adoptions play an increasingly minor role. Literary quality steadily acquires more priority as criterion. The fact that the orthodox “restored Evangelical Lutheran songbook” (1857) adopted Mennonite songs (3%), had to do with its desire to have an *Einheitsgesangbuch* (=unity hymnal) that was broadly oriented along inter-church and international lines and of poetic quality. *Christelijke Gezangen* (1884) did not deviate from this purpose; the highest literary quality was required for it. That scarcely any Mennonite songs met the required standard (0,2%) likely had to do with the fact that its existing collection was a product of its time, but also that there were fewer new Mennonite ministerial poets. Only Jeronimo de Vries (1838-1915) was counted among those gifted in literary skills of highest quality, although there are only two of his songs in the *Godsdienstige Lieder* (1882) and one in the “*Vervolgbundel*” (1920). And yet, the most Mennonite songs are found in the latter collection (12%), thanks to a stream of malcontents that was more classically oriented than the earlier moderns by reason of theological motives.

No more than 2,6% of the hymns in the Dutch Reformed collection (1938) was Mennonite or from Mennonite origin. The criterion of selection used by the Dutch Reformed was, on the one hand, the requirement of diversity, and, on the other, the Calvinist *pois et majesté*. One may therefore assume that Mennonite songs met this condition. The Lutheran collection (1955) did not include a single Mennonite song.

In conclusion, it may be ascertained that the influence of other Protestant songbooks on the Mennonite ones was greater than the other way around.