

Two Kingdoms, Two Loyalties Mennonite Pacifism in Modern America.

P E R R Y B U S H

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Throughout the twentieth century the relationship of Mennonites to the state has been one of transformation and struggle to maintain a coherent Anabaptist identity. Mennonite separatism had been sustained by a belief in two kingdoms--one kingdom belonging to God, the other embodied by the state. Traditionally Mennonites were law-abiding, but believed that the affairs of the state or outside society were none of their business. Economic, cultural, and social changes during the twentieth century had a great impact on Mennonite communities. At the end of the century these communities have lost most of their traditional separation from the rest of the world, but have sustained their religious core. Since the Second World War, Mennonites have successfully forged a new balance between religious obligation, service for the betterment of humanity, and a civil relationship to the state. Sometimes this drive for change emerged in the Church leadership, other times, congregations forced change upon their leaders.

Perry Bush has written a scholarly, and eminently readable, history of these shifts in the Mennonite community in the midst of the transformations of the twentieth century. Bush first delineates the various strands of Mennonite theological history, changes in leadership, beliefs on peace, and relationships with the state. He is especially good at defining the nuances of these various strands. Although the forces of modernization had some influence amongst Mennonites in the first half of the century, Bush places the locus for the greatest change in World War II. This change was awakened by the crises over obligations of service to a state in the midst of war. While the traditional peace testimony held many in the Mennonite communities - young men refused

military service, others refrained from work in war industries – other Mennonites retreated from that position and participated just as other Americans did.

After the war, and through to the present, Mennonites turned in greater numbers to relief work, many defining themselves as a "servant church" in the world, rather than a separatist-based community. By engaging in this work Mennonites forged a new definition of the "two kingdom" concept. By the early 1960s congregations and church leadership alike agreed that the state was "also under the Lordship of Christ" and could no longer "be judged by some entirely separate standard of morality" (page 204). This shift in theological interpretation from separatism to engagement called for the traditional relationship to the state and secular policies to be re-examined. Bush strongly argues that the peace witness was a crucial factor in strengthening Mennonite identity even after the shifts from rural, agricultural communities to urban, professional careers by the end of the twentieth century.

It is difficult to critique a book for something it did not do, especially one that is so scholarly, detailed, and well written. Bush clearly states that his goal was to find how the identity of the whole Mennonite community changed through the twentieth century.

Unfortunately he almost completely ignores the role Mennonite women played in shaping that transformed identity. The few examples about women that do appear in the book only serve to illustrate how absent are their voices and actions in this history. The work by such historians as Rachel Goossen reveal that Mennonite women have had a very different relationship to the state than their male counterparts, especially in the case of military service. However, as in other Protestant religious groups, obligations of faith, such as the peace witness, fall equally on Mennonite men and women. Mennonite women have always been very active in their communities and church work, publicly witnessing their religious obligations. The reader is left to wonder how the changes that Bush delineates so well for Mennonite men affected Mennonite women. Any criticism aside, this book adds a great deal to our understanding of Mennonite identity, community and faith. Bush has great ability to describe for a scholarly audience the details of Mennonite thought and theology. In this work he has successfully established a framework that places Mennonite answers about faith, peace, and the state into the center of religious history in the twentieth century.

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