

activities in the time of Luther and probably need not go over it again but it is a page in anabaptist history that all would like to forget.

It must be remembered that any revolutionary group will develop a radical fringe. If the group is controlled by a powerful circle or figure, the radical fringe will be kept to a minimum. But if there is no such leadership, the radical fringe will become more and more widespread even to the dissolution of the total body. The anabaptist movement did not dissolve but with no outstanding corps of leadership it did come up with some of the wildest fanatics and strangest radicals.

Menno Simons (1492-1559)

II.8.c.

Simons

Menno Simons is the distinguished deliverer of anabaptism. He was well educated and ordained a priest, serving in the Low Countries. He saw the persecution of Anabaptists first hand and was appalled at the cruelty of their foes and the courage of the martyrs. In one of those twists of history, he was drawn to their position and identified with them. His ties with Rome were severed in 1536 and the rest of his life was one of harassment and persecution. Simons had an uncanny knack of being "an hour ahead of the posse", as we might say it, and the accounts of his adventurous escapades read like romance novels. The rest of his life was spent in constant travel, writing, teaching, and promoting the evangelical cause.

Simons was marked by a confidence in justification by faith. He balanced this with a great stress on godly living...the Munster thing had terrified him as well as it did the reformers. He expected those who were justified by faith to live as if they were justified. He was prone to feel that if they did not, likely they were not justified at all and his views on this matter are not too far from the Dordt concept of "perseverance of the saints." His advocates joined him in a doctrine of passive resistance to foes and he suggested moving away from enemies rather than fighting them. Many followers came after him and the derisive name "Mennonites" described many of the anabaptist groups. With the advent of the thirty years war many of his followers found refuge in the Low Countries and also in Eastern Europe. Simons insistence on using only biblical vocabulary denied him the service of such terms as "trinity" and occasionally caused him to represent himself in ways that could have been avoided with the normal descriptive language.