

ANABAPTIST THEOLOGIES OF CHILDHOOD AND EDUCATION

(2) CHILD REARING (CONTINUED)

6. Obedience and Discipline

Much has been said already about *obedience*. The Anabaptists' stress on the Great Commission with the urgency to proclaim the Gospel, calling people to repentance and faith, was for them an act of obedience. In the discussion of the three criteria by which the Anabaptists recognised a child to have passed from innocence to youth the question of obedience was raised.

Infancy was a state of unselfwilled innocence, a state of ignorance. Therefore the development of the will marked an important change in the character of the child and a significant stage in the process of personal growth. The second criterion of the development of the child from innocence into youth was the ability to choose between alternatives. In this is an obedience freely exercised and a choice willingly undertaken. The third criterion was the exhibition of the good conscience, a recognition of the fear of the Lord. The beginning of conscience was linked with the development of self will and reason. Within the development of the conscience was the principle of obedience to parents, to the community and ultimately the voluntary surrender of oneself to the community.

So Hillel Schwartz comments:

The criterion by which Anabaptists measured child development was obedience. Obedience implied moral sobriety, purposiveness, lack of guile.⁴²

Implicit in the Anabaptist insistence on the significance of obedience is the notion of a divinely ordered world. By an act of creation God established a single law, or divine order, in the universe, wherein each part has its 'right place'. Any digression or diversion from that order is sinful and an act of disobedience. There is a clear order of relationships, based on obedience: man to God, wife to husband, children to parents, the young to the old. Marriage is within the purpose of God as an expression of this order. Parenthood is within the order of things, and is a responsibility under God. Faith is a matter of obedience to God, freely chosen and enjoyed. For groups like the Hutterites, obedience to the community was part of the divine order of things also. But of course obedience to God was the highest and first charge on the believer. All else was for the sake of this.

In a tract entitled 'Two Kinds of Obedience',⁴³ Michael Sattler described the two kinds of obedience as : PERFECT ('filial') and IMPERFECT ('servile'). Filial obedience produced in a person such a quality of character that the person would

even rejoice in punishment, whether or not that person was conscious of his transgression. In this was the importance of love and the necessity to fulfill the demands of love cheerfully and happily. The will of God was perfect and to be obeyed and would bring complete satisfaction and joy. It produced 'peaceable and mild natured' people. The other kind of obedience, described by Michael Sattler as 'servile', was concerned with obedience to external commands only. A person begrudged the punishment that came from disobedience, neglected all those duties not expressly commanded, and showed a desire to escape punishment if at all possible. It produced 'self willed and vindictive' people (page 4). Clearly there is a measure here by which the stages of growth from innocence to youth and ultimately to baptism and maturity were to be measured. Children were to be disciplined for obedience. The expectation was that the mature person will obey because obedience is the mark of maturity and faith. Indeed disobedience could only be unfaithfulness.

Robert Friedmann, in his article on 'The Doctrine of the Two Worlds' in *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, edited by Guy Hershberger, says:

The terms most often used by Anabaptists are *Nachfolge* (discipleship) and *Gehorsam* (obedience): that is the acceptance of Christ's leadership and that spirit which permeates His teachings... and accepted the values, the outlook on history and the social consequences which follow with this position as a matter of course.⁴⁴

The Anabaptist notion of the two worlds leads them through obedience into the concept of brotherhood. Salvation, though personal, was never so individualistic as it was amongst other Pietist groups. For the Anabaptists the Kingdom was not some closed conventicle of the redeemed, rather a closely knit, non-individualistic community, where 'brother' was constitutive of that Kingdom:

... where concern with one's own salvation from original sin is but marginal, and any thought of its 'enjoyment' completely foreign. Obedience stands here in opposition to enjoyment (edification)⁴⁵

However, there is, of course, a certain paradox here. This principle of complete submission to the Will of God, of the willing free surrender of the individual will to the divine meant a genuine disciplinship, even martyrdom, a matter of adult mature decision. This was certainly the spirit of the pioneer Anabaptists. Yet with succeeding generations it tends to become a rule, formalised and external. The rules are made, the community is organised, in an external structure, and conformity becomes the norm rather than the willing surrender in perfect or 'filial' obedience. Thus the upbringing of children becomes a socialisation process, with a good dose of indoctrination, rather than education for free choice. This legalism is the very kind of obedience which Michael Sattler

warned against in his tract. However, the stress on obedience did lead to a very serious discipleship which emphasised not only the community of goods but also the exercise of the Ban. The issue was how far the Will of God was to be expressed in a mere personal individualistic obedience, and how far the community itself was a corporate expression of that Will. Which was of greater and ultimate significance: the individual inner personal experience of the believer, or the will of the congregation of believers? By and large, the Anabaptist answer was to stress the greater significance of the will of the congregation of believers. To misuse another, to prosper at another's expense, to desire the things of the world, were more than just 'worldly'. It was disobedience and a sign of the lack of seriousness about filial obedience.

Although problems arose in later generations of Anabaptists concerning the lengths to which separation from the world was to be understood, and although there were problems concerning the nature of obedience in respect of responsibilities towards family and community, yet nevertheless obedience was still, in one way or the other, of paramount importance to the Anabaptists.

It is one thing to transcend selfish demands apart from filial responsibilities. It is another thing to 'take no thought for the morrow' with mouths besides one's own to feed.⁶

Their final authority was 'the life and doctrine of Christ and the apostles'. To this, faith was subject and so was reason. The question of obedience was raised quite acutely in respect of civil authorities and to what extent they were to be obedient to the magistrates and to the governing powers. Walter Klaassen sums it up in these words:

The Schleithem Confession of 1527 states that the role of the magistrate, while it is a necessary and God-given function, is exercised 'outside the perfection of Christ'. Menno Simons writes of two opposing princes and two opposing kingdoms, the one characterised by peace, the other by strife. Government or the magistrate functions in that kingdom where strife is the norm, writes Peter Ridemann. Its citizens are those who do not subject themselves to God, and the magistrate was appointed to restrain them from evil. It is the 'servant of God's anger and vengeance' and carries out its function with the sword, 'to shed the blood of those who have shed blood'. Its function is God-given and consists of punishing the evil and defending and protecting the pious'.⁷

Clearly the state and the magistracy are instituted by God as a restraining authority. Yet the principle of withstanding violence with violence was abhorrent to the Anabaptists. Obedience to the Government and the State was necessary because of sin, but Government could not command absolute obedience.

Those who live under the rule of Christ and within the Kingdom of peace, know the power of Christ and submit to his Will. To him alone belongs absolute obedience, willingly and gladly. Again Michael Sattler's analysis of the two types of obedience is important here. The position is well summarised by Franklin H. Littell:

But the more general rule was that the magistrate was given for the sins of the world and should be obeyed in all things favourable or adverse except those of conscience. This is essentially a position of passive obedience.⁴⁸

It is no wonder that Anabaptists were persecuted and were condemned for sedition. Their view of obedience to God alone had severely restricted the authority of the State. Here is the beginning of an important fight for religious freedom and a plea for pluralism, a view of Church and State arising from a concept of obedience which is remarkably contemporary. It is tempting to say it is more acceptable now than then, but Eastern Europe and Southern Africa testify today to the continuing struggle for freedom and the questioning of authority. So obedience is part of the 'divine order' of things. The placing of children into carefully defined sets, and measuring their growth and development was in order to express and fulfil the 'order' implicit in everything.

As a member of a categorically defined age set, the young child learns explicitly when and whom to obey.⁴⁹

Of significance is the document *A Hutterite School Discipline of 1578 and Address of 1568 to the Schoolmasters*.⁵⁰ Peter Scherer, better known as Peter Walpot, was a bishop amongst the Hutterite Brotherhood and was chosen as the schoolmaster, a post he held until his death in 1565. The schools were not schools in the sense of places of learning for academic pursuits only. They were *children's homes*, in which children spent most of their time, and in which they were reared and trained for adult life in the community. Thus the schoolmasters were not so much teachers, as guardians and caretakers (*bewahrer*) of the children entrusted to them. Indeed the School Discipline itself says:

They shall not be responsible for teaching, reading and writing, nor shall they entrust the children to overseers who frequently manifest favouritism in handling children, but shall themselves take particular care in the supervision of the children.⁵⁰

The schools were places of child rearing, where obedience was both to be taught and also recognised as the criterion by which the children were graded. It was the principle upon which discipline was to be exercised.

They (the sisters) shall be concerned in so training the children that they shall not be allowed to become self willed but shall be gradually trained to love the Lord and as soon as they begin to talk they shall be taught to pray at the proper time.⁵¹

The teacher himself must exercise in his own life that fear of the Lord which is so much a measure of maturity and of the Christian person:

Therefore the exercise of discipline of children requires the fear of God.⁵²

The whole atmosphere of the school shall embody that principle of brotherhood and belonging in fellowship, so much a feature of the Anabaptist way:

That is in everything the children of the two schools, whether sick or well, shall form a unit, and fellowship shall be exercised with open heart, without vanity nor selfishness.⁵³

Education in this context was for Peter Walpot training children

not to resist the rod, but willingly to accept punishment. In this way it will be possible to always deal with them in a free manner, more than if they resist, which one shall not and cannot permit them.⁵⁴

Clearly this is the filial, willing obedience spoken of by Michael Sattler. Peter Walpot points out that the disciplining of the disobedient is a positive good and should be carried out in a reasonable and correct way. This is, first of all, by spending time with the children and being with them:

But if a schoolmaster is in the school room among the children and frequently observes them and quiets them, they will become more circumspect and will be saved from mischief...⁵⁵

Secondly, the schoolmaster must not leave the matter of training to others, either the 'sister' or 'overseers'. School teachers are appointed to the work of the schoolmastering by God and by the community, and therefore have a responsibility about which one day they will answer to the Lord himself:

In the first place they must constantly keep in mind that they are appointed over the children by the Lord and His people.⁵⁶

Thirdly, there is a correct way of disciplining the disobedient:

This is not to be done with severe punishment, that is the rod is not to be applied hard and long, although often teachers have, desired to have, a reputation of this sort. (rather)... deals with them as if they were his own. By so doing he will prevent ungodly or excessive punishment.⁵⁷

The object of education or instruction was to teach 'the fear of God' and right ways of behaviour within the community of faith. Wordly education was to be avoided. One remembers

that in the 16th century the 'enlightened' or 'highly educated' were the priests and clergy. According to the Radical Reformers these had succeeded only in exterminating the simple faith by their perpetuation of the religious systems of the day. When true faith appeared with the Reformers, these so called 'enlightened' had tried to extinguish it with fire and sword. So much for higher education!

Peter Walpot outlines the stages of growth of children and the appropriate responses for each stage:

Stage 1. Children who cannot talk and therefore can neither ask for help nor understand. They are unable to obey and should be punished hardly at all. These are what he calls the 'innocent little children'.

... they should not be harsh with them but rather be sympathetic and long suffering with them on account of their innocence and lack of understanding just like mothers do with their own children.⁵⁸

The childhood innocence here demands sympathy and compassion. Once again innocence and lack of understanding go together.

Stage 2. Children who have begun to talk and can be taught to pray but still understand little. They only vaguely comprehend obedience and should be punished lightly.

But when the little children who have begun to talk still make a bed unclean it may be overlooked two or three times and the children instructed with words, but if this does not help, finally they shall be punished lightly so that they shall learn to keep clean. They shall be punished be concerned in so training the children that they shall not be allowed to become self willed but shall gradually be trained to love the Lord and as soon as they begin to talk they shall be taught to pray at the proper times.⁵⁹

Again there is sympathy shown, without spoiling, yet discipline is important because the will has begun to develop and this must be trained.

Stage 3. Children who have just started school and whose self will must gradually be broken. They must be punished with compassion, for obedience proceeds more from sympathy than from a liberal use of the rod. Children in this category are of an age to understand the value and goal of sympathetic punishment.

One should show sympathy to the little folk who have started attending school and should not undertake all at once to break the self will, lest injury come there from. For the children who are a bit larger one must also exercise very diligent care so that one can always have a good conscience.⁶⁰

The principle of the good conscience with God, the symbol of which was baptism, is the guiding principle. When the children understand this, they begin to realise what punishment is all about.

Stage 4. Children who are old enough to have and maintain a good conscience and who have been given communal duties yet who are in some way disobedient are to be punished diligently because they understand their obligations and have been slack or disobedient in carrying them out.

But if a boy or a girl has some unclean habits, such a one may be awakened in order to be cured of such unclean habits, according to good discipline. If it happens once or twice that someone wets the bed, possibly in a dream it shall be overlooked, with the hope of improvement, but if it occurs frequently the child shall be punished for the same.

...the larger children who serve as bread cutter, water carrier, bedroom maid, sweeper, dish washer, children's maid, sick nurse, etc., since they have been found to be inconsiderate, mischievous, thieving and frivolous. Wherefore, those who are older shall take diligent care to supervise and watch over them so that no one shall be found guilty of permitting such conduct and have to be disciplined... cannot be disciplined without severity and does not accept correction. Therefore the exercise of discipline of children requires the fear of God.⁶¹

Clearly the children are disciplined to take their place together in a smooth running community. This provides a basis of training for later communal life together as adults. In respect of discipline, then the punishment is commensurate both with the disobedience and also the child's ability to understand. This seems reasonable and fair.

Thus the exercise of obedience and discipline throughout these stages of childhood corresponds to those criteria of development which were examined earlier. After Stage 4, the youth would leave the school, and eventually take his place in the community, be baptised and so reach adulthood and maturity. At that time, marriage would be contemplated and so the process of procreation and bringing up of children would continue.

Peter Walpot has important things to say about the school-master and sisters in this process of child rearing. They were to be people of maturity, of good character, responsible members of the Community of faith and true believers. Not all discipline was to be given by the use of the rod, or even by words of correction. Example and the creation of atmosphere

and careful environment were considered to be of paramount importance:

They shall take care that no disunity, strife or boisterous speaking is heard by the children, but rather by a peaceful, cheerful, good natured, and sober life and quiet walk they shall inspire the youth likewise to quiet and sober living and given them good example.⁶²

The schoolmaster and the sisters were to be trustful and considerate to each other, maintaining careful scrutiny of the children's growth so that careful ordering of their development can take place. Such relationships amongst the staff and such regard for the children makes for harmony within the school and provides the right environment for the exercise of discipline and punishment when it is necessary.⁶³

They are to confer together 'once or twice a week'. They shall not absent themselves from the school but honour the Lord with their work and so care for the youth and infants.

Punishment, according to Peter Walpot, shall be administered with care and caution:

If punishment with the rod is necessary in the case of a larger boy or girl, it shall be done in the fear of God and with discernment... (page 233) they shall not manifest wrath towards the children and shall not strike the children on the head with the fist nor with rods, nor shall they strike on the bare limb, but moderately on the proper place. It is necessary to exercise great discretion and discernment in discipling children for often a child can be better trained and corrected and taught by kind words when harshness would be altogether in vain, while another can be overcome by gifts...⁶⁴

However, discretion is to be exercised in punishing disobedient children in public.

If a child will not keep quiet during the admonition it shall be taken out so that the other children may not become restless, for sometimes one child is itchy, another thirsty, a third has some other need which one does not know. For this reason it is not possible to bring everything in order by using the rod. During the day in school one should not attempt to settle everything by blows, but moderation should be used.⁶⁵

There should be no spoiling of children, for this would weaken the discipline, and lead to children becoming proud.⁶⁶

The Hutterite, Peter Ridemann, outlined similar views about obedience, and its relation to the various stages in the child's development. With strong biblical emphasis as ever, he begins with a quotation from Ephesians 6 where Paul urges parents not to provoke children to wrath, but to bring them up in the

admonition and nurture of the Lord. He continues:

For this reason is our education of children such that we permit them not to carry out their headstrong will and carnal practice. Therefore... we have schools in which we bring up our children in the divine discipline, and teach them from the beginning to know God.⁶⁷

The schools did not exist to give the kind of 'all round' education for living that we now associate with education and schooling. Indeed Peter Ridemann adds:

But we permit them not to go to other schools, since they teach there but the wisdom, art and practices of the world, and are silent about divine things.⁶⁸

The pattern of instruction based on a structure of obedience and discipline is:

The weaned child:

as soon as they can speak, they (the sisters) lay the word of God's testimony in their mouths and teach them to speak with or from the same, tell them of prayer and such things as they can understand.⁶⁹

Schwartz judges that for Peter Ridemann, this stage of growth and the exercise of discipline that is appropriate to it, is 'as involuntary as rote learning'.⁷⁰

At the age of six years or so, when the child is able to learn to read and write, he is entrusted to the schoolmaster and taught to know and love God, to know his Will and to keep it and to obey parents and schoolmasters. This is done by sermon and direct charge of the children. Peter Ridemann indicates how the schoolmaster will draw a careful analogy between the obedience given to parents at this stage of childhood, which as it progresses through the years will gradually lead the child to transfer that obedience to God. The process is clearly a process of religious upbringing, bordering on indoctrination, with obedience the key factor.⁷¹

Finally they reach the stage when they are able to work, to learn a craft, and take a trade. This stage of development corresponds in the ideal with the stage at which they know God personally, and will be baptised on their profession of faith. This is full maturity, where baptism is the rite of passage from youth to adulthood.

They remain with the schoolmaster until they reach the stage when they can be taught to work. Then each is set to the work for which he is recognised to be gifted and capable. When they have thus been educated and have learnt to know and believe in God, they are baptised upon confession of their faith.⁷²

The aim of all discipline and punishment was to correct and enlighten, so that the child could grow up to know and love God, to be obedient to him in baptism and to serve his Will.

Discipline was to be such that the child would gladly be obedient, the 'filial' obedience of Michael Sattler.

Clearly, a 'stage development' theory is in evidence, although it is not the careful cognitive development of Jean Piaget. It is evident in the writings of Caspar Schwenkfeld, the Spiritualist Anabaptist. He advised the teacher to adapt his teaching to levels of understanding, comparing the process of teaching to the bringing up of a child, where the mother weans the child from milk to solids. He speaks of believers themselves in the same terms as children growing up:

In his treatment of the love of God in our hearts the Silesian reformer envisages some as beginners in it, some who are advanced, and some who are perfect. The first are 'children', the second 'youths', the third 'men in Christ'.⁷³

He continues, suggesting that the Love of God at these various stages of spiritual growth is as follows:

In the first love is mixed with fear, in the next stage a richer love becomes possible, and in the third the soul completely loves and trusts in God abandoning itself.⁷⁴

The sinner is to be born again and to grow and increase in grace. There is no standing still in the Christian life. The inference is the stage development of children and the need for continual growth.

Thus he says there is for Christ a school, in which all are pupils. Progression and growth is necessary until perfection is reached, that final stage. For Caspar, as for many of the Anabaptists, the point of perfection is not just the replacement of ignorance with full understanding as if the Christian life was some kind of gnosticism, rather the change of life brought about by the Grace of Christ, and the willingness to suffer and die for Christ and with him.

Thus for Schwenkfeld the model of mature Christian growth was the childhood stage development, where levels of obedience are measured by levels of understanding. It was a growth in obedience.

The foregoing examination of Anabaptist attitudes to children and human development from infancy through to maturity and adulthood has brought together a number of very important factors. In the first instance, the Anabaptists recognised three phases of development: infancy, youth and adulthood. They then established certain criteria by which they recognised a progression from one stage to another. Baptism was the crowning point of human growth, the sign of adulthood, maturity and marriage. The important element in schooling and child rearing was obedience with the exercises of discipline. Two other factors have also become apparent in this examination. The one is understanding and the other the ability to take up a trade and work. Understanding the Will of God meant being weaned away from the things of the world ('carnal') to things eternal. But work was important. In the school system of the Hutterites, children themselves were expected to work in the school, and so

contribute to the community life of the school. Later when they had left school they were expected to follow a trade or practise a craft and thereby contribute to the community life of the believers.

7. Parenthood

Anabaptist children were brought up to obey their parents. This was part of the divine order of things. Menno Simons writes explicitly about the importance of children obeying their parents. However, the spirit of Anabaptism lies at the heart of parental discipline as Menno makes clear:

If now I seek the praises of the Lord with all my heart, and if I love the salvation of my neighbours, many of whom I have never seen, how much more should I have at heart the salvation of my dear children whom God has given me; who are out of my loins, and are my natural flesh and blood; so that the mighty Lord may be praised by them and be eternally honoured in them.⁷⁵

There are many testimonies in the *Martyrs' Mirror* to parents' desire for their children's rebirth and ultimate obedience to God in the fullness of faith:

Bid my son, Jan Heyndricks, farewell; and tell him to become a good child; and to fear our dear Lord, for bold and ungodly children shall not enter into heaven, but go to hell, and that he learn and go to school, and not run and play with naughty children, but obey his mother and his grandfather and grandmother, and not learn to speak evil or lie, for the mouth that lieth slayeth the soul.⁷⁶

This is echoed by another Anabaptist martyr, Joost de Tollennaer (imprisoned at Ghent, 1589):

... the best treasure which can be left to children is this: to instruct them from their youth to fear God; to present to them the Word of the Lord, as far as their understanding can comprehend it, and as the forefathers taught their children, to fear God, to shun sin, and do good as we have examples in Abraham, who commanded his children after him...⁷⁷

This is parallel to the instructions given by Peter Ridemann and Peter Walpot concerning schools that as soon as children can begin to show signs of understanding then they must be instructed in the Word of God and the commands of God. Menno brings together a whole complex of parental duties:

...thus it behoves true Christians to teach, to admonish to reprove, and to chasten their children, to set them an example in all righteousness, to rear them in the fear of the Lord and to care for their poor souls lest through their negligence they

depart from the true path, die in their sins and so perish at last in their unbelief.⁷⁰

Thus being a parent is a matter of accountability to God because child's growth from infancy and innocence, through youth and maturity is a process at the end of which he will acknowledge the Saviour in baptism. Failure on the part of parents not only brings upon them the judgement of God, but could also be damning for the children themselves. Thus parenthood is a spiritual matter. Menno lists important duties for parents: teach, admonish, reprove, chasten, set an example, rear and care. There is here a slight divergence of opinion between Menno and his Hutterite counterparts. Whereas they did seem to suggest that handing the children over to the school was at least as significant an element in child rearing as parental control, Menno stresses the greater significance of the parental responsibility.

If they err, exhort them paternally. If they transgress, reprove them sharply. If they are childish, bear them patiently. If they are of a teachable age, instruct them in Christian fashion. Dedicate them to the Lord from their youth.⁷¹

In his tract entitled 'The Nurture of Children', Menno takes up the theme of discipline and obedience again. The whole aim is the bringing up of children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. To this end, discipline and punishment for disobedience are vital. Basing his word on the Deuteronomy passage about instruction in Israel being given to children, Menno warns that parents should not withhold discipline out of a false sense of love and compassion:

.... take heed that you do not spoil your children through natural love, that you do not offend, do not rear them in wickedness, lest in the day of judgement their soul be required at your hands...⁸⁰

Constrain and punish them with discretion and moderation, without anger or bitterness, lest they be discouraged. Do not spare the rod if necessity require it, and reflect on what is written: He that loveth his son causeth him oft to feel the rod that he may have joy of him in the end. But he that is too lenient with the child, take his side, and is frightened whenever he hears him cry. A child unrestrained becomes headstrong as an untamed horse, give him no liberty in his youth, wink not at his follies. Bow down his neck while he is young, lest he wax stubborn and be disobedient to thee. Correct thy son, and keep him from idleness lest thou be made ashamed on his account.⁸¹

Menno speaks further about parental responsibilities reflecting all the characteristics now familiar in this enquiry: separation from the world, weaning away from carnal desires, to walk in the fear and the ways of God:

A hundred times rather would they see them, for the sake of the truth of the Lord, bound hands and feet and dragged before lords and princes, than to see them marry rich persons who fear not God, neither walk in his ways of the Lord, and so be fetter in dances, song, play, with pomp and splendour, with pipe and drum with lutes and cymbals... Yes a hundred times rather would they see them exiled, burning at the stake, drowning or attached to a wheel, for righteousness sake, than to see them live apart from God in all luxury and carnal pleasures, or be emperors and kings therefore sent to condemnation.²

So with this as a basis and an incentive, he speaks of discipline:

...punish the transgressions of the young with a rod and the order with the tongue, if I do not teach the ways of the Lord, if I do not set them an unblameable example, if I do not direct them at all times to Christ and his Word, ordinances, commands and example...³

Stern words! Obedience is vital to a Christian upbringing and ultimately to Christian maturity.

The reason that ever the use of the rod was a positive good is that the child's will has to be controlled.

A child unrestrained becomes headstrong as an untamed horse.

Bow down his neck while he is young, lest he wax stubborn and be disobedient to thee.

In his 'Reply to Gellius Faber', Menno answers the Anabaptists' critics who judge that the Anabaptists do 'not bring their children to Christ'. Using the now familiar terms he writes:

...(they) are so very solicitously caring for the salvation of their children by teaching, admonishing, punishing them, having constant care for them, as God's Word and the love of their children command and teach all Christian parents.⁴

And then summarises this whole responsibility with the words:

... this spiritual upbringing.

It is clear then that Menno viewed the responsibility of parents to bring up their children as a duty to God. The whole business must be exercised with a sense of the fear of God and as a responsibility under him. Parents will answer for the effectiveness and success (or lack of it), and will be judged by the quality of their children's lives, and whether their children are themselves brought to Faith and maturity and baptism. Menno not only instructed and exhorted parents

in what they should do, but also stressed the significance of their own example.

Christian temperament teaches plainly that all Christian parents should be as sharp, pungent salt, a shining light and an unblamable faithful teacher, each in his own home.⁸⁵

Let us set them an example in all wisdom, righteousness and truth, with a pious and virtuous life, so that they may, through the careful admonition and unblamable example of their pious parents, be instructed in the Kingdom of God and furnished to all manner of good works.⁸⁶

8. Anabaptist Children Today

The importance of obedience and discipline is not something that was lost to Anabaptists after the formative period. The Hutterites and the Amish have preserved a process of strict and careful socialisation in which all the principles of the formative period are maintained in practice today. John A. Hostetler and Gertrude Enders, in their research, show how at every stage in child development the obedience/discipline/punishment pattern is crucial. Writing of the 'House Children' (Birth to 3 years), Hostetler speaks of punishment as:

usually physical, arbitrary, inconsistent, and from the child's view often unpredictable.⁸⁷

When the child moves into the kindergarten at the age of three years, he is not 'permitted to disobey the person in charge' but is socialised and trained to respect authority as expressed through the colony discipline and life style, and to obey that authority. When the child transfers to the 'Big' School, the German school, then the function of the German teacher, at least in part, is to instruct the child in the rules of the colony, to introduce new rules, and:

punishes those who have misbehaved. He teaches the children to accept punishment without resistance or anger.⁸⁸

Thus still today is a stress on 'filial' obedience. Hostetler shows how the whole 16th century process is embodied in the modern socialisation of children into Hutterites' culture:

The school age child is taught unquestioning obedience to Hutterite authority; to the authority of parents, to his teacher, to his colony, to any Hutterite older than himself, and to Hutterite traditions and teachings. Instead of self discipline, the child learns obedience to those in authority who will supervise, punish and protect him.⁸⁹

We must ask later how much of this is indoctrinatory, with detrimental consequences for a child's education as a person. However, it is worth remembering that in the discussion on sin

and the child, we noticed that it was natural for a child to tend toward the carnal and to desire the things of the world rather than the things of the spirit. Because this was natural, however, the errors and disobedience, manifestations of the natural weakness of childhood, did not produce a sense of guilt in the child. Hutterite Anabaptist children do not internalise their wrong doings, because they are not trained to exercise personal responsibility for their errors. Training is for obedience to the external authorities of parents, school and community. Therefore actions worthy of praise or deserving of punishment are directed through the adult in authority at the time, who receives his authority from the community, itself an expression of the Will and Word and Purpose of God. The child lives in a particular belief system, learns the rules that govern it, abides by those rules because of his strong sense of obedience, and thereby takes his place within the Community, and thus within the purpose of God himself. Of course it is not all disobedience and punishment. When the child is obedient he is rewarded. Encouragement, praise and rewards modify the behaviour and encourage obedience until it becomes part of a way of life, almost a ritualistic acceptance because 'this is how it is' - yet enjoyed! Frustrations, pain, disappointment are accepted passively as part of the 'cleansing process' which leads ultimately to Faith and Eternal Life.

In his examination of the Hutterites of the present day, John A. Hostetler appends a table of response to punishment, comparing Hutterite children with non-Hutterite children, and concludes:

The non Hutterite children responded primarily in terms of HOW they were punished, not WHO punished them. These differences were striking.⁹⁰

The concern about 'who' rather than 'how' is evidence of the basic thesis that punishment is a good and necessary thing, because there is a divinely ordered universe, in which obedience is crucial.

One more word is necessary here. The longer a group can maintain its separation from society at large and effects of a changing environment, then the longer it can sustain a traditional unchanging socialisation pattern. As soon as the lines of separation become less distinct, then the more difficult become the upbringing of children into those traditional ways in an uncritical and unquestioning fashion. John A. Hostetler contrasts the traditional ways of the Amish with the 'emerging' Amish, who have opened themselves to new ways and new methods of child rearing and who have given themselves to closer efficiency and verbalisation of belief. They place:

more emphasis... on physical punishment and the cleansing effects of pain than is the case with Amish traditional pattern... emphasise guilt as necessary Christian virtue... reflect greater contact with the fundamentalist emphases that were common in the United States during the mid-nineteenth century ... are more dependent upon the

larger society outside the immediate community.⁹¹

The dilemma is that greater contact with the world raises the possibility of children's rejection of their upbringing in favour of 'the world', or alternatively, the danger of having an obedience more akin to Sattler's 'servile', which is not worthy of God.

So far we have discovered Anabaptist ideas of the nature of childhood which

- a) took seriously certain stages of growth, from infancy into youth and ultimately into manhood;
- b) established criteria by which those stages of growth could be measured, namely development of a good conscience with God, the disciplining of self will to the Will of God, and the development of the ability to choose between alternatives of good and evil;
- c) stressed the significance of obedience in this process as a prime factor in child development, of which 'filial' is more worthy than mere 'servile'. (Indeed, obedience would itself result in the development of the clean conscience, which is nothing short of the fear of God, the abandonment of self will to the Will of God, and from a personal knowledge of God's Will, the choice of the good rather than evil);
- d) achieved all this by the exercise of discipline, both of parents and the school;

and in which

- e) for many, whose separation from the world led into close communities (the Hutterites, Mennonites and Amish), the mark of maturity was baptism and the taking of one's place as a responsible person within the community.

Thus in the process of growing up, knowledge and understanding were not considered adequate bases for responsible Christian living. Experience within the Community also mattered, a Community where values were transmitted in the way of life, in the things believed and in the ordering of relationships. There are a number of crucial issues here: the nature of education as viewed by the Anabaptists, the stress placed on socialisation, the dangers of indoctrination, and a view of personhood. Eagerness to repress individualistic tendencies, and the willingness to subject the individual will to the will of the Community as the corporate expression of the Will of God, suggests that personhood is measured by the relationships amongst persons rather than a mere individualism. Hillel Schwartz's judgement is salutary:

Walpot's reliance upon experience as well as formal schooling derived from a sense that the small religious community could provide adequate guidance for children, and that communal values would filter down to children through nurture, work and the stress of difficult times. Obedience, learning, and fear of God were directed inward. 'Filial obedience' meant,

ultimately, having a clear conscience before God. What was important in education and child rearing was the development of a mild, good, obedient self.⁹²

These relationships are made through obedience:

Obedience to parents and ultimately to God is a cardinal virtue. Children are not to be self-willed but well-mannered, quiet, and humble in the presence of others.⁹³

Of course, it is important to emphasise that the Anabaptists valued education in its rightful place.

The rise of Anabaptism cannot be viewed in isolation from the renaissance of new learning and growing educational concern. It is not surprising therefore that in their attitudes and attention to child rearing, education for understanding should be important. Robert L. Ramseyer judges:

...It seems significant that the movement first arises among educated men who were interested in the new learning, that its earliest form seems to have been Bible reading groups, and that one of its major charges against the state churches was the disparity between biblical standards for daily life and those in practice among church people. A group of men many of them already dedicated to the Christian cause ... began for the first time to read the New Testament under the influence of a new learning which removed the dogmatic presuppositions through which the Bible had formerly been filtered... Thus for the source of stress which led to the process of revitalisation one must look to the new learning, to the development of printing, to the interest in Bible reading which the Reformation prompted...⁹⁴

The tragedy is that the importance of education was relegated under the fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible, and later, totally unreasoned literalism. Further because of the absence of any one particular prophetic figure and the consequent dispersion under persecution, peasants spread the message, became leaders in their own newly formed Christian communities and isolated themselves from the world. The other factor, which led to a distrust of education in its widest sense, was the identification of education with the culture of the sophisticated from which they were quick to separate. Thus instead of educating their children for a transformation of the culture around and thereby for an educated and reasoned ministry within the world, they separated and formed their own subculture and concentrated on educating their children in and for that subculture, which reduced the whole business of education to an indoctrination and a process of socialisation. This will be examined later.

NOTES

- 42 Hillell Schwartz, 'Early Anabaptist Ideas about the Nature of Children', *MQR* vol.47, 1973, p.109.
- 43 J. C. Wenger (trans.), 'Two Kinds of Obedience, An Anabaptist Tract on Christian Freedom', *Mennonite Historical Bulletin* vol.8, April 1942, pp.2ff.
- 44 Guy Hershberger (ed.), *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, Harold Press, 1957, p.115.
- 45 *ibid.*, p.116.
- 46 *ibid.*, p.142.
- 47 Walter Klaassen, 'The Nature of the Anabaptist Protest', *MQR* Vol.45, 1971, p.305.
- 48 Franklin H. Littell, *The Origins of Sectarian Protestantism*, McMillan, 1964, p.105.
- 49 John A. Hostetler, *op.cit.*, p.289.
- 50 Harold Bender (trans.), *MQR* Vol. 5, 1931, p.231 ff.
- 51 *ibid.*, p.235.
- 52 *ibid.*, p.236.
- 53 *ibid.*, p.238.
- 54 *ibid.*, p.233.
- 55 *ibid.*, p.241.
- 56 *ibid.*, p.232.
- 57 *ibid.*, p.241-2.
- 58 *ibid.*, p.235.
- 59 *ibid.*, p.235.
- 60 *ibid.*, p.236.
- 61 *ibid.*, p.235.
- 62 *ibid.*, p.232.
- 63 *ibid.*, p.232.
- 64 *ibid.*, p.236.
- 65 *ibid.*, p.239.
- 66 *ibid.*, p.239.
- 67 Peter Ridemann, *op.cit.*, p.130-1.
- 68 *ibid.*, p.130.
- 69 *ibid.* p.130.
- 70 Hillell Schwartz, *op.cit.*, p.110.
- 71 Peter Ridemann, *op.cit.*, p.131.
- 72 *ibid.*, p.131.
- 73 Joachim Wach, 'Caspar Schwenkfeld, A Pupil and a Teacher in the School of Christ', *Journal of Religion*, vol.XXVI, Jan.1946, p.16.
- 74 *ibid.*, p.16.
- 75 J. C. Wenger, *op.cit.* p.386.
- 76 *Martyr's Mirror*, pp.933,947.
- 77 *ibid.*, p.1073.
- 78 J. C. Wenger, *op.cit.*, p.386.
- 79 *ibid.*, p.386.
- 80 *ibid.*, p.950-952.
- 81 *ibid.*, p.950-952.
- 82 *ibid.*, p.389.
- 83 *ibid.*, p.389.
- 84 *ibid.*, 'Reply to Gellius Favour', p.699 (as in John A. Hostetler, *Collected Sources*, p.10).
- 85 *ibid.*, p.386-391.
- 86 *ibid.*, p.4.
- 87 John A. Hostetler, 'Communal Socialisation Patterns in Hutterite Society', *MQR* vol.44, 1970, p.76.
- 88 *ibid.* p.77.
- 89 *ibid.*, p.78.
- 90 John A. Hostetler, *Hutterite Society*, John Hopkins Univeristy Press, 1974, p.225.

- 91 John A. Hostetler, 'Old Order Amish Child Rearing and Schooling Practices', *MQR*, vol.44, April 1970, p.189.
- 92 Hillell Schwartz, op.cit. p.111.
- 93 John A. Hostetler, op.cit., p.183.
- 94 Robert L. Ramseyer, 'A Consideration of the Fruitfulness of Wallace's Concepts of the Revitalization Movement for Study of the Early Stages of the Biblical Anabaptists (Mennonite) Movement in Switzerland, Germany and the Low Countries between 1525 and 1560, *MQR* vol.44, April 1970, p.177.

DAVID F. TENNANT

SPURGEON DAY CONFERENCE

The Spurgeon Ter-Jubilee Day Conference, held at Histon Baptist Church, Cambridge, on Saturday 8th September 1984, was much enjoyed by the forty or so present. Society members from the area gathered with some from further afield to discover that popular mythology has not always done justice to the great man. Mr John Briggs of Keele University set Spurgeon, and 'Spurgeonism', in the wider denominational context of the period, finding his beliefs and passions were more in line with 19th century Baptist trends than has sometimes been suggested. The Revd M. K. Nicholls of Spurgeon's College presented Spurgeon as a teacher-pastor, providing Day and Sunday Schools for children, a range of adult evening classes, and developing the pastors training college which now bears his name. Both these papers should appear in due course in the *Quarterly*.

A coach trip in the afternoon took the party to Isleham Ferry, still a remote fenland spot - indeed, with less signs of man's activity than in the old pictures. The coach was able to get quite close, led through celery fields by the kind farmer and his wife, Mr and Mrs Bert Becket. As we walked the last quarter mile across a ploughed field, we reflected on the desire for believer's baptism which caused Spurgeon to walk eight or nine miles from Newmarket to be immersed in that reedy river. Then the party proceeded to Waterbeach, where Spurgeon had his first pastorate. There the Revd G. Woodham showed us communion plate given by Spurgeon and his New Park Street church.

In the evening a few more local folk joined the gathering for an illustrated survey of Spurgeon's life, given with affectionate enthusiasm by the Revd J. J. Brown. He had also mounted an exhibition which, together with stalls offering the Society's publications and a selection of Laurie Gage's second-hand books, filled any spare minutes.

The Baptist Historical Society Committee hopes to arrange further regional meetings in the future.

Meanwhile all who were present at Histon will want their warm appreciation expressed to all involved, especially the three lecturers, the Revd and Mrs Tony Barker of Histon for the church's splendid hospitality, and the Society Secretary, Revd Roger Hayden, for arranging the conference.

FAITH BOWERS