

LETTERS WRITTEN BY MENNO SIMON.*

FIRST LETTER.

A Dissuasion to all the brethren and sisters in Christ, living at Amsterdam and there about, not to attend the papal worship; because they do not feed the hungry souls with the bread of the divine word, but with the leaven of human doctrine.

“Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honor the face of the old man,” Lev. 19: 32.

“Look at the example of the old,” Sirach 2: 11.

“Whatever you hear and accept, keep that in your heart, and you shall have peace,” Laodis. 1: 13.

“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ,” 1 Cor. 3: 11.

TO ALL the true children of God, and partakers of the Promise of the Kingdom of Christ, grace and peace be with you.

My beloved in Christ Jesus, I am troubled at heart for your sakes, inasmuch as I hear that you hunger and thirst after righteousness, and that there are so few carvers, who rightly cut the bread of the divine word for the hungry consciences, and that there are so few shepherds who rightly pasture the sheep of Christ, and that there are so few masons to rightly adjust the living stones in the temple of the Lord; so few watchmen who rightly watch the city, the new Jerusalem, and blow the trumpet; that there are so few fathers to beget the children of God, and so few to nourish and feed these begotten ones, but that every thing is to the contrary. For those who truly serve in that capacity do not deny the bread, nor the

children to whom it belongs. And had they the bread by which the soul lives, not so many children would famish, while they distribute the bread once or twice a week (understand, the bread necessary to support the body). Inasmuch as they give the eggs of cockatrices unto the people, therefore observe what the prophet says concerning them, “He that eateth of their eggs dieth,” Isa. 59: 5; John 6: 58.

Again, concerning the shepherds who pass themselves for shepherds of Christ, who pasture the sheep for the sake of their own selves, as Ezek. 34: 8 says, For you see how little they care for the sheep; they do not care whether they have pasture or not. If they only get the wool and milk they are satisfied. They pass themselves for shepherds, but they are deceivers; for they are widely different from the shepherds of which we read in Jeremiah. Shepherds after his heart, whom the Holy Spirit has sent; for they have not the love of Christ which Peter had, and therefore Christ has not commanded them to pasture his lambs; if they are not commanded to do so, namely, if they are not sent, how can they then preach, in-

* The first two of these letters, in the complete works of Menno Simon, are found at the close of the volume, but as one of those to the brethren in Amsterdam has appeared at the close of both the English and German editions formerly published we give them both, together with two other of Menno's letters a place here.

asmuch, as they are not divine shepherds who lead the sheep into the green pastures of the divine word, but let them famish. They are not the shepherds who lead them to the limpid waters, but they lead them to the stagnant pools which they have clarified with their feet, that is, by their glazings and good opinions, Ezek. 34: 19.

They also pass themselves for joiners who build the Lord's house; but they know not Christ, the corner stone; they never adjusted a stone in the house of the Lord, namely, of the living stones which are built into a spiritual building, which building is the church of God, Heb. 3: 6. For wherever there are two or three stones together, cemented by the cement of love, there they busy themselves to break them down, and to destroy them, as you may see verified in all countries and cities. O, how different are they from those of whom Paul says, "Ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building;" and we are God's laborers, namely, such as should build the house of the Lord according to his word, 1 Cor. 3: 9.

If they, then, be no builders they must be those who break down. They also pretend to be the husbandmen who take care of the vineyard. How they take care of it, and protect it against all wild animals, I will leave every christian to consider for himself. How they seek the profit of the Lord of the vineyard, and how they give him the usury or honor, the Lord of the vineyard knows. He also knows how they scourge, rob, hunt, banish and kill his children, for no other cause than that they neither do nor dare consent to them, inasmuch as they see that they are not the true husbandmen, but destroyers, Matt. 10: 17; 21: 34.

Yet they pass themselves for watchmen. If they are watchmen they are blind watchmen and dumb dogs which cannot bark, Isa. 56: 10. Hosea, the prophet, shows what they watch for, and how they blow the trumpet, Hosea 4. How far they are from the word of the Lord, which says, "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman," Ezek. 3: 17. "Lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression," Isa. 58: 1.

They want to be fathers who bring forth the children of God and nourish them. But

how can they beget children, when they have never rightly conceived. O, how different they are from the fathers of whom Paul speaks, "Ye have not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel," 1 Cor. 4: 15; "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you," Gal. 4: 19. Here observe, who are the fathers of the true children. Now show me one child they have begotten, namely, one child which was born of God through the gospel. Paul also says, "I have fed you with milk," 1 Cor. 3: 2, "even as a nurse cherisheth her children," 1 Thess. 2: 7.

Behold, sincerely beloved brethren and sisters in Christ Jesus, you will observe that you have few carvers who cut the sweet bread, but it is leaven which they give you; that they are not shepherds who pasture the sheep, but wolves that destroy them; that they are not builders that build the temple, but they break down that which was built; that they are not husbandmen who protect the vineyard of the Lord, and give him his rent, but they are false husbandmen which scourge, stone, torture and kill the servants, as you, alas, may plainly see; that they are not the watchmen who watch over the city of Jerusalem and warn her of the enemy, but they betray the citizens and kill them; that they are not fathers nor nurses, but they kill that which was begotten and nourished, as Pharaoh, king of Egypt, killed the true Israelites which he could lay hold on. Therefore it is necessary to separate from them and to shun them, as we read in Matt. 7: 15, "Beware of false prophets;" and Paul says, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ," Col. 2: 8.

The church of Christ is the bride of Christ, and he will not that his bride conceive but of the incorruptible seed, 1 Pet. 1: 23, as Paul says, "I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ," 2 Cor. 11: 2. Yea, Paul would have the bride or church so pure, that if there were any who caused divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which they had learned, they should be avoided.

Yea, if they had any in the church that were drunkards, covetous, fornicators, idolatrous or proud, they should avoid them and not eat with them, 1 Cor. 5: 11. How, then, could they suffer such to preach? Yea, if they preached any other gospel than that which was preached unto them, they should be accursed, Gal. 1: 8.

To the Philippians Paul says, "Beware of dogs, beware of evil-workers, beware of the concision," and says, "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so, as ye have us for an example; for many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ; whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things," Phil. 3: 2, 17, 19. Mark to what kind of people he refers.

The apostle would have the bride so pure that no dissension was allowed, no drunkards, covetous, idolaters, nor those that taught any other doctrine than he taught; and Christ himself says to the church, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves, ye shall know them by their fruits," Matt. 7: 15, therefore I will leave all intelligent christians to judge what those do that say that they are at liberty to do as they do. Shall we, who pretend to uphold the glory of God, grant it as a liberty to go where God is blasphemed, and his ordinances broken? It was commanded Aaron to serve in the priest's office. When Dathan and Abiram would serve as such, why did the earth open its mouth and swallow them, if it was free to them? Num. 16: 32. The children of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu would always let the fire burn on the altar. If it were allowed now, to put strange fire upon it, then why were they burned? Lev. 10: 1, 3.

Read how the worshipers of the calf, the murmurers and the fornicators, all received their punishment, Exodus 32; Numb. 21: 5, 6; 25: 8, 9. Yea the man of God at Bethel, how free was it to him, when God had said unto him that he should not, in that place eat bread nor drink water, when by the lies of the old prophet he did eat and drink

contrary to God's command? It was so free that he had to die for it, 1 Kings 13.

There are very many Scriptures upon that point which I will leave for the sake of brevity. But I would that every christian should do as Christ teaches us, saying, "Search the Scriptures," John 5: 39. Those of Berea, searched the Scriptures daily, Acts 17: 11.

If you search the Scripture you will learn from it, that if you would be a member of the holy body of Christ, you must follow the Head and obey him, John 3: 36; 2 Thess. 1: 8.

If he commands you to beware of false prophets, Are you then at liberty either to do so or not? What kind of officers would you be, if the emperor should issue a decree and the subjects disregard it (take it as a liberty), if you did not punish them for not regarding it?

Now, the chief Emperor (Christ), has issued a decree, which decree he has sealed with his blood, and in this decree it reads, that we must be born again, repent, deny ourselves, take upon ourselves the cross, believe on Jesus Christ, and on our faith be baptized, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, and to obey his commandments, Matt. 28: 19; to "render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's;" to love the Lord with all our heart and with all our strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves; not to live unto ourselves, but unto him who died for us and rose again; to "beware of false prophets," and to "abstain from all appearance of evil," Matt. 22: 21; Luke 10: 27; 2 Cor. 5: 15; Matt. 7: 15; 1 Thess. 5: 22.

Now say, most beloved, which of these are we at liberty to do or not to do? Are we at liberty to be born again or not? Are we at liberty to deny ourselves, or to believe on Christ, or not? To be baptized, to give unto Cæsar that which is due him, and unto God that which is his, to beware of false prophets, and to abstain from all appearance of evil or not? If we are at liberty to observe these or not, just as we see proper, why does the Lord Jesus then say at the conclusion, And teach them to keep my commandments? Matt. 28: 19. If, now, he has commanded it, he desires it to be obey-

ed. That which is free is neither commanded nor prohibited, as Paul says in regard to eating and the keeping of certain days, 1 Cor. 10: 28. Yet he commands not to offend the brethren by such liberty.

Now, beloved children, if you confess that Christ Jesus is the Son, in his house, then let him be wise enough to rule; for he has bought this house with his blood, and has delivered the bondmen. Some he has made pastors and teachers, and Paul teaches us how they should be minded. If you go to the papistic teachers, whom you know beforehand as not being sent of Christ, and therefore bear no fruit, are you then obedient unto the voice of the Lord? O, no, Eph. 4: 11; 1 Tim. 3; Rom. 10: 15.

Since the Holy Spirit directs to those that are unblamable, and since you go to those that are blamable both in doctrine and in life, and since Christ has commanded to beware of such, and as you go to hear them, saying, I am at liberty—therefore judge for yourselves whether you are a child of God or not. And, if you say thus you are at liberty, then I ask you, Who gave you this liberty? Paul says, “Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s,” 1 Cor. 6: 19. By what means then can you obtain this liberty?

Christ Jesus has also commanded his church to baptize believers on the confession of their faith. If I, now, do not believe, and do not suffer myself to be baptized in accordance with God’s word, but suffer my little children to be baptized, without God’s word, Am I then, obedient unto the voice of the Lord? Can I then inherit the promise given to the believing?

Christ ordained in his church the Holy Supper, bread and wine, in remembrance of his death; now it is changed into a Roman mercery. Is a christian now allowed to keep the perplexing, papal day-meal, and neglect the Lord’s Supper? Judge for yourselves, since Paul says, “Ye cannot be partakers of the Lord’s table and of the table of devils,” 1 Cor, 10: 21. If we cannot partake of both, then we must neglect one or the other. O, beware of them!

Behold, beloved children, I have here given you some instruction according to the limited talents which the Lord has given me. Judge whether it would be becoming in a married woman to be with another man, if it were but once a year. So, if you be the bride of the Lamb, then you are not allowed to conceive of any body but of Christ, and his holy word. If you be the body of Christ then you must have the Spirit of Christ; if you are baptized into the body by the Spirit, then you must be obedient unto the Head, which is Christ. If you be in the city, the New Jerusalem, whose citizens are of one mind, then you must be obedient unto the King of that great city, namely, unto Christ. If you be the branches, then you must bear fruit like unto that of the stock. If you be the vineyard of the Lord, then beware of the foxes. If you be the temple of the Lord, then you must be submissive unto your High Priest. If you be the ark of the covenant, then the tables of the covenant, which are written with the finger of God, namely, the commandments of God, must be engraven in your hearts, that all men may read that you are an epistle of Christ, 2 Cor, 3: 2, 3.

O, beloved children, that the Lord would grant that we might verbally speak together, we trust that we could satisfy you on all points. Therefore you that fear God, separate from Babel, and go to Jerusalem, and do not suffer yourselves to be ensnared by such light-minded, artful words as, “I am at liberty.” The drunkard may drink to excess, the gambler, gamble, the whoremonger indulge in his carnal passions, notwithstanding it is sin; likewise, we are at liberty to hear false doctrine, or to suffer infants to be baptized, yet it is unscriptural, and therefore sin. I herewith commend my beloved children to the Lord. May the rich Word of his grace enlighten you with his pure knowledge and grant that you do his will in all things, that the fallen temple may again be built upon its true foundation and that we may obtain the end of faith, that is, the salvation of souls, Amen.

MENNO SIMON.

November 14.

SECOND LETTER.

Second Epistle of Menno Simon. Being a consolation to his much beloved brethren and sisters in Christ Jesus, at and about Amsterdam, beseeching them to visit one another during the time of pestilence, and not to fear death, because it is but a passage into a better life.

“O man, what! art joyful! what! dust and shadow art thou! Proud, for thy life lies buried in death!”

“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ,” 1 Cor. 3: 11.

Mercy, grace and peace be unto you. The Lord said unto Martha, “I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die,” John 11: 25. Chosen brethren and sisters in the Lord, whereas I hear that the fire of pestilence is raging about you, therefore I am constrained by the love I bear to you and to all the pious, as I am aware that all flesh is affrighted at death, and that the death of friends is hard to our natural feelings, to write you, who are overshadowed by the heavenly light and called into the communion of Christ, a short epistle of consolation, that you may now, and at all times diligently watch for the coming of the Lord, and prepare your whole life, heart, mind and actions for death. For Paul says, “It is appointed unto men once to die,” Heb. 9: 27. Also Sirach says, “All flesh waxeth old as a garment; for the covenant from the beginning is, Thou shalt die,” Sir. 14: 17.

If we, with a new, regenerated and penitent soul, firmly adhere to Christ, truly believe his word, faithfully follow his footsteps, are governed by his Holy Spirit, and die unto the old, sinful life, nay, in every manner, die unto the world, flesh, and devil; if we sincerely seek God’s kingdom, righteousness, word, will, truth, praise and honor, and walk inoffensively in his ways, then we shall live with, in, and through him for ever, John 11: 25, and we shall not be hurt by the second death, Rev. 2: 11, notwithstanding that we were, afortimes, dead in sins, as all the others, full of covetousness,

unchastity, pride, hatred, envy, idolatry, and were, by nature, children of wrath, Eph. 2: 3, for unto the truly penitent and believing it is all forgiven through the death of Christ, it is requited by his blood, and reconciled by the only peace-offering of his innocent, bitter death, so Paul says, “There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death,” Rom. 8: 1, 2. Therefore be of good cheer and grateful; praise him who has delivered you by the power of his word from the dominion of sin and death, and has thus called you to the inheritance of his glory by the Spirit of his grace. Again, I say, give him the praise, and that with a godly, pure conscience and with an unblamable, holy life in faith, wholesome, firm and unblemished in love, living in hope, and fervent in prayer, adorned with the raiment of righteousness, and girded with the beautiful girdle of perfection in the Spirit; having oil in your lamps, sober and awake, so that when the true Head, the glorious King and Bridegroom of our souls comes, he may not find you asleep, and that on account of your not being ready, he does not cast you into eternal darkness, and close the door upon you, and thus give you your part with the hypocrites. I repeat it, be sober, and awake; labor while it is day, lest the dark night overtake you O, reflect on what is meant! Ps. 117: 1, 2; Rom. 15: 11; Col. 3: 14; 1 Pet. 5: 8; John 12: 35.

Beloved, faithful brethren, be strong in

the Lord, of good cheer, and consoled; for your whole life and death are in the hands of the Lord. Yea, all your hairs are numbered, and without him not one shall drop from your head; he knows the number of your days, nay your life is measured as a hand breath. Therefore fear not, but willingly serve each other in time of need. O, leave not off visiting the sick, for by this you shall be established in love, as Sirach says, chapter 7: 35. "And it is also the nature of true love, to lay down our lives for the brethren," 1 John 3: 16. Reflect on what I tell you; you are aware of one thing, that an obedient, virtuous son, servant, or bride, does not fear the coming of the father, lord or bridegroom, but they long for their coming; "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear," 1 John 4: 18. You are also aware that a fatigued laborer is desirous of rest, and an afflicted soul of consolation. And I have no doubt but my beloved children are sealed in God with a good conscience; that he is your Father, and you are his children; that Christ Jesus is your Lord, and you are his servants; that he is your bridegroom and you his bride; and that you, for the sake of his blessed name, will unfeignedly proclaim and teach it to the whole world for doctrine, instruction and reproof, that they may, sincerely repenting, be gained unto God; on account of which you must suffer such excessive misery, trouble, privation and slander from the indolent, wicked generation, as may be noticed on every hand.

Therefore we should reasonably not be afraid of death, which is but a rest from sin and the entrance into a better life, nor be sorrowing about the friends who have fallen asleep in God, as those do who do not expect the reward of the saints; but we should joyfully raise our heads, gird our loins with truth and be joyfully taken up to the heavenly Canaan thus, with our only and eternal (mark, eternal), Joshua, Christ Jesus, to take the promised inheritance, and thus be freed from the laborious, troublesome way of our hard pilgrimage, which we must lead through the rough desert of this wild world so long as we shall be here; and then we

shall rest in eternal peace, Eph. 6: 14; Luke 22: 29; Rev. 14: 13.

O, chosen brethren and sisters! how gloriously are they gifted of God, who, in grace, are delivered from the body of sin, and from all perishable things, and are taken up into the holy tabernacles of peace, and called to the eternal, holy sabbath-day!

The old, crooked serpent shall no longer sting them in their heels; yea, no pain nor disease shall touch them, and the last enemy, which is death, is already overcome; their tears are dried up, and their souls are at sure rest and peace in the paradise of grace, in Abraham's bosom, under the altar of God, Rev. 6: 9, on Mount Zion, delivered from their great tribulation, clothed in white robes, worshipping before the throne of God and the Lamb, waiting a little while until the number of their brethren shall be fulfilled, Rev. 6: 11, to be fashioned like unto the glorious body of Christ, Phil. 3: 21, to shine forth as the sun, and thus joyfully enter into the eternal wedding and feast which is prepared in heaven unto all the chosen ones, by the blood and death of Christ.

O, how holy and blessed are they who are called of Christ to this feast, and have come to it, clothed in unspotted, clean garments! O, sing the pleasing and joyous hallelujah in your hearts, and thank him who has given them all this by the Spirit of his love, in eternal grace, and who has chosen you to enjoy the same part with them!

Reflect and be consoled. No more at present, but sincerely fear God, serve him in truth, uphold unity, love and peace; watch and pray; walk unblamably; fight your fight patiently; strive after the good; be friendly to one another; willingly submit to your elders and obey them, and remember them and me in your prayers. May the God of peace, our merciful Father, by his blessed Son, Christ Jesus, bless you now and at all times, unto more righteousness, in perfect love.

Your brother and lover of your souls in truth; at present enjoying tolerable health.

MENNO SIMON.

November 14.

THIRD LETTER.

An Epistle of Menno Simon, to the brethren at Franeker, province of Friesland, Netherlands.

“The love of God is true wisdom,”

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life,”
John 3: 16.

With a sorrowing and troubled heart I write to you, because a letter was handed me, signed by five brethren, in good standing, from which I learn that a violent dispute has arisen (God better it) amongst some of you, concerning the ban (excommunication). If I do not misunderstand, one party would that no transgression should be punished with excommunication until the transgressor should have been thrice admonished. I cannot agree with this doctrine. For there are some sins, as for instance, murder, witchcraft, incendiarism, theft and other like criminal deeds, which require summary punishment at the hands of the magistracy. If we were to admonish transgressors thrice, in such cases, before they were punished, then the sweet bread of the church would be changed into sour leaven, before the whole world. Therefore act with discretion, and do not treat criminal matters, especially if they are public, the same as you would other carnal works which are not considered, by the world, as requiring disgraceful punishment.

The other party desires, if I understand the matter right, that all transgressions should be punished with excommunication, without being first admonished at all; and that all penance should be outside of the church. That doctrine is, according to my humble understanding, erroneous and against the word of Christ, Paul and James. For avarice, pride, hatred, discord, defamation and quarreling are carnal things which work death, if not repented of, Gal. 5: 19, 20; James 3: 16; notwithstanding, they are not punished until after having been thrice admonished as the Scriptures command. I wish that it were taken into consideration,

that, as “the wages of sin is death,” so also, the repenting, converted heart brings forth life, as may be seen in the case of David, Peter, the murderer, Zacchens and others.

I also understand that these same brethren are of the opinion that if some brother should secretly have transgressed in something or other, and, in sorrow of heart, should complain to one of his brethren that he had thus sinned against God, that then this same brother should tell it unto the church; and if he should fail to do so, that he, then, should be punished with the transgressor. This opinion is not only absurd but it sounds in my ears as a terrible one. For it is, clearly, against all Scriptures and love, Matt. 18; Jas. 5: 19, 20.

Excommunication was, in one respect, instituted for the purpose of repentance. Now, if repentance is shown, namely, the contrite, sorrowing heart, how can excommunication, then, be pronounced against such? O, my brethren, do not put this doctrine in force, for it will lead to sin, and not to reformation.

If we were thus to deal with poor, repenting sinners, whose transgressions were done in secret, how many would we keep from repentance, through shame. God forbid, that I should ever agree with, or act upon such doctrine! Lastly, I understand, they hold, that if any one, in his weakness, transgresses, and openly acknowledges his transgression, that they should consider him, then, as a worldling.

This, again, is an absurd doctrine; for, if the transgression was done through weakness, then, let us not be arrogant and too hard on the poor soul, lest we commit a worse fault.

Not the weak, but the corrupt members are cut off, lest they corrupt the others. Of such unscriptural doctrines and practices I want to be clear. I desire that excommunication be practiced in a sincere, paternal spirit, in faithful love, according to the doctrine of Christ and his apostles, as I have abundantly declared in my writings, for over five years.

My chosen brethren, guard against innovations for which you have no certain, scriptural grounds. Be not too severe nor too lenient. Let a paternal, compassionate, prudent and discreet heart, and the Lord's holy word, actuate you.

Follow this my brotherly admonition in this respect, which has been acted upon for twenty one years. I could give you no other and better advice. I feel constrained to write to you, for the above mentioned reason. I have, in sincerity of heart, served my beloved brethren without any partiality, as becomes us in Christ. I was asked to give my grounds for my doctrine, which I am, at all times, willing and prepared to do; not to the pious only, but also to the whole world, as the word of the Lord commands me to do. I do not teach nor live

by the faith of others, but by my own faith. O, that they all were of one mind with me! How paternally and discreetly would excommunication, then, be practiced, without all offense; while, now, it is sometimes practiced so offensively.

I beseech all the pious, for God's sake, to seek peace. And if you have offended each other in the least, purify your hearts and be reconciled in Christ Jesus. Remember that you are the Lord's people, called unto peace, put under the cross, separated from the world and hated unto death. If you be baptized in one spirit, then fulfill my sincere desire, and be of one mind with me in Christ. Build up and destroy not. Instruct one another in love, and do not disrupt so that divine peace be with all the children of God, and remain whole with us unto eternal life.

May the peaceful Spirit of Christ protect you all. May you be sound in doctrine, ardent in love, and without offense in life, to the edification of his church and to the praise of his holy name.

Your unworthy brother and servant,

MENNO SIMON.

November 13th, A. D. 1555.

FOURTH LETTER.

An Epistle of Menno Simon, to the church at Emden, East Friesland, Germany.

“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ,” 1 Cor. 3: 11.

With a sorrowful heart I make known to the brethren that I receive one letter after another complaining of the excommunication, in regard to husband and wife; which causes great trouble with some, at which I am not at all surprised. For, from the commencement of my service, which is more than twenty years, I have feared this issue, which cannot be settled under such excitement as is, at present, found in the Netherlands. Dietrich Philip, our brother, and I counseled with the elders, in regard to this matter, as far back as 1547 and then it was

resolved that we should act, in this matter, according to circumstances; and it was again so resolved at Wismar, two years ago. Therefore we should admonish according to the most definite and plain rules; but if we cannot thus convince, we should not force any one beyond what he conscientiously believes to be right, but bear with him in love and patience. I hope that every pious person is sufficiently instructed in the word of the Lord, to know that if either a husband or a wife commit adultery, theft, witchcraft or any thing else that is criminal, that such

criminal misbehavior is summarily punished at the hands of the magistracy; or, to know, that, in case one cannot, undisturbedly live up to his faith, on account of his consort, but is at all times combated with false doctrine, beaten and abused, and thus is sliding back in faith, through the obstacles of such fallen consort, one should abandon such consort if he would stand before God and the church and save his soul. But if he or she can live up to his or her faith, in all things, undisturbedly, and is not combated with false doctrine, then they are conscientiously bound to remain together undisturbedly; for they are one flesh and live together as husband and wife should live.

Since there are many dangers and offenses connected with this matter, to punish with excommunication, the souls thus bound, who otherwise walk unblamably, in every respect, before God; and, since we all are flesh, therefore I pray that the merciful Lord may keep me from consenting to or teaching such doctrine. In view of this, my heart was filled with sorrow, on hearing that a certain length of time was given to Swaantje Rutgers, in which to leave her husband; or that, in case of her failure to leave him, she was to be excommunicated and delivered over to satan.

Q, my chosen brethren, consider well your actions. What slandering words will you put into the mouths of the slanderers! And what bad reports you will spread of the word of the Lord and his church! How many grieved souls will you afflict! Yea, how many souls will you separate from the truth, and what dangers will beset you! We

never dared follow such doctrine, for we fear the consequences. O! that you would desist from it. How would I, afflicted man, be rejoiced at it! My heart shall never consent to such indiscreet action, and say, amen, to such intentions.

I desire to teach, according to my humble talents, a gospel that builds up, and not one that breaks down. One that is acceptable, and not one that is offensive; and I do not intend to encumber the service of God with something besetting, for which I have no scriptural grounds. I can neither teach nor live by the faith of others. I must live by my own faith, as the Spirit of the Lord has taught me, through his word.

Here you have my admonition. The Lord grant that you may follow it in all love, peace and unity. Be not too hard nor yet too lenient. Excommunication is instituted for reformation and not for corruption. O, that all were of one mind with me in this matter. How discreetly would the ban be practiced in this respect. But, as it is, every one follows his own inclinations and imagines it Spirit and Scripture.

O Lord! grant them thy Spirit and wisdom, that they may see and judge rightly, "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," Eph. 4: 3. Beloved brethren, follow my advice, for God's sake; for it will cause many souls to rejoice. The Spirit of wisdom be with you unto eternity, Amen.

Your unworthy brother,

MENNO SIMON.

November the 12th, A. D. 1556.

