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# Peoplehood and Law

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# Peoplehood and Law

## Introduction

I want to share some thoughts with you on the basis of two paradigms or special cases. The first one is the biblical one, and that involves primarily the story of Israel, concentrating on the Old Testament but also looking in the New. In fact the New is simply a continuation of the Old, so I am not making a clear-cut separation between those two. The second paradigm or model is that of the Anabaptist-Mennonite experience. The first one is far easier for me to deal with than the second one, as I think you will see.

I want to deal with these two paradigms, or models, without suggesting that they are sufficient or comprehensive for present problems and issues. By means of these examples I want to draw attention to some dynamics of the communal life of people (nation) and law as accepted and as imposed in these. What I say will not be comprehensive but limited. I am going to work in terms of broad strokes since I am not at all equipped for a more detailed theoretical analysis. Since I am a layman on issues of law and justice, particularly as they relate to the native peoples of this country today, I want it to be clear that nothing I say must be understood or even considered as specifically relating to the present situation of justice and the law regarding native peoples of Canada. I am not competent to speak on that subject.

I need to say to start with that in using these two stories, I am speaking about actual situations — about life and people, about the struggles, victories, and defeats of specific groups of people who have existed and still exist in this world today. But they are people who lived in a world among other people and with other people both in friendship and hostility. We therefore are not dealing with ideal cases in any sense of the term, but with human actual cases, where there will always be victories and defeats, successes and failures. And because they're actual historical situations they are actual slices of human life in specific and particular periods of time. It means that there is the possibility that these models can be used to shed light also on other situations and times, namely those of today. I repeat that the models themselves cannot be prescriptive in the sense that we may simply say, "Now this is the way it has to be, even in detail," because the historical situation of each is vastly different in the specifics from the situation in which we find ourselves today. So we need to exercise great care about the way in which we use models from the past.

# The Bible, People of God, and Law

I want to come now specifically to the first topic in this series of three: The Bible, People of God, and Law. First, a comment about context. The community of Israel in its origins comes onto the historical scene about the year 1200 B.C. and its story lasts — as far as the biblical story is concerned — let's say to the dispersal of the community of Israel from its own land in the year A.D. 132. During the whole of that time — 12-13 centuries — these people lived in the vortex of a super-power conflict. It's very important for us to understand that. On the one side was Egypt, always the center of major power configurations, and on the other the great Mesopotamian empires, whether they were Assyrian or Babylonian, Persian or Greek, or whatever, in their successions. The land which Israel occupied was a battleground again and again, between the super-powers of the succeeding centuries. Indeed, so often and so massive were the battles fought on this territory, that the people came to believe that the final and ultimate great battle before the end of history was going to be fought on that ground, the Battle of Armageddon, which we every now and again hear about. It was to be fought in the valley of Jezreel, which had been a traditional battleground for many centuries.

So the people of Israel were almost always victims of super-power conflicts, of the power arguments of other people, with which they did not necessarily have anything to do themselves and the end of all of which was that they finally lost their homeland and were dispersed throughout the world, to come back to it only in our lifetime. Living in the land of Israel was like living at the foot of an avalanche mountain, or on an earthquake fault, or on a volcano. This kind of precarious living did a great deal to shape the views of these people as we have them recorded in the Bible.

The situation of the early Christian community, as we meet it in the New Testament and immediately thereafter, was very similar. It was very early confronted with religious and political authorities, especially the Roman Empire. The gradual sense of confrontation is graphically described for us in the book of Revelation; they were very soon subject to discrimination and persecution with death a common penalty. Persecutions flared up, often caused by popular resentments of their neighbors, resentments which were then used by the authorities for political expedience to further their own ends.

I want to do four things with this story. I want to talk first about self-definition, that is, about how these people identified themselves; who did they think they were? Then, secondly, I will say something about the function of law and to say this again in very broad strokes (maybe I should say the function of justice). Thirdly, I want to draw attention to some specific cases where these dynamics become visible. And finally I want to say something about the special temptations of this community.

## Self-Definition

There are probably a lot of ways that one could approach the subject of self-definition; it depends very much on what one is reading and with what presuppositions one comes to the story. While the self-definition that I am suggesting here is by no means the only one, let me use this one because I think it is peculiarly useful to demonstrate self-definition of this people. It happened in ancient Israel by means of two concepts — the concepts of people and nation. With exceptions, when the Hebrew writers referred to Israel, to themselves, they used the term "people." Now there are some exceptions to this, but as a broad rule that is accurate; you can test it for yourself if you like by checking these words in a concordance. You will find that the pattern fits. With some exceptions when they talk about themselves they use the term "people" and when they talked about others, that is to say the other groups, human groups out there, they were referred to as "nations." And so at the very beginning in the great conflict between Moses and Pharaoh, before the liberation took place, the call came: "Let My People Go!" Or as we read in the book of Deuteronomy, "You are a people consecrated to the Lord your God. It is you that the Lord your God has chosen to be His very own people, out of all the people on the earth." (There already is one of the exceptions.)

So people is the word for Israel. Nation is the word for the Assyrians, for the Babylonians, the Amorites, the Egyptians, the Syrians and all the rest of them. This identification can be found for example in Isaiah 10:2,6,22,24 if you wish to have a reference. Now the word people, as it is used in the Bible, is a family word; there is a kind of intimacy about this word. It is a relational word. In Psalm 95 the psalmist sings about Israel being the "people of His pasture, the sheep of His hand," or again in Psalm 100 you find the same identification of Israel: "The people of His pasture, the sheep of His hand." That, of course, immediately alerts us to Psalm 23, which uses the same intimate image of the Shepherd and the sheep, of the Lord God and the people, for Psalm 23 is as much a story about Israel as it is about the individual psalmist. In Isaiah 1:3-4 there is even the identification of people with children, as the children of a Father, children of God. The prophet has God speaking, "I reared sons, I brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. Israel knows nothing, my people understand nothing." People, children — family words, relational words, intimacy.

When therefore we have the general designation of children of Israel for example, which we run into again and again in the Old Testament, that is a synonym for the word people, the people of God. People therefore is a familiar term. The people are a large family, and it is therefore also not surprising that another prophet, Malachi, said in speaking to Israel, "Have we not all one Father? Why then do we break faith with one another?"

The people therefore are God's family. But the people are also the worshippers of the one true God, and because they are the worshippers of the one true God they also express the Spirit of this God. This is particularly strong in the prophetic tradition; the worship of the true God means doing justice to

each other, as in that remarkable sixth chapter of Micah where you have a confrontation, or a conversation, between God and the people and the prophet; God says, "You haven't done what you were supposed to do," and the people say, "What shall we do?" Then comes a rehearsal of cultic religious acts; is that what you want us to do? Make sacrifices, sacrifice our own children to you? The answer comes back finally: "You know what God wants you to do, to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God." That is the true worship, and that definition of worship then reappears again in the New Testament; true worship is to look after those who are in need, the dispossessed and the powerless (James 1:27).

"Nation" is the term most often used to identify the opposite of the above. Collectively all of those people, all of those human beings who are not worshippers of the true God, are not a people, because they worship other gods, and other gods are nothing according to Psalm 96 and particularly in the writings of Isaiah and Jeremiah. Therefore the nations do not truly exist because they are not related to the source of existence which is the true God. Even today the word nation is a kind of abstraction; it's very difficult to pin down what it is. But to the prophets of the Old Testament nationhood was lack of true existence.

There is that fascinating story in 1 Samuel chapter 8, about the emergence of kingship in Israel. You know that before that time the people had been governed by a kind of tribal confederacy. The Hebrews were simply a group of tribes, and the chiefs came together regularly for consultation; that is the way the people were governed. Now we read in 1 Samuel chapter 8 that the chiefs come together and they say to Samuel — who is a kind of chief executive and a prophet — "We want a King, 'like other nations'." There was a good reason for that request when we look at the history, because the whole existence of Israel was in danger of total disintegration. They were under assault from the Philistines who had iron weapons while Israel had only stone and bronze weapons. You can't effectively fight a war with that kind of inequality in weaponry, and so their existence was on the verge of extinction. They are now hoping to pull what is left out of the fire by an appeal to have a king like other nations.

And that desire to be like the other nations is identified by Samuel, to whom the request comes, as a turning away from the true God to the worship of idols. But what is equally interesting is that the identification of kingship, of being a nation, is made immediately with military power. The first thing Samuel says in response to this is: "Now these will be the rights of the King who is to reign over you, he will take your sons and assign them to his chariotry and cavalry and make his weapons of war and gear for his chariots," and the daughters will be equally employed, in other tasks necessary to this new kind of activity. There is the clear and unmistakable implication that this is not part of the life and way of the people, but rather of the nation. It belongs to being a nation. It has nothing to do with being a people.

"Horses and chariots" is a term used frequently in the Old Testament to symbolize military might. Every time that term is used it is identified as not

being a part of the life of the people, for they depend on the justice of the Lord. Nations, therefore, are synonymous with military power, with arbitrary rule, with coercion, with injustice, with violence, not only against external enemies but all of this is inflicted on their own people.

Throughout the biblical story, both Old and New Testaments, the people were a minority, small enough to be wiped out any time, small in number compared to the nations. Still, there is the confident hope running through the literature like a powerful hymn, that in God's time and by his decree, the minority will one day become the majority. Then we read in the prophet (Isaiah 2: 2-4) that the nations will come to Jerusalem, to the place where God's Law, God's justice is known, and they will say, "Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways," since the law will go out from Zion, from Jerusalem. The direct consequence of this as that passage proceeds will be the abandonment of violence, the abandonment of arbitrary judgment, the abandonment of coercion, of killing, of injustice, of war.

The Hebrew historians, writers, and theologians understood very well that the history of Israel, the story of Israel, was part of the history and the story of all people, of all human beings on earth. Because all of them were descendants of Noah, they described them carefully in the first chapters in Genesis. It's not accidental that they do that there. We read in Genesis 10:32, "These were the tribes of Noah's sons, according to their descendants and their nations, from these came the dispersal of the nations over the earth." And from among these nations God lifted out this handful of slaves, and they became a people because he chose them specifically, to be the means by which God's law, God's righteousness, God's justice would be brought to the nations. In one of the great passages of Isaiah 49:6 God says to the people, "It's not enough for you to be concerned with gathering your own survivors, that's not enough of a vocation for you, I have set you to be a light to the nations." So the notion of "people" in the Bible is intimately connected with the idea of chosenness, of special destiny, and while this was always a source of joy and wonder, it was also at times a virtually intolerable and unbearable burden.

### **The Function of Law**

Now I want to come to the function of Law. Much of that has already been implied in the distinction between people and nation. Certainly law was part of the life of the people of God in the Old Testament and in the New. The word is used constantly; much of the books of Leviticus and Numbers are legal codes regulating various aspects of community life. Now it is very important to be aware that this notion of law with which they are working here is rooted in belief in God. We are dealing here not with any notion of a secular law code of the kind that we are accustomed to today in Canada. For Israel's very existence as a people was based on uncoerced acceptance of the Lord and his law in the covenant of Sinai. This notion of covenant, of agreement, between God and the people overarches this whole story. And of course the story of the

Old Testament and the New is the story of the attempt to persevere in this agreement, which is so difficult because it runs counter to everything else in this world in which they live. The acceptance of this law is voluntary and this law is not for the aggrandizement and the protection of rulers, it is not to shield privilege, but it is very specifically given for the wholeness and the welfare of people. The laws spell out, often in considerable detail, what faithfulness to the neighbor is, and it is a law to which the rulers, that is the tribal chiefs first, and the judges, and the kings are also subject. We have a number of very interesting cases in which precisely this comes to light.

Conformity to the law among the people therefore was only and always conformity for the preservation of life, for health, for growth, for the protection of those who were powerless and could not protect themselves. So there is conformity; it is understood that you keep these laws, you act by them, and behave by them. The absurd view which I read in a recent police statement — that you enforce the law in order to make sure that people respect the law — is nowhere to be found here. The law out there is exclusively to serve people, to help people, to protect people. Among the nations, law is perceived to be imposed through force by arbitrary rulers, rulers who are not themselves subject to it. We have that very dramatic story in I Kings 21 of Ahab and Jezebel. Jezebel came from one of the nations and she was astonished at the reluctance of Ahab simply to act as a king. She said, “You make a fine king of Israel and no mistake. Cheer up I will get you the vineyard.” Jezebel believed that a ruler was simply a ruler and did whatever it was that pleased him. Conformity to law among the nations was maintained by coercion, by control, by domination, by the appetite of the powerful and the ambitions of the violent.

In this distinction between people and nation are the roots of different perceptions of law. The position which emphasizes inward motivation for conformity, conformity for healing and for protection, is rooted in the belief in the Lord who is just and faithful; this inward motivation is characteristic of law and obedience to it among a people, in contrast to the nations, where law is imposed from without. Thus conformity to law can come from within by voluntary acceptance and knowing why you do it, by covenant, by agreement, or it is imposed from without and conformity is assured by coercion and force and violence. Therefore, in one case the law represents salvation, healing, and protection, a source of joy, hope, and confidence, and in the other represents slavery, death, and exposure to violence and arbitrary rules, a source of fear, despair, and hate.

### Special Cases

I want now to illustrate the above with some special cases and add some references. These are almost arbitrary choices because there are so many of them. There is first of all the so-called *lex talionis*, or the law of the claw, which is identified as an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth (Exodus 21:23-25). We must understand about this law that it represents a limitation of uncontrolled vengeance. One may not take more than one eye for one eye. It is a recognition that these forces operate in human life, that there is this pressure on the part

of human beings to try to restore the scales of justice somehow by doing this, but only one eye for one eye.

Second, there is a reference to the cities of refuge in Numbers 35:9. The cities of refuge were a prescription for the limitation and control of vengeance, specifically in the case of manslaughter, to use a technical term. In that kind of a case, because of the immediacy of the event, you don't know whether the act was deliberate or accidental. The city of refuge provides the person who has been caught in this offense with temporary safety until the matter can be dealt with at a greater distance and with witnesses and all the rest of the procedure of law which governs those things. This was for the members of “the people” but it was also for others. There is a specific reference to strangers, individuals who don't belong to the “people” but who also have the right to this protection.

Third, there is the jubilee year, Leviticus 25, which was there to protect the patrimony, that is to say, the ancestral holding of land. If it had somehow gotten away from the family, the jubilee year was instituted to bring it back, to restore it again. It was also the year for the release of slaves, so that people who for one reason or another had been suppressed into slavery could become free again.

Fourth, there is a general provision constantly — and I don't have to give you specific references here of the special obligation among the people — to care for the needy, widows, orphans, the dispossessed, the poor, and the strangers. There is to be no charging of interest, no selling for profit among the people. Again an especially graphic example is the story of Ahab and Naboth in I Kings 21.

There was certainly a violation of laws in Israel; that's part of the tension of this story as it unfolds in the Old Testament. But they were rooted, I repeat, not in a secular view of the state; rather they were rooted in faith in the Lord God who had delivered them from slavery and had given them a home simply because he was gracious. And this is repeated again and again through these legal codes; “This you must do because I the Lord your God delivered you from slavery in Egypt.” In the New Testament (in Matthew 5:38), there is a further radicalization of this law of the claw. Jesus says: “It has been said ‘An eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth,’ But I say unto you, no vengeance at all,” and that is further spelled out by Paul in Romans 12:17-21.

Fifth, from the New Testament the words of Jesus in Matthew 22:15-22: “Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar.” That means: “Give Caesar — the government — only what belongs to Caesar, not more. There is a limit of what Caesar can expect.”

Sixth, there is the story of Philemon, in the writings of Paul, where Paul returns to Philemon his runaway slave, Onesimus, and he says: “I appeal to your love. Kindness should be spontaneous; take him back not as a slave which he is by law, but as a brother which he is *de facto*. Both of you have the same Lord. According to man's law he is a slave, according to God's law he is a brother.”

And finally, of course, and I simply mention it, there is the Cross. This sort of massive event right at the center of everything where we see a man crucified

who presumably had rights under Roman law but who laid no claim to them. In Jesus' own life and death he demonstrated the rejection of the law of the law. He didn't only say it, but he also rejected it for himself, surrendered his own rights in order to assure the liberation of others.

### Special Temptations

In conclusion, I want to mention some special temptations. I add these here because we are dealing with specific life situations. I already referred to the tremendous tension that runs through the whole biblical story about faithfulness to this vision which is so alien to the life of the nations round about. Life is never pure and simple and therefore we need to be very careful how we use the typology of people and nation. Even though biblical people were committed to peoplehood with its implications for law and justice and to the precedence of voluntary acceptance over imposed law, they were always in danger of mixing these things and even reverting from the status of peoplehood to the status of nationhood.

First there is always the temptation of self-righteousness, the repudiation of all those who don't belong to the people, the repudiation of the chosenness of others. It was Amos, I believe, who in exasperation at one point when he was constantly faced with the refrain, "We are the chosen ones!" replied that God said: "I have chosen all the other ones as well. Don't get any notions about yourselves." So this can be a source of prejudice, of bigotry, of pride, to the point where others are excluded. Chosenness never confers privilege. It only and always confers obligation, and so being chosen is a burden.

Secondly, there is the temptation always of falling back into nation from people. It seems so often to be easier to order our affairs according to imposed law by coercion. So often that is the simplest way to proceed; it's tidy, it gets the thing done, it's effective. The story of the switch that took place in Israel from tribal confederacy to monarchy is one of those transitions. To be sure they managed to rescue some of that, even under a monarchy. But it was as Samuel said, a surrender, a falling back.

Thirdly, there is the temptation to convert the internal law into external law. Here we have a problem of language. People have pointed out the absurdity of a statement such as the following: "You *shall* love the Lord your God and your neighbor." We can make laws out of those things, you know, and we do, and then they become external laws and the internality and the voluntariness is gone. How does one legislate love of the neighbor? That has always got to be voluntary, it belongs to its essence; love that is coerced is love no longer.

## Anabaptist-Mennonite Peoplehood and Law through History

As I stated earlier, I find this paradigm more difficult even though this is what I work with all the time. Maybe it is more difficult because it is closer to home, in terms of time and history and identity. Anabaptist Mennonite Peoplehood and Law through History; I am using the words "through history" loosely here. Again there is a context. The initial date is 1525. That is much nearer in time and therefore also much nearer to us in terms of its cultural perceptions than the previous, older story. The context was Europe. The Holy Roman Empire was one of the major political structures at the time. It was a very loose confederation of all kinds of states with an emperor and most of Anabaptist activity in the 16th century took place in the confines of this empire. It was a very old structure and was considered by many to be a continuation of the Roman Empire of 15 centuries before, more or less. It was also a time of the rise of national states, the kind of thing that we are fully familiar with. We see it particularly in England and France and also in Spain. There were some others as well, who were not in the empire but who were separate, who had separate identities. It was a time of a very powerful and pervasive church, the papal church, certainly without question the greatest power on earth even in the 16th century because it was international, it was everywhere, it was immensely rich. It owned from one half to two thirds of all the real estate in Europe.

These major political components — the empire, the rising national states, and the papal church — had by this time all developed very extensive bureaucracies. From at least the 14th century onward the universities were turning out bureaucrats, people trained in administration. Those ancient universities served the existing establishments just as much as the universities do today. That's where the clerks were trained, with all their skills and with their sharp wits and their abilities to organize and to reduce to technique the relationships of large masses of people. Bureaucratization was a mark of the time. The various bureaucracies were very very powerful, and it's in this context that we have to see the events of the 16th century.

### A Time of Centralization

One other aspect of this that is very important for our present discussion is that bureaucratizing produces centralization and there was a very strong tendency — particularly in the national states and in the church — to centralize power, wealth, and the law codes. Canon law (or church law) and also the law that was beginning to function more and more in Europe, namely Roman law, was law for a centralized political structure. Thus there was tremendous pressure to centralize in centers of power and wealth and influence. For people at the bottom, the farmers and the people in the towns, the whole legal system became more and more remote.

I spent a sabbatical some years back in Innsbruck, where for months I read

correspondence from the Habsburg administration office which was located in Innsbruck, and particularly about the uprising or the coming to powerful consciousness of the peasantry in the 1520s. I read the grievance lists of the peasants from all the various areas that came into this central administrative office. One thing that was common to all of them was this point: We no longer know what's happening to us with respect to the law, because we are no longer being judged by common law which is the law, the bills of rights, that used to prevail in all of our little areas. We knew exactly where things were at and the law was administered there, and then we always knew what was happening. Now we no longer know; we are the victims of judges, we are the victims primarily of lawyers because they know how to manipulate these things. Then we are told to go from home, and we have to travel for miles and miles over there to where the trial takes place and we don't know anybody there. They charge us for our room and board over there and then when the whole thing is over we are denied justice anyway! This was the pervasive cry in the early 16th century about this new thing that was happening in Europe, of which we too are the beneficiaries.

The other major factor of this context is that the whole of Europe was Christian, that is to say it was known or it was identified by the word Christendom, which meant that all of these institutions — government and church and so on — came under this broad umbrella of Christendom. It was understood to be a single functioning unit over which Christ was the King. But he was absent and he had two viceroys, the pope and the emperor. That basic view of two powers was adapted for the lower levels of authority as well. In other words there were two ministers — the secular one and the spiritual one — who functioned together, who cooperated in making and helping the society to function. It was all one organism, with none of the sense of the separation of church and state with which we are familiar. People found it extremely difficult to contemplate any separation of the two.

### **Restoring Faith to Purity**

Now we come to Anabaptism. The word Anabaptist comes from a Greek word which identifies someone who baptizes again, so that when people started baptizing each other when they had already been baptized as infants, they were given this nickname, Anabaptists — people who baptize themselves again. Nowadays Anabaptism is a technical term. It identifies a certain religious grouping in the 16th century. It was part of a general movement of the time to restore Christian faith to purity, in the light of all that had happened over the centuries that went before. There was Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, Thomas Cranmer and others who were leaders in this movement to peel off the accretions that had grown around the gospel over the centuries and to restore it again to its purity. Here were people who, for the most part, were not setting out to found another church; they simply wanted to purify the church that was there and which they acknowledged and recognized. It was primarily in the first instance a movement to restore the purity of doctrine. For Luther it was mainly the emphasis that a person is made right with God out

of the sheer grace and mercy of God without any addition of his own. A person perceives that God offers this free grace, and it is received in faith. That is all that is required. It was radically reductionist in terms of doctrine, peeling away everything and just leaving the kernel; it was concentrated on doctrine, teaching.

That was a concern for Anabaptists too when they started out in 1525, but it's immediately evident also right from the beginning, that they were interested not only in true teaching and doctrinal orthodoxy; they were also interested in action or orthopraxis, that is to say true action. It was not only a matter of believing the truth and accepting it; it was also a matter of doing the truth. When, as the reformation proceeded, there were attempts to bring the various protestant parties together, it was always a matter of trying to come to common doctrinal formulation. Anabaptists, however, said that the only way to get together was to start obeying together. Common obedience was what was required. Even today Mennonites disagree on many things among themselves but they do get together in Mennonite Central Committee to act. This was therefore an emphasis right from the beginning. Along with everybody else, they used the Bible as the authority. It was the authority to which one went to answer a question. It is important that this be emphasized again and again; they read their Bible in the context of the institutions and events of their time, and of the practices of people. This is the grid through which they read the Bible. It is not an exaggeration to say they read their Bible in a radical way considering the ways in which others were reading it.

They went along with Martin Luther, John Calvin, and others on a great many points, but there were also some points at which they parted company with them. They did so especially on the big question about the basic assumptions regarding society and church. It was a scandalous thing to suggest, but they said that Europe was not Christian. Everyone accepted without question that Europe was Christian, but Anabaptists came along and disputed that notion. They also went much farther out on a limb, as it were, in the rejection of clericalism than the others did. And the rejection of clericalism meant mainly the rejection of clerical dominance, clerical tutelage; this was a reflection of a growing, a deep and pervasive questioning about whether the clergy were telling them the truth. When the peasant submissions came in 1525, the first article was almost always that they wanted to choose their own pastors. They wanted to choose their own pastors because they wanted to make sure they had a pastor who told them the truth. They also added that they wanted to have the right to choose them and also the right to get rid of them, if they did not tell the truth.

So there was this radical rejection of clericalism, of which the other side is the conviction of the competence of lay people, of people who are not religious functionaries. It was the belief that lay people also had some things to say to religious questions. They were not simply children to be told what to do and then simply to obey; they also had things to say. Time and again they quoted Jesus; they said Jesus once said: "I thank you Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and the



prudent and revealed them to the simple." What a marvelous text and did they ever use it! They wore it out. They said Jesus said it, and what better authority could you have for the competence of ordinary simple people to speak about the things of God? And that's also why they said that they would no longer continue the practice of baptizing babies; when you baptize a child you preempt that child's ability to make a decision for himself. You take the decision away and so the child assumes all the way along that he is a Christian and doing what is right as a Christian, when in fact he knows nothing about it whatsoever. That's why they decided to wait with baptizing people until they could make a decision of their own and could respond to it personally. Thus they attempted to assure this business of the competence of the laity; that's why you baptize adults.

### Church and Government

They also questioned the union of church and government, the coincidence of the church and the civic community. They said the two were not the same; that was simply working out a little bit further the idea that Europe was not Christian. They said that the New Testament told them nothing about the working together of the Roman governor and the Christian bishop in the city of Antioch. If it was so important how come they did not talk about it? So they concluded simply that it wasn't there. They didn't do that kind of thing. In the beginning the church was peoplehood, as I said earlier, which was separated in terms of its function and in terms of the rules by which it operated from what went on over there in Rome and all its administrative centers. And if that's true, they said, if that was true then, then that's what we ought to be doing now, particularly in view of the fact that the present authorities in Rome — both emperor and pope — assume that they are the direct descendants of the Roman emperors back then. Separate them, they said, because they operate by different rules. You can't have the rules from Rome operating in the church, and the rules of the church don't operate in Rome either.

They accepted the Bible as an absolute authority and they read it very carefully. They read the Bible virtually exclusively because they were profoundly suspicious of anything else that was written. Everything else was compromised by its associations. Thus because they read the Bible as an absolute authority, they also took over from the Bible the notion of people and nation, especially as that was articulated in the New Testament as church and world. The words "people" and "nation" have now become the words "church" and "world." We read there about living in the flesh and living in the Spirit, or living in the old age and living in the new age. They used all the New Testament metaphors that try to identify the same difference. They also used a vehicle which was part of their cultural equipment, and which came from the great church father Augustine from his great work, *The City of God*. In it he wrote that there are two kingdoms or two cities, the city of heaven and the city of earth, and two loves, the love of God and self-love. Anabaptists used Augustine's words because they had been around

all the time and were a useful vehicle. They especially liked the terms "the two kingdoms," the kingdom of Christ, and the kingdom of Satan (or anti-Christ).

The kingdom of Christ becomes visible and comes to expression particularly in the congregation. They used a particular word: "Gemeinde"; Gemeinde is in fact a sociological not a theological term. It means a group of people, a gathering, a coming together. Congregation is the closest English word that we have for it. Today we use the word church although they tried to avoid that word because it was associated with other things that they were rejecting. Now this "Gemeinde," this congregation, is not co-terminus with the civic community in which it lives. In other words, there can be a kingdom of Christ or a visible expression of this kingdom in the city of Zürich but it's a different thing from the civic community of Zürich, which has its own organization and presuppositions. Thus, according to Anabaptists, to be a citizen of Zürich did not mean that you were at the same time a citizen of Christ's kingdom. And this congregation, or this "Gemeinde," is voluntary.

Here we are back to the notion of the competence of the laity or ordinary people. People can choose to belong to this congregation, this "Gemeinde," or not. It is entered by choice and not by birth, so that political citizenship, birth, social status, or rank, ethnic identity if you like, all of those things, they said, relate to being born of the flesh but not of the Spirit. And this community then is guided and led by the Spirit of Christ. This kingdom is not territorial in the way in which we normally think of kingdoms. It has no earthly borders that you can identify. No earthly borders or national borders define this kingdom. That doesn't mean that it is invisible, because you can see it when people come together, and you can see by the way people act whether they are or are not members or citizens of this kingdom. It is none of those kinds of things that we are so accustomed to in the nation system. Thus when Anabaptists were banned because they were deemed to be dangerous, and the governments wanted to extract an oath from them that they would not come back, they replied that they could not do that since governments had no authority to tell them where they could go because the earth is the Lord's; it all belongs to God and I belong to God and therefore you can't tell me where I can go and where I can't go. But that kind of talk plays hob with nation states. It's dangerous, and of course one of the consequences of it was that the Anabaptists got it.

Then there is also the kingdom of Satan. That, according to Anabaptists, was the rest of the world. It was all of those outside the perfection of Christ they said, all who are not obedient to Christ. That is indeed a community or a kingdom that you are born into and that kingdom includes government, and government is there specifically because of people who will not be ruled by the Spirit of Christ. And that included mainly, as far as Europe was concerned, Catholic and Protestant. Now there were very few "non-Christians"; there were a few Jews around, everybody knew that, and the Moslems away out there, but we are talking about Europe now. And they

refer to Catholics and Protestants, or the term that is often used is "these pretended evangelicals," people who pretended to be Christians. They said this mainly because these people claimed to be Christians but they did not act like Christians. This other kingdom, then, works by rules which are precisely opposed to the rules that function in the kingdom of Christ. The Schleithem Confession contains an article on separation where the clear-cut distinction between light and darkness, between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan, is radically stated. There can be no commerce between the two. That was the Anabaptist formulation of the notion of nation and people that I mentioned earlier.

### Law in Human Life

Now I want to talk specifically about law again. Anabaptists accepted the necessity of law in human life. They saw it function in both kingdoms, and they saw it function in both kingdoms for human benefit. Thus on the one hand one gets this very strong feeling of negative assessment of government. But on the other hand there is also the other side of it, a very positive assessment. Government, they said, is necessary particularly because so few people will be governed by the Spirit of Christ. In the kingdom of Satan or in the world, government with its law was instituted because human beings who would not obey Christ needed to be restrained from destroying others and themselves. But although it was acknowledged and accepted as necessary, it was a law that was imposed on people, a law characterized by coercion, by violence, by vengeance, and by killing, because those who are not governed by the Spirit of Christ don't know any other way, they don't respond to any other way. Martin Luther said, and the Anabaptists generally agreed, that to abandon force in human affairs was like admitting the wolf to the sheepfold. Soon there would be only wolves and no sheep, and that would be to defeat the whole thing.

So government was certainly instituted by God for human benefit and for human protection, but Anabaptists were more pessimistic about government than Luther was. They said that since government always functions outside the perfection of Christ it does not follow the rules of Christ, or the law of Christ. Since they don't accept the law of Christ even rulers and judges follow and seek first their own advantage and the advantage of subjects only if it adds to their own advantage. And thus rulers, judges, and lawyers are all engaged in promoting selfishness and self-seeking, with no regard for the common good. This by the way was the cry of the ordinary people in the 16th century. Everything was to be done to the glory of God and the common good. Judges, courts, governments were perceived to be arbitrary in their judgments, since it is they who knew and controlled the law. I remind you of the words about Roman law at this point.

One of the more sophisticated of the Anabaptist leaders who himself was a civil servant wrote in a pamphlet that government had come to be in his time little more than a protector of private property, especially that of the exploiters. Now all of this was a devastating criticism, levelled against

civic communities, against governments, against the church — Catholic and Protestant. In spite of all that, however, they said that government must be obeyed, taxes paid, and honor given to those who govern. But it was hard. One feels the tension between this positive assessment of government and the constant criticism of it in their writings. It's hard because they saw the order which they said was established by God, turned upside down. Government, they said, was instituted to reward the good and to punish evil, a definition that keeps cropping up all the time. Now, however, they said, the most law-abiding citizens are most persecuted and imprisoned and exiled and killed. They were talking about themselves, but we have that testimony not only from themselves. We have that testimony also from government and from the reformers who said about these Anabaptists that they were very serious about living as responsible and honorable citizens. And yet they found themselves at the receiving end of what to government was prosecution, but what from their point of view was persecution because of the kind of fundamental criticisms they levelled at the system of the time.

### A New Commandment: The Law of Love

Now in the kingdom of Christ there is also a law. There is a new commandment, the love commandment, the first commandment: "You shall love the Lord your God and your neighbor as yourself." But this law is not imposed, this law is accepted voluntarily when a person joins that community by the mark of baptism, in the commitment of baptism, to that kind of life and to the discipline of that community. That is to say, the vow of baptism was at the same time the acceptance of discipline of that people. They pledged themselves to live by it, because they said it promised the greatest of all human advantage — that is to say the blessing and acceptance by God and the true maturity and development of people. Now the community of the "Gemeinde" — the congregation — is also composed of people who are tempted and who fall and infringe against the law of love and fall into sin and evil. There are means in the church to deal with that kind of thing, but the rules are different than those which function in the other kingdom. The rules are characterized by patience, the complete rejection of violence and coercion, by acceptance, by forgiveness, by love and repentance. The process of discipline is carried out, or if you like, the administration of law within the community is carried out, not by arbitrary rulers and judges, but by the community itself, and the process itself, as I already said, was accepted voluntarily to begin with. So we don't have an adversarial way of dealing with things in the community; they often referred to Jesus from Luke chapter 12 where he is approached by someone who says to him, "Master come and judge between me and my brother concerning our inheritance." And Jesus said to the man, "Who set me up as judge over you?" He refused to make a judgment. We are not set over against each other in that fashion; it's done by cooperation, in reconciliation, so the result of that discipline or that internal administration of law is restoration. The goal is healing and growth.

The fact is that church discipline in the 16th century both in Catholicism

and in Protestantism was often punitive in the extreme. Anabaptists were exhibit number one because the Catholic and Protestant clergy regarded the Anabaptists as their parishioners, and when Anabaptists were hauled in front of a judge and threatened with exile or even killed, that was the exercise of church discipline. We need to be clear about that. That's what was happening, and so when the Anabaptists came up they said immediately in this context that a person who is incorrigible, who will not ultimately conform to the rules of this new community, is not to be killed but simply excluded from the community. So the process is for restoration and healing, and people were indeed excluded, but people were also readmitted, brought back. They said there is a paradox here in this whole thing. In one of his tracts Pilgram Marpeck writes that what appears to be the greatest disadvantage, that is to say voluntary submission to discipline, surrender, renunciation of self, turns out to be the greatest possible advantage. And what appears to be the greatest advantage, that is to say self-seeking for one's own advantage and right, is ultimately the greatest disadvantage. Anabaptists often quoted the words of Jesus: "What shall it profit a person if he gains the whole world and loses his own life?"

Here too, then, we have the same emphases on external and internal law, imposed and voluntary acceptance, punitive and restorative, conciliatory rather than adversarial. That is why, as I have indicated, they rejected infant baptism and instead instituted believers' or adult baptism. Infant baptism, they said, corresponds to law that is imposed on people whereas believers' baptism corresponds to law that is voluntarily accepted by a person. They also spoke to the governments of their time and to the laws of their time. They argued that it was not necessary for a person to be a Christian in order to be a just ruler. All you have to do is look at the Old Testament, they said. Those people weren't Christians and yet you have examples there of just rulers. And they also pointed to classical Greek and Roman examples of people who were just rulers but who were not Christians. They argued that governing could be done with a great deal less violence, with far less arbitrary judgments. It could be done without bribery. All of those things they said time and time again, and called on governments to perform their functions in the protection of the powerless and those who couldn't protect themselves. They said they would obey in all things that did not affect obedience to Christ. Criminal acts were certainly reserved for judgment of the existing courts. But the internal discipline, the social control, and the power of the internal law of Christ was such that I don't know of any cases among Anabaptists and early Mennonites of murder or theft and so on. At least they were extremely rare if there were any.

In other words this notion of law internally was very, very effective, but, and this is important for us to remember in terms of what we are doing here, they did accept the fundamental views of Western society which were already developing: views with respect to work, family, roles of women and men, and no doubt other things as well. They were part of the emerging

pattern of Western civilization; in many of those points they simply accepted what was normative in the society.

What I have described here in terms of the vision of this community that operates by different rules from the rest of society and government was generally true of Anabaptists and Mennonites from the 16th to the end of the 18th century. They kept out of civic affairs, because they said they could not participate there on account of the rules that operate there. They were not free, not at liberty to use those rules, because in government there is coercion and an imposition on people things they don't want themselves. They nurtured their own community, their own "Gemeinde," with mutual aid and with internal discipline. The general testimony is that their life was characterized by frugality and honesty and generosity to outsiders in terms of helping people. It is certain that they were prize farmers when they became agricultural people, even though initially it was an urban movement. Conflicts with governments, primarily over military service, seriously began to surface in the 18th century, particularly over the rise of Prussian militarism. Generally, Mennonites tried to avoid those problems by moving on, by migrating. There was among them a powerful sense of peoplehood with very powerful internal cohesion and discipline. This was important, because to be non-conformist in this kind of society meant that you had to have powerful internal discipline in order to survive. But because they were non-conformists they tended to run into more and more conflicts, particularly on this issue of the military, and so they moved on.

The first big migration of Mennonites — which was not over that issue but over the issue of persecution — was from Tirol and Austria to Moravia in the 16th century. Thousands moved. At the same time there was a large migration from the Netherlands to Poland, and then later on, at the end of the 18th century, when the issue of military service became a real one, there was a large migration from Prussia to Russia and then for the same reason from Russia to North America, and from North America to Central America and South America for a variety of reasons, the school reason being one, in Canada particularly. They almost always also had economic motives for moving, but the intention to try to steer clear of compromising involvement with nation, with government, with coercion and use of power, was certainly a powerful motivator for these continual migrations from one place to another; in the course of all that migrating they changed languages several times.

Some years ago I was discussing some of this material with a group of people. I had just been describing to a man whose name was Enns, that less than 200 years ago his ancestors were speaking Dutch, not German. He said that was news to him, and I said I could prove it to him. And then they learned German, and spoke German, and now we speak English, and he said, "I am really confused, I don't know where I belong." That's what comes with this constant moving; you begin to wonder whether you are ever going to have a home or not. Well, we appear pretty secure here right now I would

say, but who knows? That has happened before.

But Mennonites have had exactly the same temptations which I enumerated in my previous address — the same temptations to self-righteousness that the Jews had. That seems to be an affliction of small communities which try to survive in a dominant culture. At least it certainly has been an affliction of Mennonites; I shouldn't speak about others. It is the assertion that others do not belong, that others are not chosen, and that is then often a source of prejudice, bigotry, and pride. We need to remember that Mennonites also have often had a strong sense of chosenness, particularly at the beginning, and it's been part and parcel of the tradition to the present. Chosenness never confers privilege, only obligation.

Second, there is the temptation to fall back into being a nation from being a people, from the conversion of the internal law into external law. The Mennonite story provides some examples, exactly for these kinds of things. Because of attempts to remain faithful to this vision there have been schisms — separations — among Mennonites. There was one at the end of the 17th century, a schism which produced what we still know today as the Amish. They said they had gone too far in accommodation to that world out there and so they marked their separation and their dedication to faithfulness to that vision by not changing their uniforms. Thus they still wear clothes cut according to the patterns out of the latter part of the 17th century. But there is a good reason for it. This is not simply obstreperous social behavior; there is a point to it, namely, emphasis on peoplehood.

The same kind of thing happened also with schisms that took place with Mennonite communities in Russia, particularly the big schism that came in 1860 out of which the Mennonite Brethren church emerged. It was on the same issues again. It could be called a revolt against secularization, against surrendering to nationhood, to use that other term now. Mennonites had become a nation. They were a self-contained community, they had their own laws, their own police, and they had taken to using coercion on people and to forcing law and to imposing these things on people and finally some said "enough" and you had a separation. The people that left said that the inner law had been abandoned for the outer law, and that was not to be tolerated in the Christian community.

Now because Mennonites share their views on work and family and so on with the broader culture of which they are a part, their distinctive notions about being a people and about law tend to erode more and more. I think the old dynamics are still visible for those who look for them, you can still see them, they are there, but one gets a little anxious now and again about their survival. Loss of internal discipline and social control leads to erosion of values. We have accepted a lot of the individualism of the culture in which we live and which militates against a sense of community and a common discipline. It's possible now to be a Mennonite without being a Christian. To be a good Mennonite today often means no more than being a good citizen, that is to say, that one obeys the government, asks no questions,

and does not criticize. And those of us who do occasionally say something in public about it get it in the neck from our own young people for saying so.

Years ago when I helped draft resisters from the United States come to this country I had a call from a Mennonite farmer near Waterloo who told me, "Look, if you keep on doing this we are going to lose our privileges." To be a Mennonite today certainly means to be almost invariably good in business, and the line from that to exploitation is so vague, we get over into it without even realizing it, without even sensing it, incrementally. We are good farmers, and now all of that good farming has also taken on a death mask, because with the "improvements" we are now facing the destruction of the land on which we have lived and from which we have drawn our living. Thus the model as it has evolved becomes less and less distinct as time proceeds.

## Ahab of Jezreel: Faithfulness and Unfaithfulness

In this final address I want to share with you, rather informally, a story from the Old Testament. The stories were always the most important part for me in the reading of the Bible when I was a child, and since the Bible was one of the very few books we had in our home I read it a lot. The story that I want to share with you today is also one that I have known for a long time and that has always impressed me very deeply. It's the story from I Kings chapter 21, the story of Ahab and Jezebel and Naboth. It is an incident in the continuing story of the reign of King Ahab in the kingdom of Israel, and is one of those stories that illustrates better than a dissertation or a theoretical discussion, the kinds of issues that constituted faithfulness and unfaithfulness among the people of God. I want to read the story first, and then simply go through it and make some comments on it which are important for the discussion at hand.

I said this story is an incident in the ongoing story of the reign of Ahab and therefore the 21st chapter starts like this: "This is what happened next. Naboth of Jezreel had a vineyard close by the palace of Ahab, King of Samaria. And Ahab said to Naboth, 'Give me your vineyard to be my vegetable garden since it adjoins my house. I will give you a better vineyard for it, or if you prefer I will give you its worth in money.' But Naboth answered Ahab, 'The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my ancestors.' Ahab went home gloomy and out of temper at the word of Naboth of Jezreel. 'I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers.' He laid down on his bed and he turned his face away and refused to eat. His wife Jezebel came to him, 'Why are you so dispirited,' she said, 'that you will not eat?' He said, 'I have been speaking with Naboth of Jezreel. I said, Give me your vineyard either for money or if you prefer for another vineyard in exchange. And he said, I will not give you my vineyard.' Then his wife Jezebel said, 'You make a fine king of Israel and no mistake. Get up and eat, cheer up and you will feel better. I will get you the vineyard of Naboth of Jezreel myself.' So she wrote letters in Ahab's name and sealed them with his seal and sent them to the elders and nobles who lived where Naboth lived. In the letters she wrote: 'Proclaim a fast and put Naboth in the forefront of the people, confront him with a couple of scoundrels who will accuse him like this: You have cursed God and the King. Then take him outside and stone him to death. The men of Naboth's town, the elders and nobles who lived in his town, did what Jezebel ordered, what was written in the letters she had sent them. They proclaimed the fast and put Naboth in the forefront of the people and then the two scoundrels came and stood in front of him and made their accusation, 'Naboth has cursed God and the King.' They led him outside the town and stoned him to death. They

sent word to Jezebel, 'Naboth has been stoned to death.' When Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned to death she said to Ahab, 'Get up, take possession of the vineyard which Naboth of Jezreel would not give you for money, for Naboth is no longer alive, he is dead.' And when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, he got up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth of Jezreel and take possession of it. Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, 'Up, go down to meet Ahab the King of Israel, in Samaria. You will find him in Naboth's vineyard. He has gone down to take possession of it. You are to say this to him, 'The Lord does this: you have committed murder and now you usurp as well. For this — and the Lord says this — in the place where the dogs licked the blood of Naboth, the dogs will lick your blood too.' Ahab said to Elijah, 'So you have found me out, oh my enemy.' Elijah answered, 'I have found you out. For your double-dealing, and since you have done what is displeasing to the Lord, I will bring disaster down on you; I will sweep away your descendants and wipe out every male belonging to the family of Ahab fettered or free in Israel. I will treat your house as I treated the house of Jeroboam, son of Nebat and of Baasha, son of Ahijah, for provoking my anger and leading Israel into sin.' (Against Jezebel too, the Lord spoke these words, 'The dogs will eat Jezebel in the fields of Jezreel'). Those of Ahab's family who die in the city the dogs will eat, and those who die in the open country the birds of the air will eat.' And indeed there was never anyone like Ahab for double-dealing and for doing what is displeasing to the Lord, urged on by Jezebel his wife. He behaved in the most abominable way, adhering to idols just as the Amorites used to do whom the Lord had dispossessed for the sons of Israel. When Ahab heard these words he tore his garments and put sackcloth next to his skin and fasted; he slept in the sackcloth; he walked with slow steps. Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, 'Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Since he has humbled himself before me I will not bring the disaster in his days; I will bring the disaster down on his house in the days of his son.' "

By all the standards of how success is measured, Ahab was certainly one of the more successful kings of Israel. He was an intelligent man and in terms of what he did for the nation, in terms of its general security and economic welfare he was a good king. He did a good job. The kingdom had never been as well to do, as wealthy and strong as it was just then. He had married a princess from the city of Tyre to the north along the coast. The marriage had been arranged by his father; it was one of those marriages of alliance by which nations or political units allied themselves with each other for military and economic security. And there is no question that Jezebel, the princess of Tyre, his wife, was a strong, beautiful, talented woman. There is more about her later on in the first books of Kings.

There was in Israel a tradition of basic justice. It consisted primarily in the canons of faithfulness to the neighbor, doing justice by each other, protecting and helping the poor, the weak, and the powerless. This tradition

was alive in Israel, and it's very clearly visible also in the actions of Ahab, the king who had just enough of a sense of obligation to do justice that when Naboth refused to surrender his vineyard the king did not proceed immediately to take it. He assumed that was the end of the story. We see the same thing expressing itself again after the judgment had been spoken to him. He knew that he had transgressed against the justice of the Lord. He was angry and he was frustrated, but he didn't do anything.

In some ways when we look at it from the point of view from which we see many things today, turning this vineyard over to the king might well have been a good deal for Naboth because the king offered him more than it was worth. In other words, at that point he was not proposing to take it away. Naboth's reply to the request of the king was, "I cannot give away or sell the inheritance of my ancestors. I have no right, no competence to give away what belongs not to me but to the generations of my ancestors and also to the generations of my descendants." Now when Ahab described this exchange to his wife he left out this part; he simply said that Naboth would not give him his vineyard and that was a very important omission. And he wouldn't admit to himself, or he didn't want to admit or acknowledge, that Naboth had a binding reason for not parting with his vineyard.

Now Jezebel came from a different tradition, a tradition of rulership, of monarchy, of kingship, of oriental despotism — a tradition that knew no inhibitions at all to do or to take what it wanted; it was absolute. She was impatient, and so she took things into her own hands. We note that Ahab asked no questions; he just let her go ahead. He obviously knew his wife; she had probably done things like this before. And one can easily imagine this man rationalizing this thing to himself now and saying, "If I don't do it myself, if it's done by others I have no blame, it's not my doing. I can benefit from it with a good conscience."

Now this woman Jezebel obviously already had a reputation for ruthlessness, for the elders and the nobles to whom the letter went received it meekly and without protest. Without asking questions or without arguing they did what she ordered. They must have thought: "Clearly, if we don't do what she says then we will be next on the list." And it may well be that these men were so concerned with their own security, or maybe they had more important reasons which we don't know, that they perhaps never thought about the fact that they were already victims and already offenders, all in one. When it was all over then, and a free man had been trivially murdered after being framed in this way, Jezebel announced to the king, "Naboth is dead," and Ahab asked no questions. He put on his coat and drove over to the plot to take possession of it, again with his rationalizations ready in his pocket.

But the thunderhead of God's wrath was building up, even when Ahab had no inkling of it. The thing had been done quietly; at least there was no public outcry, and of course it could be assumed that there would be

none because Naboth had after all been executed on a charge and found guilty. The whole procedure had been legal. The thunderhead of God's wrath came in the form of a wild and rugged man who spent most of his time out in the desert and in the wilderness. He had spent so much time there that he knew as much about wild animals as he did about people. This man Elijah, this fierce man, was the champion and the spokesman of God's justice, which is the justice for the poor and the weak and the powerless. And then we have this dramatic meeting at the place of the crime, introduced by that marvelous line of the king, "So you have found me out, oh mine enemy." When Elijah speaks the blame does not rest on Jezebel, nor on the elders, nor on the nobles; he places it squarely on the king — where it belongs. And the clear understanding is that this king is as much subject to the law as Naboth or anyone else. We had one of these confrontations before. It was the confrontation between Nathan the prophet and David. They are not dissimilar situations. It's one of the things that constituted the difference between Israel and the nations, where this kind of thing could happen. A king could be called to account by this man, this prophet.

And now there is a terrible storm of a sentence on Ahab, and the story unfolds from then on in the first and second books of Kings, and the drama does not end until the man dies and until his son is killed or shot to death on the plot of Naboth of Jezreel. The implication of the whole incident is that kings who behave like this, people who act like this, bring down their own ruin upon themselves in the end. It's not some arbitrary action on the part of an absolute God. No society that allows such a miscarriage of justice will ultimately survive, for it is the undermining of the very basis on which the society can live. It is built by the Lord God into the scheme of things. It takes time. It took another generation. But it's clear that it will happen.

I want to leave it at that and simply ask the question: "Who are the counterparts in Canada today of the actors in this drama — Ahab and Jezebel, the elders and the nobles, Naboth and Elijah?"

## Additional Printed Material

**The Christian as Victim** by Howard Zehr and Dave Jackson (MCC). Examines the experience of victimization and discusses how Christians should respond when victimized.

**Mediating the Victim-Offender Conflict: The Victim Offender Reconciliation Program** by Howard Zehr with a case study by Earl Sears (MCC). A 24-page booklet providing an overview of the VORP process and the rationale behind it. Several manuals for operating such a program are also available.

**Who is My Neighbour?** by Howard Zehr. Designed to help congregations and other groups discover practical ways of reaching out to victims.

**Crime is a Peace Issue**, ed. by Wayne Northey. A compilation of articles about various aspects of crime and corrections. Strongly recommended as a basic resource guide.

**The Bible and Law**, ed. by Willard Swartley. Includes the major papers presented at the Bible and Law conference sponsored by Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries in July 1981.

**Life After Prison** by Al Wengerd. Raises some thought-provoking questions for the prisoner about to be released.

**Death as a Penalty** by Howard Zehr. A good introduction to the difficult questions around the death penalty.

**Repairing the Breach. Ministering in Community Conflict** by Ron Kraybill. Written to help congregations provide a peacemaking presence within and outside the church.

**VORP Book** by the PACT Institute of Justice and the MCC U.S. Office of Criminal Justice. Contains all the information needed to start a Victim Offender Reconciliation Project.

**Mediation Primer**. Produced by the originators of the VORP and Community Mediation Service programs in Canada. Includes theory and practical helps for training in mediation.

**Dial 911: Peaceful Christians and Urban Violence** by Dave Jackson. Discusses ways to respond to crime, drawing upon the experiences of Reba Place Fellowship in Illinois. (Herald Press).

**Dial 911: Leader's Guide** provides material for using **Dial 911** as a basis for discussion in small groups.

**New Perspectives on Crime and Justice**. Occasional Papers published on an irregular basis as a means of sharing important papers and presentations (MCC). Titles are: **Crime, Pain and Death** by Nils Christie (no. 1); **A Biblical Vision of Justice** by Herman Bianchi (no. 2); **Peoplehood and Law** by Walter Klaassen (no. 3).

**Capital Punishment Study Guide** by Larry Kehler. An excellent six-lesson outline for study in groups (MCC).

For additional materials write to the addresses listed on the back of this booklet.