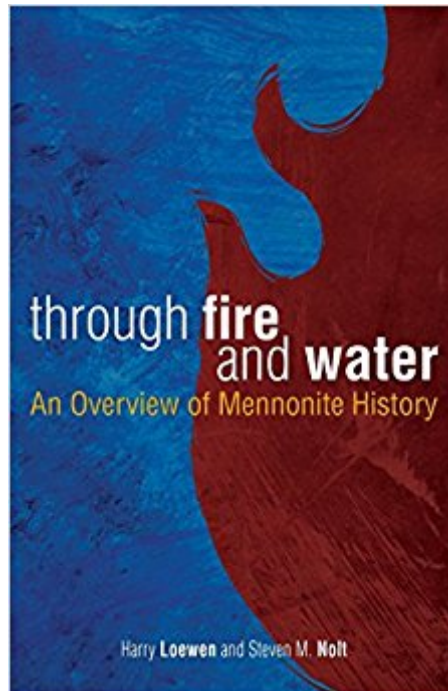




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# Through Fire And Water: An Overview Of Mennonite History



## Synopsis

First published in 1996, *Through Fire and Water* has proved to be a great resource for Mennonite high school history classes and for people who want to know more about the origins, history, and beliefs of the Anabaptist/Mennonite church. This revised edition takes note of changes since that time in the U.S. and Canadian Mennonite church scene, including the cultural, racial and ethnic diversity in the U.S. and Canadian Mennonite churches, and also discusses recent developments in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

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## Customer Reviews

In 1536, Dutch priest Menno Simons renounced his connection with the Roman Catholic Church and joined the Anabaptists to form his own congregation. Practicing baptism by immersion, the autonomy of the local church and the priesthood of the individual believer, Simons's new Christian sect, called Mennonites, soon spread from the Netherlands to the rest of Europe and, eventually, to America. Out of the Mennonite church grew other Christian sectarian movements like the Moravians and the Amish, who retained the Mennonite emphasis on pacificism but diverged in other important ways from the theological doctrines of the Mennonites. This marvelous book traces the history and teaching of the Mennonite church from its roots in New Testament Christianity through the emergence of Anabaptism in the 16th century and the settlement of Mennonites in North America to the contemporary work of Mennonites around the world. In accessible prose sometimes spiced with cartoons, the authors recount the struggles and successes of Mennonites to establish their religious

traditions in an often inhospitable world and provide a balanced and humorous overview of Mennonite history. Copyright 1996 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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I am finally getting a chance to sit down and write down my thoughts on this book from Herald Press, sent to me by the folks at Mennonite Publishing Network. It actually was one of my favorite reads on the Anabaptist Movement in quite some time. To all my fellow friends and family in an Anabaptist church, reading this book, whether you read or not, will be far from a waste of your time. Church history buffs will enjoy hearing a little more 'from the other side'. I truly believe this book is going to become an essential book to the church, within regards to the telling of our story. Growing up in Lancaster Pennsylvania, I was well aware of the many little 'informational' books that were sold at shops on the Amish side of town, explaining who the Mennonites are, who the Amish are and telling a brief overview of our history. Honestly, I believe 'Through Fire and Water: An Overview of Mennonite History' has the potential of replacing all of those and becoming the standard of a much more elaborate, well rounded and insightful history of where we came from and how it is defining just where we are going. One of the best selling books to hit MPN history, is the Naked Anabaptist. Honestly, as much as I enjoyed the read, I believe this book, Through Fire and Water,

should be a mandatory read before and after one reads the Naked Anabaptist. The Naked Anabaptist explains us as a broader and more modern context, this gives us the essential look at just where our roots are. Through Fire and Water deeply explores all branches of the Anabaptist movement, within the dark theater that is `Church History`. Starting in the beginning, carefully showing our dance outside of the Protestant Reformation, this book artfully displays our history through both facts and the telling of stories, both past and modern Anabaptists. It takes the time to explain our history, our branches and our migrations (Amish, BIC, Russian Mennonites, MB, etc) as well as tell their stories of who they were, where they came from and what circumstances shaped their existence. I especially enjoyed new insights on people like George Burdett, where we truly get a opening glimpse at how radical he was as he marched into Catholic services, to cry hypocrisy. It sheds new light on areas that I wasn't aware of, including Menno Simon's humor, who often signed his letters `The Cripple who Loves You`. It also gave me a more in-depth glimpse at the Russian Mennonites, which are different than my own Swiss heritage. The book is written in almost a play format. It opens with the scene of our Christian Heritage, laying out stories and reformations of our history. It then enters and carefully explains the bad and the good of our emergence in the 16th Century of Europe, setting the stage for us as bandits on the run. From there we learn our Story of how we became Mennonite, Brethren in Christ, Amish, etc - how our migrations to Russia and America erupted. Before closing with the most rounded look at our history I have ever experienced in one book - it dives into how our history has shaped us into the missional community we are today, including our pitfalls, but celebrating our spread across the globe, to be the several million church members we are today. As a Pastor, this is one of the books I will be most recommended when people ask me and our church plant, Who are the Mennonites? As a Mennonite, this book gave me a much more rounded look into our history and the affects it has had on us - but also on what pieces of the Kingdom we have come to understand through our heritage. Finally as a Christian, it is a book that tells the other side of the Church History. The side often forgotten and not told, it is part Martyr's Mirror, part Naked Anabaptist and part Confession of the Mennonite Perspective. One of my favorite sections was titled, From Anabaptist to Mennonite, exploring how we became compromised as the quiet of the land and how we migrated onward from there. This place of being quiet is where some of us in the church, are still defaulting our lives, losing the passion our heritage presents in living out the Lord's Prayer, on earth as it is in heaven. It was also exciting to see my 10th Great-Grandfather mentioned, Jacob Engle, the founding Pastor of the Brethren in Christ. The book is roughly 350 pages of history, that is written with the same passion, those before us, lived out in their lives. It was engaging, energetic and motivational. Many

times I not only had to laugh or shake my head, but even was ushered to tears over the story of where we come from. This book made me wish time travel was possible to meet with these `common joes`, so many years before that lived extraordinary lives.

Having just completed "Through Fire & Water," I am left with mixed feelings. The authors tell the story of Anabaptists and Mennonites. The book seems relatively complete in that it identifies the European origins of "rebaptizers" and traces their migration across Europe, to America and Russia, and around the world. The book is filled with interesting vignettes and anecdotes that help make the story quite interesting. In fact, the entire book is composed of vignettes assembled into a narrative that becomes increasingly coherent as the book progresses. There are no long or excessively detailed stories that might cause you to lose interest. In essence, this book appears ideally suited for a high school audience that is learning about Christian history. Those who do not spend much time reading, or have little interest in reading, should also find the book quite enjoyable. This is an easy and informative read, and the book tells an important story. Those looking for a more substantial narrative or more thorough research might prefer to begin with other texts. The opening chapters are so broad that no coherent narrative emerges. Throughout the book, only a minimal amount of research is used to support the vignettes. The prose is also very basic and straight ahead. That said, I do feel that "Through Fire & Water" presents a good introduction to Mennonite history. I am glad I took the time to read this text. If you are looking for an entertaining and accessible introduction to Mennonite history, then I think you too will be glad you selected this book.

I read this book because I do genealogy for a hobby and have strong Swiss roots. It is useful to me to understand the migration patterns and lives of ancestors. This book had just the right amount of information to paint a clear picture. It was detailed to a useful level but didn't overwhelm me with so much that it obscured the main picture.

Such a great overview of the Anabaptist story. I thought it might have been a bore. But I was pleasantly surprised. Good book if you want a quick glance of Mennonite/Anabaptist history.

Another important book that I read as Shartlesville prepares to celebrate its 250th. The first organized Amish settlement in Americas was in our area. This helps me understand the group and the local history.

We felt this book would be a good read for someone who is converting from the Muslim faith to Christianity and is also looking for a church home in the Mennonite tradition. We have found the book to be a very valuable tool for this purpose.

This book does not just cover early Mennonite/Anabaptist roots it covers early church roots as well. Written in a style that is easy to read and digest. It is an easy read and very informative!

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