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## Themes of Peace and Violence in Mennonite Community as seen in Rudy Wiebe's Novel *Peace Shall Destroy Many*

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### **Abstract:**

*This article tackles themes of peace and violence in Mennonite community as depicted in the novel Peace Shall Destroy Many by Rudy Wiebe. The Mennonites have been known for their strict attitudes towards violent activities. For this Canadian Christian minority, all aspects of war are unacceptable, logically and religiously. In this novel, Wiebe illustrates many moral, cultural, religious and inner social practices of the Mennonites. He presents to his readers a clear picture about this special community. The novel sheds light on a conflict between two dominant speeches within the Mennonite society. One of the speeches stands for the old traditions and customs of the Mennonites, and the symbol of this argument is the character Deacon Block. The other speech indicates the new revolution among Mennonite youth against some of their society's habits and traditions, and this is represented by the character Thom Wiens. So, Deacon Block is the antagonist in the novel, while its protagonist is Thom Wiens. The paper concludes that pacifism takes many forms such as non-resistance, conscientious objection, alternative service, and reconciliation. However, pacifism, within Mennonite context, does not always express good ideas, but rather can reflect a kind of selfishness, where non-believers die to protect believers. Even though the Mennonites talk about pacifism on a national level, in terms of not going to war, not serving in the military fields, and refusing to pay taxes to the government, and because human nature is basically evil, it is impossible for a community to have no evil or violence in it, the Mennonites are no exception.*

**Keywords:** Mennonites, Non-Resistance, Peace, Reconciliation, Violence.

### **Introduction:**

Since the beginning of humanity, there have been many dangers that have threatened peace, religion, stability, and even human beings' lives. The most dangerous obstacles that have impeded the development of humanity have been wars. Some damages of those wars were repairable as people could restart their normal life rhythms, while some of them caused vast damage that changed the face of the world. This research paper intends to shed light on a peaceful community named the

Mennonites, which was and is still known for its strict attitudes towards war and violent activities in general. It tackles the themes of peace and violence as seen in Rudy Wiebe's novel *Peace Shall Destroy Many*.

According to *The Cambridge Encyclopedia*, the Mennonites are "Dutch and Swiss Anabaptists who later called themselves Mennonites after one of their leaders, Menno Simons (1496-1559)" (Crystal, 1997, p.700). This short definition gives the reader a hint about the origin of this religious group. Also, it clarifies that the word 'Mennonite' comes from the name of Menno Simons, who was known as the founder of this denomination. The definition that Mennonites are given in *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* supports the previous definition. *The Harvard Encyclopedia* states that Amish and Mennonites are "Germanic people who stem from the Swiss Anabaptists movement that emerged during the reformation in the 16th century" (Hostetler, 1980, p.123). In addition to the origin of the Mennonites in this definition, it can be seen that the environment in which the Mennonite ideas grew in was the reformation of the Middle Ages.

Despite their isolation, the Mennonites support peace and non-violence around the world, and clarify their position to nuclear weapons, especially after the nuclear age began at the very end of World War II. They emphasize that war is evil and it is against the brotherhood of humanity as a whole. Also, they say that their opinions are derived from their Christian beliefs. They declared these ideas in the middle of the twentieth century in their declaration "A Christian Declaration on Peace, War, and Military Service" in which they revealed their position on war: "We believe that war is altogether contrary to the teaching and spirit of Christ and the Gospel; that therefore war is sin"(A Christian Declaration on Peace, War, and Military Service, 1953, para.1).

The Mennonites stated that all aspects of war were unacceptable, logically and religiously. Mennonites emigrated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from Europe to Russia and then to America, and especially to Canada, escaping from the persecution, they faced in both Europe and Russia because of their lack of participation in wars (Brown, Bennett, & Cooke, 1990). They considered themselves as pacifists whose major goal was to spread peace everywhere in the world, and that was revealed in their major authors' writings. Among those authors was the writer Rudy Henry Wiebe, who wrote about different aspects of his Mennonite community (Keith, 1985, p.1940). Rudy Wiebe is a Canadian short story writer and novelist. In his writings, he wrote about many groups in Canada, but mainly focused on the Mennonites, and later on, on the native Indians. He wrote about various minorities, considering the moral, cultural, religious, and inside social issues. Through his literary works, he always tried to put his readers in the picture that he drew of the social practices or activities of the societies he wrote about. He never hesitated to reveal, when he was writing, what he knew about his subjects. So, he was affected by the environment in which he was born, and in which he lived (Lecker, David, & O'Brien, 1989). His first novel was *Peace Shall*

*Destroy Many* in 1962 on which this research paper is based. In this novel, Wiebe depicts a picture of the Mennonite society, which was his home environment as a Mennonite person. He introduces to his readership the systematic lifestyle of the Mennonites and illustrates their major customs and traditions. The novel took place in the Canadian prairie region named Wapiti. Its setting was at the end of World War II, specifically the year 1944 (Klinch, 1987).

In this novel, the conflict was clearly seen between two different ideas that existed within the society. One of them stood for the old traditions and customs of the Mennonites as their elders had kept them, and the symbol of this was Deacon Block. The other idea was the new revolution among Mennonite youth against some of their society's habits and traditions, and this was represented by Thom Wiens. So, Deacon Block was the antagonist in the novel, while its protagonist was Thom Wiens (Toye, 2001).

Both of the main characters seem to share many common denominators about the importance of their fathers' rules and traditions; however, they start to disagree with each other when Thom realizes that their system includes some incorrect things such as the way women are treated, their relationships with the outsiders, their attitudes towards participation in war, and other subjects. So, as the novel progresses the reader can notice the two different views of Thom, who questions Mennonite practices, and Block, who emphasizes continuing their fathers' ways. However, before the end of the novel, it seems that their points of view start to converge, where both of them agree that there was something wrong in their traditional practices.

### **Pacifism:**

Historically, the notion of pacifism was practiced under many names, sometimes as an agreement or treaty, and even as the purpose behind diplomacy and international relations. However, the first known use of this word was in the early twentieth century. During World War II, American pacifists, who were trying to play a role in finishing that horrible war, used the word pacifism more and more. As a result of that, they worked hand in hand with many other activists to end that war or at least to not accept American participation in it (Wilson, 2001).

Therefore, before discussing the concept of pacifism through the novel *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, it is necessary to define it. According to *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2006), the "word 'pacifism' is derived from the word 'pacific,' which means 'peace making' [Latin, paci- (from pax) meaning 'peace' and -ficus meaning 'making']" (Para. 2). However, in the *Encyclopedia Americana*, it is clarified that "[p] acifism usually refers to the refusal to sanction or participate in warfare on the grounds of principle" (Chatfield, 2006, p. 186). This definition shows that pacifism is the situation in which people refrain from being involved in wars due to their own religious creeds. The reason behind the refusal is neither horror nor discouragement, but rather an obedient decision to God's orders.



Alexander Moseley (2006) states, “Pacifism is the theory that peaceful rather than violent or belligerent relations should govern human intercourse and that arbitration, surrender, or migration should be used to resolve disputes” (Para. 1). Moseley in this quote gives a general meaning for pacifism, for he thinks it must mark the different aspects of the relationships between human beings. In addition, this definition supports the idea that pacifism includes a successful international diplomacy that can strengthen the relations between nations. Furthermore, pacifism in Canada, where the novel *Peace Shall Destroy Many* took place, was classified in two parts. The first part is “sectarian pacifism [which was] the historic non-resistance of pacifist religious sects that have tried to remain separate from... Canadian society” (Socknat, 1985, p. 1348). However, the second part “which attracted popular support, is the liberal Protestant and humanitarian reform... based upon the pacifist teachings of Jesus and belief in the irrationality of war and the brotherhood of man” (Socknat, p. 1348). Therefore, this shows that the concept of pacifism was well known within Canadian society in general, especially among religious groups such as the Mennonites.

In addition to that, the Mennonites used to emphasize their desire to settle peacefully in the world. In many Mennonite conferences, they declared their attitudes about this. In their conference “A Commitment to Christ's Way of Peace” in 1993, they expressed their opinions about peace when they said, “We yearn to work together in the ministry of peacemaking with all Christians” (Steiner, 2000, para. 20). This symbolizes the Mennonites’ preparation to achieve peace in the world as a whole, and especially between Christians.

Moreover, pacifism is “the movement to establish and preserve peace among nations through the creation of international laws and organizations” (Warren, 1998, p. 684). This definition transfers pacifism from local ideas within narrow social groups to a global issue. According to that, it can become a common denominator between whole nations to achieve peace in the world by extinguishing the fires of the international wars. Now, focus will be on how Rudy Wiebe illustrated pacifism through the novel.

Rudy Wiebe (1962) defined peace in the novel *Peace Shall Destroy Many* when Joseph wrote the following in his letter to Thom:

[T]he word ‘peace’ means a state of safety and blessedness. This was one of the blessings promised Israel by God if they followed Him. ‘Peace’ to most Mennonites has, besides that mentioned above, only this Old Testament significance, if it has any distinct meaning at all. As long as God gives us good crops and we don’t have to fight in any war we are at peace.

Yet the ‘peace’ of the New Testament is quite different. The angels sang ‘Peace on earth’ and shortly after all the babes of Bethlehem were

slaughtered because of the birth of Christ. Explain ‘peace’ there, if you will! It sounds as if God was playing a horrible joke on mankind. (p. 194).

The first paragraph includes two main meanings for peace. One of them shows peace as ‘a state of safety’ in the lives of people on the earth. Nevertheless, the other meaning of peace sheds lights on the religious inclination. Peace in that case is meant to be a religious term, of more interest for believers than for others who are not interested about eternal life. In this sense, peace is one of God’s orders that every believer is asked to obey. According to that, God will reward those who are interested in achieving peace among humanity as peacemakers, and at the same time, he will punish those who break peace as mutineers. Therefore, peace in this sense is part of religion. Once a person believes in God, they must take into consideration that there are some orders that God has asked them to maintain, such as keeping peace.

The second paragraph describes peace as the song of angels. Therefore, the words ‘Peace on earth’ express a deep meaning. The importance of peace is clear because it is known that angels repeat God’s words, and when God says it like this, he intends to spread peace on earth. According to the Mennonites, it is the responsibility of God’s followers to obey his orders and propagate peace among humanity. Furthermore, the Mennonites believe in the teachings of Jesus that “[b]lessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God” (Wiebe, 1962, p. 194). The content of this quote represents the core of the Mennonites’ attitude towards peace. Being the children of God symbolizes innocence and purity, and to be so requires being a peacemaker. In other words, God blesses those who make efforts to spread peace around the world. So, it is an exchange for people become peacemakers. As a result of being peacemakers, God makes them innocent, pure, and true followers.

More than that, the Mennonites conceded the necessity of peace: “By personally living His peace, we are peacemakers” (Wiebe, p. 195). This means that when people live peacefully with each other, as God orders, then automatically they become peacemakers. So, “According to Christ’s teachings, peace is not a circumstance but a state of being” (Wiebe, p. 194). This quote emphasizes the need for peace, not only in wartime, but also at any time. That clarifies the fact that pacifism is a Mennonite theological principle, and that peace is not a seasonal matter, but rather it is always needed to guarantee human continuity. The above data can give the reader an impression about the term ‘pacifism’, as an international concept as well as a Mennonite or Christian religious principle. However, many other terms used within the novel *Peace Shall Destroy Many* will be discussed. Some of them will be Non-Resistance, Justice and Alternative Service, and Reconciliation.

#### **Non-Resistance:**

Logically, it is an axiom that all who face danger have the complete right to resist and defend

themselves. This right is reserved in local and international laws. However, it becomes debatable when some people admit that they cannot resist or defend themselves when they become in this situation. Thus, the following paragraphs will try to define this term 'non-resistance' in other resources, and then show how it is revealed through the novel *Peace Shall Destroy Many*.

It is mentioned in the *Encyclopedia Americana* (2006) that “[b]y the 18<sup>th</sup> century non-resistance was fully developed in the life and teachings of the so-called peace churches: the Mennonites, Friends (Quakers), and Brethren” (p. 186). This gives a historical background about non-resistance. In addition to that, it is noticeable that non-resistance was also made by the non-Christian leader Mohandas K. Gandhi. This Indian leader’s non-resistance was different from that of Mennonites in that they did not resist whereas he took this non-resistance as a kind of peaceful resistance to British colonization. Gandhi’s non-resistance was a new phenomenon in the history of independence movements. The following passage clarifies Gandhi’s role in this area:

Gandhi’s efforts were followed closely in the West. A complex integration of Hindu philosophy and Christian principles, bound to Indian culture and a colonial condition, Gandhi’s movement could not be copied neatly, but it was admired and in some respects emulated. (Chatfield, 2006, p. 187).

Gandhi’s non-resistance cannot be ignored when talking about this domain because the Indian non-resistance was one of the civilized systems by which people proved that the rights could be restored without any need to cause other problems.

Moreover, non-resistance is defined in *America’s Favorite Dictionary* (2004) as “The practice or principle of complete obedience to authority even if unjust or ... refusing to resort to force even in defense against violence” (p. 947). This definition clarifies that the content of non-resistance is the submission to the governments’ orders without any objections. In other words, it seems clear that non-resistant people are those who desist from protecting themselves against the outside dangers, even if they know that they will be harmed.

In *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, Wiebe revealed the theme of non-resistance through many passages. Mainly, he forms it as a dialogue. An example can be seen when Annamarie, a woman in the novel, asks Thom, a young man who is the main character in the novel, about what Joseph, the Mennonite schoolteacher in Wapiti, who used to criticize some Mennonites practices included non-resistance, said. Thom replies as follows:

If he [Joseph] speaks from history, I guess he’s right when he says non-resistance is possible only for a small group. But what does that say? Does what has happened in the world show us what a Christian should do? Or does the Bible? (Wiebe, 1962, p. 46).



In this passage, it is clear that Thom disagrees with Joseph in his idea that non-resistance cannot be practiced in the contemporary time. In contrast, he questions the benefits that Christians got from the two world wars, and he says that those behaviors were not expressing the real themes that God asks Christians to follow. Thom, as a symbol of the Mennonites, thinks that non-resistance is one of the principles that Christianity stands on. However, things become complicated when Annamarie comments on Thom's ideas about non-resistance:

If only the minority can say, 'It is against our conscience to fight because we must love enemies as well as friends,' and the majority must say, 'We must fight to protect pacifists so that they may have the right to think as they do,' then the majority, the non-believers, die so that the minority, the believers, may live. Who, then, is the martyr for the faith? (Wiebe, 1962, p. 46).

In this paragraph, one of the controversial questions through the novel is raised. It is the idea that the pacifists, the Mennonites in this case, are always a minority. So, when they decide to not fight, that is because they know that the majority will fight instead of them. Moreover, those pacifists consider themselves as the real followers of God, while the others are disobeying His orders. Therefore, the equation here consists of two sides. One of them carries guns and defends people's lives and protects the land. The other side is embodied in the pacifists, who defend neither their land nor even themselves. So, the majority of population lives for the lives of the pacifist minority group.

Therefore, the opponents of pacifists' ideas think that it is not acceptable or logical to classify these defenders as non-believers, and the defended as the real believers. This is the equation that Annamarie wants Thom to solve. Hypothetically, the pacifists have the right to not resist in order not to be harsh human beings; however, they have no right to seize religion in their own practices and understandings. That means that religion is for all people; therefore, it cannot be limited to the pacifists' own interpretations.

The following passage describes a soldier in the battlefield:

Look, do you think a soldier thinks of all this when he comes round a corner and there's a German? He doesn't think. He either shoots on the spot or he's dead. That's all. War isn't one country against another. It's only, and always will be, one man killing one or more other men. (Wiebe, 1962, p.46).

In this paragraph, the author depicts a picture of a scene in the war, when a soldier faces his enemy. If it is the case, as pacifists believe, the first soldier will do nothing to stop the other one, even if he is sure that he must kill or be killed. Many people criticize this belief, and this quote ensures that. The author here gives a German soldier as an example to remind his readers of the old

hatred between the Mennonite pacifists and Germany under the dictator Adolph Hitler, who had been known as the leader of genocide in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Therefore, it is not arbitrary to recognize the enemy as a German soldier, but this is meant to emphasize that even if a person faces a real enemy, like a German soldier, they are not allowed, in a Mennonite society, either to kill him or even to be prepared to do so. So, for the Mennonites, there is no choice to kill, even if the enemy is German. Annamarie, in the previous passage, tries to discuss with Thom such beliefs that prevent a person from defending their selves. Furthermore, she adds,

If Allied soldiers did not stop the German advance, we could not live to hold our belief in Canada because Hitler would soon control us too. As the Russians are doing to the Mennonites that still remain there. (Wiebe, 1962, p. 47).

In this paragraph, Annamarie wonders what would happen to Mennonites if the German armies were able to reach Canada. She wants to remind Thom that there are some soldiers that are fighting the Germans and protecting the Mennonites and their beliefs. Therefore, she wants to say, if it was not the case, the possibilities of the Mennonites' existence would be slim. According to that, those soldiers, who are 'non-believers', rescued the Canadian Mennonites from being victims of Hitler's invasion. So, the Mennonites should evaluate the others' efforts that served them when they were in need.

The following passage shows a historical moment in the Mennonites' history:

One reason our parents fled to Canada—why our fathers left Holland and Prussia—was to be protected from serving in war, wasn't it? What will you and I do, now that we, in our turn, have no country to fly to for protection? (Wiebe, 1962, p. 47).

The above quote gives a flashback about Mennonite historical events that led to their immigration to North America, especially Canada. It also reflects the situation of the Mennonites who stayed in Russia where they were mistreated unlike those who came to Canada. Here Wiebe says that while the Mennonites are safe in Canada, they do not want to share with Canadians their efforts to keep Canada safe from outside dangers. Instead of being loyal to the country which accommodated them, they are a burden to the country because they need to be protected. Therefore, in this point, the author sheds lights on the negative side of non-resistance, where people relinquish their duties.

Furthermore, the Mennonites teach that “[o]bedience to authority goes against [their] human nature sometimes, but godly behavior is always difficult” (Wiebe, 1962, p. 99). This explains how in addition to their disobedience to governments, which order them to be involved in the military activities, they admit the impossibility of absolute obedience to God's orders due to human nature. In



the following passage, Pete Block, one of the main characters, discusses Mennonite attitudes towards soldiers in the battlefields:

How does a great healthy man like you stay out of fighting the Germans? But I don't think that a Christian can go out and kill his fellow man, even if the government says he should. And I'm a Christian.

Is it fair to believe that, when soldiers are dying for you? Look at it this way: we're very conscious of the misery of the Canadian soldier right now fighting in the 'Battle of Freedom' for us, as the radio insists. What about the time when there was no shooting war and all those soldiers were here with us in Canada having a, comparatively speaking, comfortable time, like now. There were still millions of this world's people dying miserably, for no other reason than that they happened to be born in the wrong country. (Wiebe, 1962, pp. 210-211).

When Pete Block finds himself in front of that embarrassing question, he becomes forced to clarify his opinion, which is considered as the opinion of the whole Mennonite society. He says that a Christian cannot kill. In addition, he adds that the permission that governments give their soldiers does not, at all, legalize or justify killing people. In this opinion, Pete repeats the idea that they cannot obey the government when it becomes a matter of principle because principles are above the governments' orders.

Similarly, Block tries to explain Mennonite attitude about the soldiers that serve in battlefields. He wants to show his sympathy with the Canadian soldiers who are fighting, but also he wants to prove that the Mennonite opinion about war is not necessarily meant for this war, (World War II) but rather it is a part of their belief. To avoid being criticized for his opinion, he says that even if this war finishes, and Canadian soldiers come back to the country, that will not stop the daily killing around the world. Therefore, because they are interested in human beings as a whole, they believe that whenever there are humans who are killed, they will keep their refusal to participate in any military activity, be it by Canadian soldiers or others. So, it is not something decided against Canada, but instead it is a Mennonite principle that is derived from the Bible.

Furthermore, Pete says in another place in the novel that "he was a Mennonite and the Mennonites taught their children not to resist their enemies and so he could not join the army to fight any one" (Wiebe, 1962, p. 213). Here non-resistance is inseparable from Mennonite practices. They teach it to their children and ask them not to defend themselves because this is forbidden in their beliefs.

The Mennonites' opinion about non-resistance can be seen clearly through the following:

We are to follow Christ's steps, but we do not have pride. By God's Grace we understand what others do not. As we cannot imagine Him lifting a hand to defend himself physically, so we, His followers, conquer only by spiritual love and not by physical force. Always only love: for those who love us, for those indifferent to us, for those who hate us, for those who would kill us, which is the same thing; *all* are included when He says, 'This is my commandment, that you love one another even as I have loved you'. (Wiebe, 1962, p. 5).

It can be said that this passage includes the core of Mennonite identity. Here, it seems clear that they emphasize the religious background of their most important principles. However, what Block says here is contradicted by the 'violence' inside his own community that is brought on by intolerant traditions. When they think that their beliefs enable them to see what others cannot, this can be interpreted as a kind of superiority over other Christians as well as people in general. The same thing can be applied to their view of themselves as the believers, who deserve to live, and the others, who are non-believers, who have to die so that the believers may live.

However, the Mennonites do not see things from that corner. They believe that as a result of their honest worship, they acquire the skills that enable them to understand religion more than any other group. They believe that to protect their properties they have to keep the principles that God orders. Therefore, they see that being away from war is something sacred for them, and their conviction does not allow them to relinquish this.

Moreover, the Mennonites insist on their strong relationships with human beings without any distinctions based on religion, race, and friendship. They build these principles on a religious basis. The Mennonites work hard to prove that their beliefs are derived from the Bible. For example, the principle that human beings belong to the same origin and should be treated equally can be seen in many religions, especially Christianity, Islam, and Judaism.

Nevertheless, the opponents of the Mennonites can interpret Mennonites' opinion that 'they understand what others do not' as a kind of vanity, if not heresy. That is because it seems as if they compare themselves to Christ, when they say that as God does not 'defend himself physically,' they also will not defend themselves physically. Therefore, they put themselves equal to God and forget that they are still human beings. However, the advocates of Mennonites' ideas classify this as proof of their honesty because they try to train themselves to live as closely as possible to God's orders.

Furthermore, it is noticeable that Wiebe focuses on the children's questions to the elders to make it simple for the readers to realize the mistakes within Wapiti's Mennonite beliefs. For

instance, the following questions that Thom is asked by his brother and the way he answers them give the reader an impression about Mennonite beliefs:

Why don't you fly, Thom? Because the people that fly those planes do nothing good with them. They fly in the war and try to kill as many people as they can. And remember what you learned in Sunday School? How the Lord Jesus said we weren't to bother anyone, but love them all, like you love Mom? We are to do good, not hurt. Why do they want to hurt and kill people? I suppose because the others are trying to do it for them first. Why? The Bible says that when men live in sin they do sinful things. They do not love but hate. (Wiebe, 1962, p. 9).

When Thom's brother sees the planes that were flying over their village as part of air force training in World War II and as part of the North American defense against Hitler, he asks him what prevents him also from flying a military plane. To justify that, Thom tries to link the pilots to violence in order to say that the real reason is that the planes are only used for bad things such as killing people and striking on those who do not agree with them. In his answer, Thom ignores that the planes are in the Allied side, which includes Canada. Also, the planes are just tools, and if he has the power to have them, he can use them as he wishes. So, it is not the real answer.

Also, when Thom tells his brother that the fighter pilots do only bad things, it seems as if it is an axiom that does not need evidence, while in fact it is not. In addition, he tries to remind his brother of what is in the Bible about good and bad behavior, as if there is no doubt that the pilots are doing evil and that his position is right. That is because being in the planes does not change anything in human characteristics. In other words, if the one who is in the plane is Thom, or another person, it will stay the same. So, the planes do not stand for evil as Thom tells his brother.

Despite that, it seems that the boy is not yet satisfied with what he hears. He asks again about the reason behind killing people. Thom's answer seems contradictory. He says that he 'supposes', which symbolizes that he is not sure, that the reason behind that is that they expect to be attacked, so they prefer to attack first because to attack is the best way to defend. The contradiction here is that Thom justifies for them their attacks, in contrast with what he has just said that they only want to kill people.

Moreover, the boy's 'whys' come again. To put an end to these questions, Thom comes back to the Bible to tell his brother that it is mentioned in there that people's behaviors reflect their characteristics. Therefore, if they are bad, as he assumes in this case, they do only bad things, and if they are good, they do what reflects their goodness. So, for him bad people know nothing about love, but admire hatred.



### Conscientious Objectors and Alternative Service:

Before analyzing this subject through the novel *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, it is necessary to define both 'Conscientious Objectors' as well as 'Alternative Service'. Historically, "The United States developed an early familiarity with conscientious objection since many of its original settlers were members of pacifist sects that had been forced out of Europe" (Levine, 2006, p. 609). This gives an idea about the history of conscientious objectors and how the US and Canada adapted their laws to tolerate the beliefs.

It is clarified in the *Encyclopedia Americana* that the term conscientious objector, "means a person who, on the grounds of principle, is unable to yield to a command of the state. The term has been used most often to denote one who refuses to participate in armed conflict, and thus has been closely associated with pacifism" (Levine, 2006, p. 609). This means that the people who are conscientious objectors, or CO's, are just practicing a kind of pacifism. It is then the situation in which some people, whose countries are involved in wars, refuse to enter the war due to their principles.

In addition, conscientious objection is defined in the *Cambridge Encyclopedia* as a "refusal to accept a particular policy, plan, or course of action, because to do so would go against one's conscience" (Crystal, 1997, p. 279). This definition clarifies the similarities between the conscientious objectors and the non-resistant's. Also, from this definition, it is clear that they take their name from the word 'conscience' because they refuse what does not fit their conscience. In other words, they balance things according to their conscience. If something agrees with their conscience, it is acceptable for them, but if it is not, then they do not go against their conscience.

Also, in the *Cambridge Encyclopedia*, it is mentioned that conscientious objection is "often invoked by pacifists or others objecting to military services, though the state may not always recognize conscientious objection as a citizen's right" (Crystal, 1997, p. 279). This shows another similarity between the conscientious objectors and the pacifists, where both of them oppose military activities. Besides, they share a lack of respect for the governments' decisions when they contradict their beliefs or consciences.

In the novel *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, conscientious objection is present. Thom says, "I will go to court on the day and say with the same conviction as Deacon Block's son, 'It is against my conscience!' In the spirit and in the faith of the fathers. Murdering heathen!" (Wiebe, 1962, p. 17). This shows the importance of their conscience which is similar to honor or even an oath. However, it is mentioned in the novel that "they had sometimes discussed the 'problem' of the conscientious objector" (Wiebe, 1962, p. 210). This matter is also involved in the discussion through the novel about pacifism and non-violence in general.

In another place in the novel, Margret, one of the characters, states, "at least the Canadians

treat the CO's decently" (Wiebe, 1962, p. 105). Margret here makes a comparison between the rights of the CO's who live in Canada with those who live in the United States. She tells a story of a conscientious objector who "was called up into the United States Army during the First War and they sent him to a camp and beat him terribly because he and six others wouldn't take orders to cut down weeds in the camp" (Wiebe, 1962, p. 106). This shows two things. One of them is the mistreatment that CO's faced in the United States. The other one, which is the most important, is that some CO's mix with their religion something that has nothing to do with religion, where cutting weeds should not be a problem.

Alternative Service is also included in the novel *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, so it will be first defined in other resources, and then it will be discussed as it is revealed in the novel. At the beginning of World War II, the government of Canada tried to find a solution for the problem of conscientious objectors. So, in 1941, they established what was called the "Committee on Military Problems of the Conference of Historic Peace Churches". The main decision was to give the conscientious objectors some alternative service to do instead of going to war, which they refused as it went against their conscience (Melvin, 2009).

In the novel *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, it is clarified, "Alternative service is necessary to winning the War. Wars can only be won with some fighting, so we divide the job: I supply you with bacon to eat and boots to wear and you go kill the Germans – for the good of both of us" (Wiebe, 1962, p. 48). This quote explains how alternative service gives its benefits, but also it shows its bad side for the pacifists. The content of this quote is that alternative service is a part of the war because the soldiers in the battlefields need to eat and to be clothed, so if the pacifists afford these needs, how then can they be against the war?

Finally, this idea also causes many pacifists to refuse alternative service, considering it as a help for the soldiers who kill people. Others accept it but limit it into some specific areas such as working in hospitals, helping refugees, or rescuing people in natural disasters. There is a connection between alternative service and conscientious objection. Conscientious objectors are normally the ones who serve in alternative service due to their non-participation in war.

### **Reconciliation:**

According to *Oxford Word Power* (1999), reconciliation means "becoming friendly or close again after an argument" (p. 617). This definition explains that reconciliation is really peacemaking. In addition, Christians declared at the Amnesty conference that the "biblical heritage of faith expressed impels [them] into a ministry of reconciliation. Reconciliation is integral to the gospel" (Mennonite Church, 1975, para. 24). This expresses the Mennonite attitude towards reconciliation as one of their religious principles symbolizing that reconciling people with each other is rewarded by God as a virtue.

Furthermore, they added in the Amnesty conference, “The church replaces vindictiveness with reconciliation and goes beyond amnesty. Broken human ties and walls of hostility which are the result of the war and its aftermath need the compassion and reconciling ministry of persons who have experienced the gospel of Christ” (Mennonite Church, 1975, para. 24). These two sentences also emphasize reconciliation instead of hatred. Moreover, they urge the correction of mistakes that occur in the relationships of human beings. However, if a disagreement happens, it might be fixed with the reconciliation rather than dispute.

In a late conference “A Commitment to Christ's Way of Peace”, it was stated, “Despite human sin, God in Christ, through the Holy Spirit continues to offer forgiveness and reconciliation to all” (Steiner, 2000, para. 5). God, who knows the real amount of human beings’ sins, reconciles and forgives them all. In addition, the Mennonites “believe that God calls the church to demonstrate by its life the gospel of peace, which it has received through the reconciling work of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace” (Steiner, 2000, para. 7). This stresses the importance of reconciliation, where the church is asked to spread such principles as God orders. All of these declarations underline the importance of reconciliation in Christian beliefs.

Similarly, in the novel *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, the author emphasizes reconciliation when he says, “The Christ-follower has the peace of reconciliation with God and therefore the peace of conscious fellowship with God through God in Christ” (Wiebe, 1962, pp. 194-195). This shows the meaning and importance of reconciliation, be it between people with each other or between God and man.

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, it is obvious that pacifism, in its different forms such as non-resistance, conscientious objection, alternative service, and reconciliation, is deeply important in the novel *Peace Shall Destroy Many*. However, pacifism does not always express only good ideas, but rather can reflect what some people consider as a kind of selfishness, where non-believers die to protect believers, which has no origin in any religion. The outcome of this research shows Mennonites on the one hand as pacifists who believe in an absolute pacifism. On the other hand, it reveals their human nature as presented in many of their daily practices. Even though Mennonites talk about pacifism on a national level, in terms of not going to war, not serving in the military fields, and refusing to pay taxes to the government, because human nature is basically evil, it is impossible for a community to have no evil or violence in it.

This idea reveals the relationship between religion and traditions and customs not only in Mennonite culture but also in many other cultures. One of the themes of *Peace Shall Destroy Many* is that traditions sometimes can be elevated to the level of religion. That means that many people unconsciously put their religious teachings aside when they are contradicted by their traditions and



customs rather than vice versa. Furthermore, the purpose of saying that human nature is basically evil does not aim at dehumanizing people, the Mennonites in this case, but to interpret or evaluate some of their traditional and cultural aspects in order to understand such practices. In this context, Rudy Wiebe tried to convey through *Peace shall Destroy Many* that while pacifism, conscientious objection, and alternative service were Mennonite characteristics, they, like many other communities, lived under the weight of their traditions.

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