



The *Pulpit Exchange*

It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. (1 Corinthians 1:21)
So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. (Nehemiah 8:8) Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend. (Proverbs 27:17)

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Distinctive Anabaptist Beliefs

I trust that it is our goal in our lives to repeat what Jesus has done for us. I believe this was the goal of the Anabaptists also. They knew their Lord and they wanted to repeat what He had done for them. Distinctive Anabaptist Beliefs. I feel like I am holding a candle to a very small candle to a very large subject indeed. I invite you to turn with me to 1 Peter 2:9, 10. We will not be likely looking at very much Scripture, but we will refer to it a few times. I thought we would start with this. "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal

priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy."

I believe it was the goal of the Anabaptists to be a holy and peculiar people. "Peculiar," does not mean "strange" necessarily, but special to God, even though at times our lives are strange to the world, and in many ways the

IN THIS ISSUE

Anabaptist Distinctives

Anabaptist ways did stand out. This word carries the thought of being special to our Lord. The goal of the Anabaptists along with ours, is to praise God for what He has done for us.

I trust that as we look at this we can shed some light on our godly heritage and also on our present walk of life. This subject is more than a mere history lesson because every time we look at Anabaptist beliefs, we find that they are deeply rooted in the Scriptures.

Therefore, their beliefs are unchanging and life-giving because they are rooted in the Scriptures.

For some time after Jesus was here on the earth, the Church was basically faithful. There were many who died a martyr's death for their faithfulness to Christ and to Christianity. I think of the persecutions in the time of Nero and following. 313 A.D. was a watershed year. It was the time when Constantine made

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Messages have been selected on the basis of topic rather than the speaker. Messages have been selected from congregations within the Conservative Mennonite Church of Ontario, Conservative Mennonite Churches of York and Adams Counties, PA., Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church, Maranatha Amish Mennonite Churches, Mennonite Christian Fellowship, Nationwide Fellowship Churches, Ohio Wisler Mennonite, Washington-Franklin Mennonite Conference, and certain selected unaffiliated Amish Mennonite congregations.

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Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. This work stopped the persecution, which in essence seemed good, but it also, we might say, married the Church and the State. This put Church membership on the level of citizenship. It introduced infant baptism as a way to ensure that everyone belonged to the Church. Holiness of life was no longer required to be a part of the Church. Forced membership filled the churches with unregenerate people. It seems like a contradiction does it not? Halley's Bible Handbook says that this was the worst calamity ever to have befallen the Church.

There were a few small groups who kept the light of truth burning, among which was the Waldensians. We are somewhat familiar with them and their stories. The early reformers of the 1500's were disturbed by the corruption in the Church of the day. Originally the early reformers had a vision of a voluntary Scriptural Church, but they finally compromised with the wishes of the civil rulers and the Church/State arrangement continued. Later, Martin Luther (one of the early reformers) lamented the lack of holiness among his followers, and eventually the reformers became persecutors of those who were willing to go fur-

they than what they were — those who were willing to obey the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles, in everyday living.

This failure by the reformers to establish a New Testament Church, gave rise to the Anabaptist movement. On January 21, 1525, Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz and George Blaurock baptized each other in true Christian faith and immediately they became outlaws to the State. As one writer said, "The Anabaptists were a tear in the fabric of society." The Anabaptists endured the persecution of the 1600's because they were distinctive in their steadfast belief in the Scriptures.

This word "distinctive" in our title carries the thought of being clearly seen as separate. The Anabaptists endured the persecution of the 1600's. They went through the migrations of the 1700's, distinct in their nonresistance, during the various wars and distinct from the Pietists in their discipleship. In the 1800's they were distinct in their separate and disciplined church life, in comparison to Protestant influences. Then, in the 1900's, a steady drift began, not to be reversed in the larger Mennonite Church. Today, the distinctiveness of a holy life is lost in so many circles. Yes, it grieves us, 63

but let us also be inspired to jealousy for a heritage that has worked for many years.

I have a number of distinctive Anabaptist beliefs listed here. We would like to take a look at them.

1) The authority of the Scriptures.

This distinctive belief was foundational to all of their other beliefs. They were the noble Bereans of their era. Acts 17:11 speaks of the noble Bereans who "searched the scriptures daily, whether those things

were so." The Anabaptists embraced the Bible as the guide of their lives. They saw it as that which is binding on them and as a law to them. They had a practical attitude toward the Scriptures. They did not see the Scriptures as only for meditation as the theologians and mystics did. They read the Scriptures with a question on their hearts, "How then shall I live?" They studied with the intention of doing.

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Timothy 3:16, 17) This is how they saw the Scriptures. We understand that some of the Anabaptists carried what they

called a "concordance," which was often a small pocket sized handwritten compilation of selected Bible verses. It was small and pocket sized possibly to avoid detection. Yet, they carried this with them. I expect that they used this to commit much of the Scriptures to memory. This concordance of their own, gave them a rule of life when Bibles were scarce. Converts (especially new converts) to the Anabaptist faith, were often illiterate and made great effort to learn to read the Scriptures. Often because they were able to learn so quickly and because of their zeal and desire to learn, their accusers said that they were taught of the Devil. I believe the accusers realized that the way they were able to learn was supernatural. God gave them that ability to learn to read so that they could receive of the truth of life.

These concordances (compilations of Scriptures) aided them in their prison testimonies to refute their accusers. It is interesting to note that their recorded prison testimonies are often a medley of verses, or some of them at least, as we see in The Martyr's Mirror accounts. You may notice in Menno Simon's writings as someone observed, it is hard to find a paragraph that does not use

Bible references or quotations. They saw the Scripture as the rule and as the authority in their lives. They knew the Scriptures and obeyed them without calculation of the consequences. This was not a reckless obedience, but fearless, knowing that they must obey God rather than men. Thus, in a sense, we might say that it was reckless, yet it was based in their belief in Scriptures.

Do we have this same type of fervour of obeying the Scriptures regardless of the consequences? Are we using the Scriptures to encourage each other enough by using the Scripture in letters, cards, and conversations? If we want to be able to encourage each other from the well of our hearts, we must put the water there. We must draw from the Scriptures personally ourselves. The Anabaptists also believed that the Scriptures should be interpreted by the body of believers. We have the promise "he will guide you into all truth." (John 16:13) They understood this to mean that the Holy Spirit gave direction collectively as well as personally — as well as the Holy Spirit's individual enlightenment. This is more than mere confidence in a majority rule. They saw the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures and through the body of believers.

This gave them stability rather than being tossed from one persuasive opinion to another.

Another distinctive belief was 2) the liberty of conscience. When we use this term, we do not speak, and they did not refer to toleration within the Church, or individualism. The Anabaptists were strong on Church discipline. They were not interested in individualism or toleration within the Church, but rather, liberty of conscience. This refers to the freedom to live according to one's conscience without the government's interference. Of course this was a belief that they could not insist on because it did relate to what the privileges they were granted. However, they did believe that it was right for them to have liberty of conscience. The Anabaptists also held that persecution, or any attempt to force one's faith on others, was unscriptural.

This all ties right in with the next point we will make also in relation to voluntary church membership. Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself." (Matthew 16:24) "If any man will come." This is liberty of conscience. Again and again, they would appeal to the authorities to allow them the freedom of conscience to live by

the Word of God. This privilege, as we know, was so often denied. This concept of liberty of conscience did become a cornerstone of the Constitution of the United States. The Declaration of Independence says that all men are created equal and thought of as "endowed with certain inalienable rights." We enjoy today the privilege to be excused from military service as conscientious objectors. What we, and what many Americans take for granted today, at one time, was a very distinctive and dangerous belief to our forefathers.

3) The Anabaptists believed in voluntary Church membership. This is closely related to the thought of liberty of conscience. They believed that Church membership shall be based upon conversion of the individual, and his commitment to holy living. They were sometimes called "the believers Church," and it means simply this: you became a member of the Church by believing and being baptized, not by having someone else believe for you and being forced to be part of the Church. This concept of voluntary Church membership surely added to the vitality of their church including the fact that people were there by choice rather than by force or by consequence.

We are somewhat familiar with volunteer fire companies. It has been said that they are known to excel in their efficiency because simply, they are committed to their choice and are interested in what they are a part of. Christ's goals are obtained by motivation. He appeals to the heart and to the will. Christ is interested in those who want to follow Him. Is there any challenge to us today in this area and this idea of voluntary Church membership? Especially with the multiplicity of churches around that we could be a part of? What is the challenge to us? I think it is simply this; We can go to church, become a member, read the Bible, just to save our conscience or because our parents always did. The challenge is: Are we a part of this church out of habit, or are we here because we want to be? Is it coming from our heart?

Let us help our youth to develop personal conviction for our practices. People will ask at times, "Why do you wear that white cap?" or the covering, or "Why do you not have the inter-net?" How do we answer? Is it simply, "Because our church tells us to.... This is the rule." Or, will we have some logical Bible reasons ready. Do we know why we do what we do? We can so

easily say that we embrace the principles of voluntary Christianity but refuse to support the group, and refuse the obligations of the choices that we have made. We can refuse the obligations of the group that we have decided to be a part of.

Voluntarism thrives when we believe that this group will help me onward to heaven. Let us make sure that we are a part of a church which we believe will help us. Let us express the positives of church life to our families. Let us remember that we joined the Church, not because the church might fail without us, but because we might fail without the Church. We need this help.

4) Believer's baptism. This was a central belief and a most distinguishing mark of the Anabaptist movement. The issue of adult believer's baptism was the number one cause of controversy for them. They firmly believed that baptism was "the answer of a good conscience toward God." (1 Peter 3:21) This is a condition that innocent children cannot meet. As we think of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch and how the Ethiopian said, "what doth hinder me to be baptized?" (Acts 8:36) Philip's response was this, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou

mayest." (verse 38) This illustrates to us the need for faith and believing, and being baptized upon confession of faith, knowing what we are doing.

This distinctive belief of believer's baptism, quickly branded them a heretic. Many sealed this belief with their blood. It was not hard for those searching for Anabaptists to simply ask, "Were you re-baptized?" Of course the Anabaptists in their honesty, needed to, and were willing to say, "Yes we were." They were willing to testify of their faith. We think of the book, *The Martyr's Mirror* as a record of the suffering and martyrdom of the Anabaptists (the defenseless Christians) century by century. You will notice in *The Martyr's Mirror*, at the beginning of each century, there are various accounts, or writings, about believer's baptism. This ordinance was kept faithfully by at least some through the centuries. It is interesting how that mention is made of a period of instruction, of confessing their faith, of renouncing of infant baptism, and so on.

The Anabaptists saw that every time baptism was mentioned in the Scriptures it was tied to repentance and faith. They concluded that baptism could only be for believers. Infant baptism

they said, "Was no baptism at all, but only a water bath," Our challenge today as we think of baptism, and of observing this ordinance among us, is that our candidates for baptism — our young people — whomever — would display true repentance and faith, a change of life, and amendment of life. In Anabaptist times, the half-hearted or the "fence riders" we might say, were screened out by fear of persecution and death. As we receive new members into the Church, and as we baptize, it is important that the holes in our screen are not too big, and that we would insist on repentance, faith, and amendment of life.

We, who have been members, and were baptized many years ago, need to ask ourselves this question, "Are our baptismal vows alive and fresh in our minds and in our practice? Are we being faithful to what we promised to be faithful to?" The counsel meeting is a good time to renew and review those commitments.

5) The fifth distinctive belief is discipleship. Jesus said in Luke 14:27, "And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple." We must bear the cross and follow our Lord. Deep in the heart of the Anabaptist was the desire to live the Christian life as a tangible

expression of what they believed, and as a tangible expression of their faith. Two of the key words in their vocabulary, were in their language literally, "Follow after Christ." This was in contrast to Luther's faith only. They saw that it was important to follow after Christ in their practice and in what they did. They demanded an outward expression of the inner experience. They believed that Christ lived in them, and that there was an inner experience, but they demanded a Scriptural outward expression. True faith had to be expressed. Whereas Luther, one of the reformers, emphasized faith above works.

The Anabaptist writers emphasized that every aspect of life was to be brought under the Lordship of Christ. Discipleship was a distinctive trait and belief of the Anabaptists. They indeed had faith, but they used it to produce a life, and it was an attractive life to others. It proved their faith. I heard of an account recently where a conservative Mennonite man was being interviewed by a religious group of people and was asked, "What was it that made the Mennonite faith different from other Christian faiths?" He replied this way with a number of questions, "How many of you have television?" Nearly

everyone in the audience raised their hand. "How many of you think that television is harmful to your children?" Again, nearly all of them raised their hands. Then he asked, "How many of you will go home and throw your television in the garbage?" Not a single hand was raised. "Now, you understand the difference between the Mennonite faith (or we would say the Anabaptist faith) in differing from the faiths around them."

Anabaptism is a faith that puts their belief to practice and that sees Scriptural obedience as important and essential to our faith and to our acceptance with God. Discipleship means to have no gap between our belief and the outworking of it.

6) The sixth distinctive belief is the separation of Church and State. The Schleithem Confession of Faith was their first statement of faith. In this first statement of faith, it states clearly that the State is ordained by God, but is not part of the

Church. The Anabaptists believed that the Church should be a holy brotherhood separate from the State. They believed strongly in the need for civil government, and they believed that civil government was ordained by God. However, they saw that civil government and the Church

were two separate kingdoms. There was no overlapping in their minds as far as responsibilities, and as far as participation. They were not to take active part in the State. Of course, this set them apart from the reformers. The reformers did not make that distinction. The Anabaptists obeyed freely, not grudgingly. They paid their taxes, were law abiding, and desired to be good citizens. They saw that obedience to the government was a part of their obedience to God, as long as it did not work against obedience to God.

I believe that the New Testament depicts a tension between the Church and the State. They saw that also, and realized that this tension may entail suffering. The Anabaptist's perspective was that they had no civil rights to defend. They saw the government as that which was able to grant them privileges, but they did not stand up for their civil rights. We are grateful to our government and for all privileges that we enjoy. We believe it is right to appeal for privileges and consideration, but we do not force our way upon them. As time continues, likely that tension will increase and we do not have the promise of privileges, or of the many rights that we have been granted thus far.

Let us not be caught up in pro-

moting our personal freedoms in an anti government spirit. Will such sentiment produce a willingness to suffer as Christians? As we think too, of the separation of Church and State, we need to be careful that we stay away from government subsidies that keep impressing their availability upon us in increasing ways.

7) The seventh distinctive belief nonresistance. The Anabaptists looked to Jesus as their supreme example, "Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not." (I Peter 2:23)

Jesus was defenceless. He allowed them to do to Him what they desired. The Anabaptists followed that example. The Martyr's Mirror is entitled this way, "The Martyr's Mirror of the Defenceless Christians." They followed their Lord in being

defenseless. We know the Martyr's Mirror as a compilation of martyrs who were nonresistant, and did not fight back. There were many people who claimed to be Christians, who did take the sword, and did fight back.

Our Lord taught us this way in Matthew 5:39, "But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." This is clear teaching from

the Scripture from our Lord on nonresistance. Both Luther and Zwingli were advocates of nonresistance at the beginning of the Reformation, but finally those ideas would not fit with the State Church that they in the end maintained. They did not keep the clear line of separation between the Church and the State. Naturally, if they would force people to be a part of their church they could not hold on to nonresistance. The Anabaptists (we must keep clear) were distinct from the Münsterites, a militant, misguided group, who took up arms and were not consistent in this doctrine.

Nonresistance was a lifestyle to the Anabaptists. It was far more than simply not taking up the sword. It was an attitude that affected all of their personal relationships. In the 1500's it was the custom to carry a sword or other weapon on one's person, especially while travelling for one's self-defence. When people stayed at inns, fighting might break out or bandits on the road might attack, so people carried swords for self-defence purposes. The Anabaptists leaders counselled their members to carry a staff rather than a sword which was a practical item and became a distinctive trait to them.

One "Anabaptist catcher" was quizzed by a passerby on why he had so few helpers with him on his mission. His answer was this, "They are good men and do not fight back. Thus, there is no need for more men." Nonresistance is not only abstaining from violence, but it has a very active side. Their attitude was that it affected all personal relationships. This active side of nonresistance is illustrated so well by Dirk Wilhelm's hands reaching out to his drowning captor who had fallen through the ice. Nonresistance is vital to the package of love. It offers assistance to the needy, returns good for evil, and makes peace in difficult situations. This is how the Anabaptists endeavoured to live.

8) Eighthly, non swearing of oaths was a distinctive trait and belief of the Anabaptists. It is again, based on Scripture —James 5:12 "But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation." The Anabaptists took a stand on this principle very early in Schleithem, Switzerland. Since the oath was used by the state as a necessary procedure, it brought them into conflict again. This was

a quick way for the authorities to identify an Anabaptist. They frequently testified that their word was to be simply "yea and nay," without any swearing. This topic arose again and again in their trials and their disputations, and some were martyred merely for the fact that they would not swear. There is an interesting account of the early Mennonite settlers on the Conestoga. In 1728 they needed to sign a statement in relation to their citizenship, which as Germans, they could barely understand, not knowing much English. They were very careful in that statement to give their pledge without the language of an outright oath. When they later gained a better understanding of what they had promised and what they had done, they were dismayed to realize that they had promised their loyalty to the king of England, and I suppose that it included being willing to defend the crown by using military force. Unknowingly, they had signed this and it made a real crisis of conscience for them, especially in the American Revolution, when their children were asked by the neighbours to take back their loyalty to the king. It was ironic that those very neighbours who had taken the oath proved far readier to take it back. They were loath to take

back their word of loyalty, as their neighbours were ready to disregard their oath as meaningless.

9) Nonconformity is a distinctive Anabaptist belief that we must hold on to today. The Anabaptists recognized the enmity that God placed between the world and the Church. They anchored their beliefs on passages such as Romans 12:1, 2 "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind," and 1 John 2:15, 16, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." They applied this principle of separation from the world to all areas of life. It was nonconformity to the world. They stressed humility. It is said they were to make nothing for pride's sake, but were to use the principles of simplicity and modesty. They avoided places of amusement and were careful in their language. They shunned any display of vanity or appearance of wealth and luxury such as silks and pearls and so on. They were often recognizable for their simple, modest dress.

T. J. Van Braght, the author of *The Martyr's Mirror*, said that they refused to keep up with the ever changing styles, which he likened to the phases of the moon. Distinctive attire today is a blessing to us. It helps to remind us of who we serve, and spares us from many temptations. It makes others think of God. Recently, one of our sisters in Georgia was shopping, when she was approached by a little seven year-old girl who said, "Please sing me a song about God." What is it that went on in the mind of that innocent one? Surely the modest garb and the veiling of the sister made her think on the things of God. Several of our young sisters have since gone and had a small little child's Sunday School class with her. She lives with her grandmother. This illustrates how non-conformity does speak to the world, and sets us apart. It helps us remember who we are and who our Father is.

10) The Anabaptists believed in a high view of the Church. They believed in a brotherhood of believers. There was a caring concern for each member. There was discipline for the benefit of each soul. They saw the Church as a visible body, and as a visible body that they were responsible to keep separate. They were

responsible to each other. They saw the Church as a band of people together on the narrow path to glory. They were responsible for, and accountable to each other. They saw the place of the ministry in Scriptural light. They returned to the apostolic pattern of leadership being taken from the congregation, and not specially trained men. Their leadership was unsalaried. They believed that they were all of one class.

11) Another distinctive belief related to their children. The Anabaptists viewed their children as growing into accountability to God. They were careful to train and nurture them with that choice in mind. They saw that their children also needed to reach out in faith and believe in order to be baptized and be a part of the Church. Therefore, they put forth effort to train and nurture them toward that choice. They wrote letters from prison urging their children to someday choose the life of a pilgrim and a stranger. We see this many times in *The Martyr's Mirror*. They were unique for bringing their children to worship services. We rejoice today to hear the cries of the little ones in our worship services. Let us never give up on bringing our children along to church.

12) *Evangelistic zeal*. The great

commission was a favourite passage for the Anabaptists. "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. . . and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." That was a consolation to them. The reformers never seemed to take the Great Commission very seriously. The Anabaptists believed that every member was an evangelist. They were committed to spreading the Gospel as far as their tongue would take them. They emphasized the responsibility of each believer testifying of the power of the Gospel in their personal lives. There was no other group who was so active in soul winning, so they had the field to themselves. Many people did respond to their heart-felt testimonies.

Underlying their lives and their practices was the zeal that they did not count their lives dear unto themselves. Rather, they had a zeal for their Lord and the zeal to testify for their Lord. They lived in the shadow of the dungeon, the rack, the stake, yet they had seen a great light and they desired that others would see it also. The challenge comes to us, will we be a strong link in this chain of faith? I quote from

The Eastern Testimony, "Our heritage is not something to stand upon and from which to look down on others, but, it is something to hold to, appreciate and perpetuate. It is not something to glory in, but to pattern after, not something to boast of, but to be worthy of, not something to be

proud of, but to be humbled by, not something to expect credit from, but to make us feel indebted and responsible." Jesus said, "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required." (Luke 12:48) May we be faithful to the call that comes to us today.

Quotes:

"In the New Testament we have neither word nor example to teach us to use musical instruments in our worship either at home or in the church. A safe rule to follow and which the Anabaptist reformers followed, is to include in our worship today (both public and private) only that which the New Testament records that the apostles and saints in the early

church used. Other reformers followed the rule that all could be employed in worship that was not specifically taught against in the New Testament. This opens the door for many hurtful and sensual practices." From the Tract The Bible and Musical Instruments Published by Rod and Staff Publishers.

Scripture References

Matthew		Acts		James	
5:39	70	8:36	67	5:12	71
16:24	65	8:38	67		
		17:11	64		
Luke		Romans		1 Peter	
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From the Previous Issue:

The Influence of the Radio

From a message by David A. Miller
Preached during Revival Meetings
at Stoughstown Mennonite Church
March 2005

A TALK WITH CHURCH MEMBERS

By Daniel Kauffman

INTRODUCTORY.

OBEDIENCE.

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IN THE HOME.

IN THE CHURCH-SERVICE.

IN SOCIETY.

IN BUSINESS.

STUDY OF THE BIBLE.

LIBERAL GIVING.

THAT "UNRULY MEMBER."

HOLD YOUR TEMPER.

SELF-AGGRANDIZEMENT.

SELF-DENIAL.

THE SABBATH.

PRAYER.

OUR YOUNG DISCIPLES

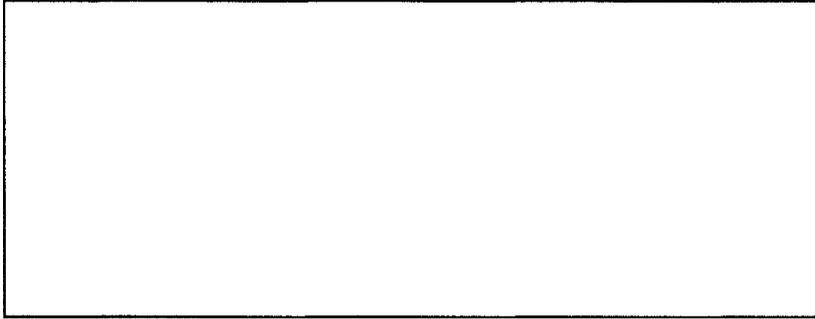
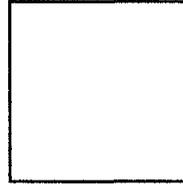
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