CALL TO FAITHFULNESS

Essays in Canadian Mennonite Studies

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ESSAYS IN CANADIAN MENNONITE STUDIES

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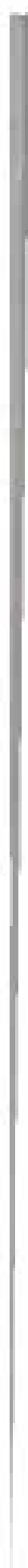

Call to Faithfulness

Essays in Canadian Mennonite Studies

Editors:

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Winnipeg, Manitoba

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Dedicated to:
The Rev. Dr. J. J. Thiessen
for leading a people
and Mrs. J. J. Thiessen
for inspiring a leader

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword ix
Preface.. xii

I. Roots of Faithfulness

A. *The Bible*
1. Call and Response — Henry Poettcker 3
2. Command and Obedience — David Schroeder . 13
3. Living by Promise — Helmut Harder................ 23
4. Sign and Belief — Waldemar Janzen............... 33
5. Grace and New Beginning — Peter Fast 45

B. *A Common Heritage*
6. The Present in Dialogue with the Past — John Friesen... 57

C. *A Caring Community*
7. The Church as Community — Adolf Ens 73

II. Experiences of Faithfulness

A. *As a Church*
8. A History of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada — H. J. Gerbrandt 81
9. Forms of Ministry — Herman Enns.................. 93
10. A Century of Private Schools — Rudy A. Regehr 103
11. Inter-church Relationships — Larry Kehler 117

B. *As a People*
12. Mennonites Coming and Going — Gerhard Ens 131
13. Mennonite Families: Foundations and Launching Pads — Bernie Wiebe 135
14. Urbanization of Mennonites — Leo Driedger..... 143
15. Economic Questions and the Mennonite Conscience — Roy Vogt............................ 157
16. The Struggle for Recognition — Frank H. Epp .. 167

III. Challenges to Faithfulness

A. *Ideology and Culture*
17. Adaptation and Identity — Menno Wiebe 177
18. Pacifism and Mennonite Identity
— Rodney Sawatsky 189

B. *Forms of Expression*
19. Faithfulness to the Arts — George Wiebe 199

C. *Concept of Mission*
20. An Unfinished Task — Cornelius J. Dyck 213

Foreword

This new book of twenty essays has been written by men in one way or another associated with the Canadian Mennonite Bible College. The subjects they are dealing with cover a wide range but have the common motif "Faithfulness", faithfulness of us as a people and a church to the Word of God. The roots of us, the Mennonite people, are in the Bible; we are the descendants of those who have laid down their lives or given up their homeland for the sake of their conscience; we have inherited a sacred legacy. Have we honestly endeavored to live up to this trust? Or where and in how far have we missed the mark and gone off on a tangent?

The essays are an endeavor to delineate our faith and the essence of our legacy; to appraise our performance from the biblical and the historical point of view to indicate our shortcomings and point to the way we should take. Wherever criticism was necessary, it has been voiced, but the intention has been to make it positive and constructive criticism.

The book is being published by the Canadian Mennonite Bible College and is dedicated to Mr. and Mrs. Jacob J. Thiessen "for inspiring a people".

But who are these Thiessens and when and how have they inspired a people? Which people?

Mr. and Mrs. J. J. Thiessen were born in the Molotschna Mennonite Settlement in Southern Russia. For a number of years Mr. Thiessen served his people there as a public school teacher. Then came the Revolution and uprooted the world that our people had known. The Government that came to power was militantly atheistic and the new society that it proceeded to create rested on an atheistic world view. Thousands of our people felt that for them a compromise here was unthinkable and they fled the country

to make a new beginning somewhere else. Mr. and Mrs. Thiessen were among those who left.

More than twenty thousand of our people came here to Canada. They were penniless and unfamiliar with the language and the ways of this, to them new, country. The struggle for mere survival was long and hard and made more difficult because of the long years of bleak depression in the thirties. It would have been so easy (and the temptation was great!) for our people to concentrate solely on material things. Fortunately we had a number of men and women who in those formative years (and these lasted about a quarter of a century), gave encouragement to the weary, hope to the discouraged and a vision of a brighter future to them all. In all those years they reminded their people that "man does not live by bread alone". Among this noble group we find also Mr. and Mrs. J. J. Thiessen.

For years they served as home parents and counsellors to the many Mennonite immigrant daughters who were forced to serve as domestics in the homes of wealthy Saskatoon residents. Hundreds of these farmer girls to this very day thankfully recall the guidance and encouragement that was theirs, thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Thiessen.

In the hospitals of Saskatoon, Mennonite patients could be found most of the time. Many of them, unable to speak English, or speak it well, temporarily separated from their families and beset by many doubts and anxieties, longed for a word of comfort. For decades Mr. Thiessen has regularly been visiting such patients offering them sympathetic hearing and a kind word of solace.

Mr. Thiessen served as moderator of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada for seventeen years. His position brought him in contact with all our churches and with many individuals and enabled him to exert a wide influence among our people.

When the main battle for an adequate economic base had been fought and won it was felt necessary to create an educational institution where religious instruction on a higher level could be given to our young people. Our congregations needed informed members and well prepared leaders. Rev. J. J. Thiessen was one of those who saw this need and he more than anyone else has helped to make this dream come true. I have no hesitation in

saying, that had it not been for Mr. Thiessen, the Canadian Mennonite Bible College would not have come into being when it did.

The larger Mennonite brotherhood recognized Rev. Thiessen's many contributions when Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Chicago, in 1955 conferred on him the Doctor of Divinity degree.

For many years Thiessen has served as chairman of the College Board. He has always shown great interest in the progress of this institution. He has kept close contact with instructors and students and it is true to say that he has been an inspiration to many of them.

Thanks is also due to the CMBC Faculty for the production and publication of this anthology and its dedication to Mr. and Mrs. J. J. Thiessen for service, guidance and inspiration given to our people.

Gerhard Lohrenz,
Pastor, Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church.

Preface

The following series of essays is offered to the general public with a two-fold purpose. First, it is to serve as an attempt to speak to the rank and file of those constituting the Conference of Mennonites in Canada — to help them see their origins, to note a bit of their struggles in this land, and to give an interpretation of their present state.

Inasmuch as all those who write are from within this Mennonite fellowship, the stance is not one of "they out there," but "we who are thus involved." While this may have the disadvantage of not being as objective as one might wish, it does have the value of whole-hearted involvement in the subject matter, because these experiences are the writers' experiences — **our** very life.

The second purpose of this book is to give a concrete expression of appreciation to Dr. J. J. Thiessen for his unstinting labors of love for our Mennonite people, particularly those in our Canadian context. No time for this appeared more fitting than the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the College — Canadian Mennonite Bible College — the educational institution which Rev. Thiessen saw in his dreams 30 years ago, which he led through the infancy stages when the steps were short and somewhat uncertain, and which he then guided into a full-blown youth with vigor and vitality.

At this juncture in the College's brief history Rev. Thiessen knows practically every one of the over one thousand students who have attended, by name, an acquaintance that for many is on a very personal level. This multitude of alumni joins in this word of appreciation to their spiritual father. counsellor and friend.

No leader can go far without a people who support him and who are challenged by the visions which are held before them. Rev. Thiessen would be the first to give

acknowledgement to the many co-workers who have been at his side in a great task. And we too would take this occasion to say thank-you, especially to those first board members of Canadian Mennonite Bible College, pioneers who shared in the struggle, who made the slow climb and who then had the gradual satisfaction of seeing growth and expansion.

The editors wish to express their personal thanks to the writers and to those who shared in the reading of some of the essays. Their suggestions have been most helpful. Special thanks go to Miss Norma Denk who has typed faithfully, and to Mrs. Margaret Franz who has assisted with the proofreading. Acknowledgement for special permission to quote from other sources is given at respective places in the footnotes, and this permission is also appreciated. Sincere appreciation is also extended to several donors whose financial contributions have helped to make this volume possible.

April 30, 1972, the day of commencement for the 1971-72 school year, marked the occasion when the first copy of the book was presented to Dr. and Mrs. J. J. Thiessen.

Henry Poettcker,
Rudy A. Regehr, editors.

March 3
World Day of Prayer, 1972
Winnipeg, Manitoba.

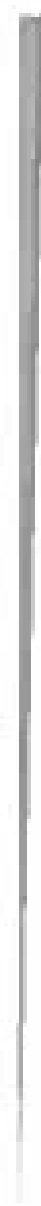
I

Roots of Faithfulness

The Bible

A Common Heritage

A Caring Community



1

Call and Response

Henry Poettcker

The Biblical account has a revelatory character. Its very nature is of the essence of revelation. It is the story of God's self-disclosure to man from the days of yore (briefly portrayed in the patriarchal figures) through Israel's history down to New Testament times. At the water-shed of history, in the most unique way of all, God gave us a picture of Himself in the person of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The writer of the book of Hebrews speaks of this portrayal as God's speech to man, first in various and sundry ways to the fathers of old, and then in the latter times, the period in which the writer lived, specifically in the person of the Son.

At the very outset we may affirm that God's speaking to man, as varied as it is, is a call to man to respond to His creator in trust and obedience. But to understand that we must raise the question, why God should speak to man and call him.

God meets Man

To speak of God's self-disclosure, His revealing Himself, is to confront the fact that God's calling man is His way

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of encountering His creature. This says something about His very nature. His call to Adam reveals His redeeming and reconciling purpose: a fallen creature is not to be left to destruction but is confronted by His Maker anew. In the world in which he is set man cannot escape God. While he tries hard to do that, he cannot shake the presence and the voice of God. Under the Old Covenant Israel hears God's call repeatedly, even and especially at the times when she thinks to go her own way. God's spokesmen, whether prophet or priest or king, allow the chosen nation to feel God's intense compassion, His yearning to keep them in His presence. His pathos is revealed in His longing to rescue them from the dire consequences of their disobedience. Ed. Diserens has drawn this together well in his succinct statement about the essential character of God's call: " . . . it is a function of the redemptive work of God, it proceeds from God's mercy, and it aims at the salvation of men."[1]

Set in the context of an agreement (we know the well-known term, covenant), God's intention with men comes to the fore as He calls them. The Old Testament depicts a call to Abraham to leave an old life in an idolatrous environment, to go to God's chosen land, where through him "the nations of the world would be blessed." Moses receives a call to lead the nation out of the Egyptian bondage to the promised land. "Moses . . . come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt" (Exodus 3:10). In a slightly different way Isaiah and Jeremiah were called both to speak and to illustrate God's intention with His people.

In the above examples, to which others could be added, it becomes clear that God calls certain individuals to pursue a task for Him. They have a certain role to play. The same holds true in the New Testament. According to Mark, Jesus calls the disciples for a three-fold purpose: a) for fellowship — that they might be with Him; b) for proclamation — that He might send them forth to preach; and c) for a ministry of service and healing — that they might have authority to cast out demons (Mark 3:13ff.). The Apostle Paul saw his ministry after the pattern of one sent, "called to be an apostle by the will of God." When he later spelled this out Paul referred to Jesus' own words spoken to Ananias, together with the subsequent instructions which were given: "The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see his righteous Servant, and hear him speaking with his own voice. For you will

be a witness for him to tell all men what you have seen and heard" (Acts 22:14f.). Speaking before King Agrippa, Paul quoted the words of Jesus in the same context of his conversation, which made the call even more specific: "I have appeared to you to appoint you as my servant; you are to tell others what you have seen of me today, and what I will show you in the future. I will save you from the people of Israel and from the Gentiles, to whom I will send you. You are to open their eyes and turn them from the darkness to the light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that through their faith in me they will have their sins forgiven and receive their place among God's chosen people" (Acts 26:16-18; TEV).

In connection with the call which God extends to men He often names or renames them. The giving of a name as the Hebrews understood it, was to illustrate both the character of the one who bore it and the role that he was to play. H. Michaud has indicated that a change of name signified a change in the reality of being,[2] and hence God's call speaks of changing people and giving them a "new dignity and function". Thus in the New Testament Simon becomes Peter, a rock who will be the leading pillar in the first chapters of the Christian Church.

There is a kind of corporate character to God's call to men. Even when it comes to an individual, it speaks to the nation — and to all mankind. Jacob receives a name that applies to the chosen people as a whole: Israel, man of God. Equally so a word to the nation is meant for the individual to hear; to it he is to respond. That Israel is God's servant means that every one in that nation is to heed so that God's righteousness may come into its own.[3] And God's righteousness has as its very essence the salvation of men. "In effect, this call is a saving invitation for the one who is its object, and it must show its effects far and wide in space and time."[4]

It is breath-taking to move one step further to look at the Lord Jesus Himself. According to Matthew, Joseph was to call Mary's child, Jesus — "for he will save His people from their sins". To Mary the angel said: ". . . you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. The Lord will make him a king. . . . " (Luke 1:31f.). Yet even more breath-taking is the sequel, for following from the role of this Jesus (both Savior and Messiah), men were called to be co-laborers with Him to accomplish His purpose.

God's Very Being Manifest in Christ

A term which for us today has become quite technical is the word 'Gospel'. It may mean either a body of material which we have in the Bible (with certain delimits depending on a given person's intention), or it may refer to one of the first four books of the New Testament. 'Gospel' carries the original meaning of 'good news'. The good news is quite simply that God has acted in His Son Jesus Christ to redeem men from destruction and bondage, to let them live their lives as He intended that they should. No one forced God to do what He did. Paul writing to the Romans puts this quite clearly and forcefully when he affirms, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself". And he says further that it was "while we were yet sinners that Christ died for us". The Biblical emphasis clearly refutes any idea that God had to be made willing to save man, or that man somehow had to connive to force God to accept him. God is sovereign. This no one dare forget!

From an understanding of such a sovereign favor, we get our deeper understanding of God's grace. Exercising His prerogatives, His freedom which knows none but self-imposed limits, God acts to free man from sin's bondage to make fellowship with Him possible. This act is finally and ultimately portrayed in Jesus Christ, for the Son in obedience to the Father gives His life that others may be rescued from destruction and live.

In His ministry the Lord Jesus gave man a picture of the Father. In effect, He said: "Do you want to know what God is like? Look at me!" ("He who has seen me has seen the Father.") Ever and again the emphasis fell on God's purpose. That purpose became the Son's purpose. And so, as the Father had called men, so now the Son called them and continues to call them. "He who during His earthly ministry called men with an authority He could only hold from His Father, continues to call men by His Holy Spirit."[5] The New Testament writers acknowledge this call repeatedly and continue to remind their readers of the divine call which they have received. The Romans and the Ephesians, e.g., were called in Christ — not because they merited His favor but because He dealt graciously with them.

That marvel the Apostle to the Gentiles could never forget. And for him it was impossible to understand his call apart from that grace.

The aim God had in mind in calling men has become obvious in the consideration thus far. God calls to have men share His goodness — the blessings of salvation — and this means on the one hand that they partake of His very nature as new creatures and on the other hand that they become co-laborers with Him testifying to His saving grace.

The Gospels also know this call as one into the Kingdom of God. Denoting first and foremost a relationship it calls for those entering the Kingdom to acknowledge the King as their Lord.[6] The results are far-reaching for to enter this relationship is to enter eternal life (so Paul to Timothy, I Tim. 6:12), or to share Christ's glory — which for the Hebrew meant a recognition of the overpowering implications of God's revelation, *viz.*, helping people, guiding them through life, fitting them to grasp His purpose. That the New Testament would even speak of this in the Old Testament analogy of an inheritance indicates the faithfulness of God once again, for "those who are called receive the eternal inheritance (blessings) that God has promised" (Hebrews 9:15). Paul calls the Colossians to give thanks, "with joy, to the Father who has made you fit to have your share of what God has reserved for his people in the kingdom of light" (1:12). Blessings are given to be enjoyed, yet these same blessings received in the call imply responsibilities to be met. First, however, a further word needs to be said about the extent of God's call.

Calling, Universal in Scope

If the question be raised about the comprehensiveness or the all-inclusiveness of the call, the answer is staggering. "God's redemptive work is on a world-wide scale." The Johannine passage (3:16) speaks of "whosoever believeth in him" being saved. God's mercy is restricted to no particular categories. His call comes to Jew or Greek alike and we are indebted to Paul for emphasizing this truth as he did in his Roman correspondence. Influenced as he was by Hebrew prophetic thought and holding similar convictions about God's impartiality he will say: "For we are the ones

whom he called, not only from among the Jews but also from among the Gentiles. For this is what he says in the book of Hosea: 'The people who were not mine, I will call 'My People', the nation that I did not love, I will call 'My Beloved'. And in the very place where they were told, 'You are not my people', there they will be called the sons of the living God' " (Romans 9:24-26).

For a goodly number of people God's election poses a problem. Defined narrowly, it seems to be an action motivated by a divine whim or a very partial selectivity. It is argued, if God elects, man has no choice and therefore man cannot be held responsible. But this is to approach the solution from outside rather than within the covenant framework in which God operates. It is a rational type of stance, which calls God to fit into man-made structures or categories. Brunner has described the situation well:

> We want to measure God by our yardstick. But God's righteousness cannot be measured by our standards. It includes his absolute sovereign freedom; else he would not be the God who freely bestows. His giving is subject to no rule but his will alone.[7]

While rationally there is no apparent way to reconcile God's freedom and man's responsibility, the whole matter looks quite different when one begins with the affirmation that it was God's love which motivated Him to act. First He created man, and then later He recreated fallen man. God elects because He loves man, and this very God has acted in Jesus Christ to reconcile fallen man to Himself. From His side God has made salvation possible for all men.

Man's Response

If this is so (and we maintain that it is) then no one can see his call apart from God's merciful act and His just purpose, and in the light of this we need to speak of man's response. Peter in his second letter insists that his readers are to "try even harder to make God's call and his choice [of you] a permanent experience". Hence, while on the one hand God imparts His blessings, these very blessings received in the call speak of responsibilities to be met. In the

arena of life people are called to work for peace amidst alluring heresies. They are called to holiness amidst the seductive evils of the time. They are called to freedom in the face of crippling legalistic minutia.

It will help us if we view man's responsibility from several perspectives. There is first the attitude of complete trust, what the Bible knows as faith. Jesus' first recorded message as given in Mark's Gospel is a call to repentance and faith. "Repent and believe in the Gospel." That one who is headed in the wrong direction is asked to turn around, repent — *i.e.,* let the total thrust of his life, self-centered and egotistical as he is, be reoriented to make possible the newness of life which being called into the Kingdom implies. The stance is one of faith, not so much the intellectual assent to something, although that dimension is included, but a trust in the One who calls, that He is trust"worthy" and that He merits our unqualified allegiance. The illustration of that kind of faith is seen in the father of faith, Abraham, who in faith obeyed God's call to him.

In the New Testament the believer is always understood as one who knows very clearly the object of that belief. It is none other than Jesus Christ in whom the Father has realized the salvation promised already to the nation of Israel long before. The believer according to the New Testament is "in Christ" and this phrase, used so often by Paul, denotes the faith-union with Christ apart from which man's life can never know the meaning and the fullness for which it was intended. With it, however, his life is truly "new" and men demonstrate their obedience that they are one with Christ.

That leads us then to the second perspective, the obedient stance, for obedience speaks of the one who is confronted conforming to the desires or the will of another. Identification with Christ means to become involved with Him in His work. Paul's favorite expression for this involvement is to call himself a *doulos,* a slave. Our translations usually give the equivalent as 'servant'. All believers are called to be servants, participating in the work of God. If the question be asked, with what special equipment or in what particular capacity does one serve? the answer is given in the very nature of the call. In His sovereign way God calls to the kind of work or the kind of office which He deems best. "Each one as a good manager of God's different gifts, must use for the good of others the special gift he has

received from God." And Peter goes on to list some. "Whoever preaches, must preach God's words; whoever serves, must serve with the strength that God gives him, so that in all things praise may be given to God through Jesus Christ . . . " (I Peter 4:10-11). The writer of Hebrews speaking of the office of priest, specifically that of the high priest, insists, "No one chooses for himself the honor of being a high priest. It is only by God's call that a man is made a high priest . . . " (5:4). Yet quite apart from the type of gift or "assignment" one thing is unequivocal: the one who is called is called to serve. And that places the focus again on obedience.

How very important this response is seen to be is pointed out again by the writer of the Book of Hebrews. He dares to say that the relationship of the Lord Jesus to His Father involved wrestling seriously for the "action strategy" which His mission demanded. "In his life on earth Jesus made His prayers and requests with loud cries and tears to God, who could save him from death. Because he was humble and devoted God heard him. But even though he was God's Son he learned to be obedient by means of his sufferings" (5:7-8). That is a breath-taking statement. A calling which demands obedience of the Son of God Himself certainly would claim from His followers the same loyalty.

There is yet a third perspective from which to see man's response to God's call and that is the sphere within which man operates. If the faith-union designates the relationship which the believer has to the Lord Jesus, then in relation to his fellowman he stands in two contexts: within the fellowship of believers, the Church, and within the world for whose salvation Jesus came and for which He continues to strive.

Every believer in Christ stands in a brother relationship to other believers and in this setting each is a help to the other — to strengthen, to admonish, to encourage, to teach, to minister. Yet in this mutual upbuilding, the Church simultaneously stands in the world to minister to it in Christ's behalf — proclaiming the good news, demonstrating their reality in the fellowship, calling men in the world to a faith response and to a life of service. That is the only adequate response to the call of God.

[1] Ed. Diserens, "Call" in *A Companion to the Bible*, ed. J. J. von Allmen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 46. For a fuller discussion of calling and election in the Old Testament note B. W. Anderson's comments in *Understanding the Old Testament* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1957), pp. 53-54; 230-232; 248; 314-316. **Used by permission of the Lutterworth Press.*
[2] H. Michaud, "Name" in *A Companion to the Bible*, *op. cit.*, p. 278.
[3] For a full discussion of the "righteousness of God" *cf.* N. H. Snaith, *Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (London: Epworth Press, 1944), chp. 3, pp. 51ff. (There is a paperback reprint by Schocken Books, New York, 1964).
[4] Diserens, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 47.
[6] Note the discussion of God's "mercy" which enables this relationship to be established. *Cf.* Nelson Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible*, transl. Alfred Gottschalk (Cincinnati: The Hebrew Union College Press, 1967), pp. 50ff. Note also the discussion by Ernest W. Saunders, *Jesus in the Gospels* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), pp. 101f.
[7] Emil Brunner, *The Letter to the Romans*, transl. by H. A. Kennedy (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1946), p. 86.

2

Command and Obedience

David Schroeder

The "Hearing" of Revelation

Instead of speaking about obedience to God's commands, the Hebrews spoke of *hearing* God's *Word*. This illustrates both the authority of God's Word and man's proper response to that Word, — that is, obedience. To *hear* the Word of God was to *obey* it, precisely because it was God's Word.

This emphasis on *hearing* points to the essential feature of biblical religion.[1] It is the religion of the Word and of obedience to the Word. Biblical Theology is therefore a theology of the Word: God speaks his Word to man and man must hear and obey. "Hearing", or obedience, indicates the proper response to the revelation of God.

God reveals Himself to man — who He is, what He has done, is doing and will do, and what He requires man to do. And, though God reveals Himself constantly to all men in His work of creation and providence (Romans 1:19ff., Acts 14:17, Psalm 19:1ff.), He has revealed Himself most clearly in history, and most fully in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-2). But when God reveals Himself to man He does not merely give man information about Himself — He also confronts man with Himself.

Dr. David Schroeder is Professor of New Testament and Philosophy at Canadian Mennonite Bible College. He has served on various conference committees and as a board member of Mennonite Biblical Seminary. He has written numerous articles and Bible Study helps and has directed a General Conference study on higher education. He is a member of the Charleswood Mennonite Church.

God's disclosures of Himself are always made in the context of a demand for trust (belief) in, and obedience to what is revealed. The "command" of God is not some arbitrary rule or law imposed upon man, but is part and parcel of the revelation of God to man. The command *(Gebot)* is grounded wholly in God's offer *(Angebot)* of love and grace and forgiveness.[2] The command of God is always an appeal, an invitation, to accept God's gracious offer. God's love and mercy lays a claim on man that can best be characterized as a "command" (I John 3:23) but the offer, not the command, is primary.

When God reveals Himself to man, He addresses His Word to him personally and calls for a personal response to Himself. This call, or claim on man's response is of the nature of a command and man can respond either in belief or unbelief; in obedience or in rebellion. It is not by accident, therefore, that the Hebrew word for "hearing" is translated by the word "obey" in Greek. To "hear God's Word" is the same as to "obey God's Word". That this is what is intended even in the Old Testament is apparent, for the non-hearing of the Word is spoken of in terms of words such as "rebel" "revolt" and "disobedience". Not to hear God's word is active and open rebellion and disobedience. When God speaks (offers his gift), a passive, non-committal reception of the Word is inconceivable. To "know" God is to obey His commandments (Judges 2:4).

This combination of God's revelation of His love and grace *(Angebot)* and man's response; God's Word and man's hearing of it; God's command and obedience to it, is reflected in both the Old and the New Testament and it is well for us to note at least some instances of it.

Command and Obedience in the Old Testament

Abram was in the City of Ur where the Word of God came to him saying:

> Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him

> who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth will bless themselves. (Genesis 12:1b-3)

We speak of this revelation of God to Abram as God's *promise* to Abram. God in His mercy and grace promised to bless Abram and his descendants. But it is clear that for this promise to be realized in Abram's life he had to respond to this Word in faith — obedience — and he did. It is immediately recorded "And so he went . . . ".

But the command of God is not an arbitrary one. It is part and parcel of the promise — it grows out of God's love and grace to man. In every gracious offer of God a claim is laid on man to respond in faith and trust and obedience. God again revealed Himself to be a gracious God when he led Israel out of the captivity in Egypt and made a covenant with them at Sinai. The whole offer comes from God. It is He who offers to be their God if they will be His people; it is He who states the terms on the basis of which this relationship will remain in effect. Man must respond by either accepting or rejecting the offer.

The laws of the covenant (Exodus 20:1-17, 21:1ff.) spell out the will of God for His people. These laws are presented to the people by Moses and the people respond in the words, "all the words which the Lord has spoken we will do" (Exodus 24:3). This is their acceptance of the covenant and their pledge of obedience. It is evident that God in His sovereign grace chose Israel (Deuteronomy 4:37) and made a covenant with a redeemed people (Exodus 6:6-8) setting them in a special filial relation to Himself (Exodus 4:22-23, Deuteronomy 7:6-11). It is out of this offer that the call comes to man to respond in faith — obedience to God's revelation. The command, the *imperative,* arises out of the indicative — out of that which God has already done for man.

The covenant is, therefore, both gospel and command: a declaration of the acts of God by which it has been initiated, and a declaration of the obligations for which man is now responsible before God. The covenant has too often been interpreted in terms of the legalism of later Judaism — but this is to misunderstand its basic meaning. The law and the commandments are a gracious act of God in which He reveals His will and are not to be understood as legalistic requirements. That being obedient to the commands of God means more than simply keeping individual laws or legal requirements is best seen in the sacrificial services. Time

and again there were people who thought that the sacrifice was a way of buying the forgiveness of God. But from the beginning it was clear that *obedience* is the only true sacrifice (Psalm 40:6-9). God wanted not the blood and the flesh of animals but a life of obedience.

> And Samuel said, "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." (I Samuel 15:22)

The offering of an animal without spot or blemish is to signify man's offer of himself to God. If then man does not yield obedience to God the act of sacrifice is a lie. The sacrifice is acceptable only as it is an expression of a right response to God's command, that is, obedience. The Prophets in their own way underline the covenant and are especially intent on pointing out Israel's departure from the Word. This is interpreted as a breaking of the covenant relationship through disobedience. It is only through repentance and a new and faithful response to the Word of God that Israel can hope to be spared the judgment of God.

Nevertheless, the Prophets too see the command arising out of God's gracious Word to man. It is not a question of keeping laws but it is a question of a whole-hearted faith-obedience response to God's will; it is the obedience which is not merely the fulfilling of a contract but which arises out of a reverence before the majesty of a holy God.

A New Command — a New Obedience

In the New Testament the Word again is central. Jesus Himself is spoken of in terms of the Word:

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:1) . . . And the Word became flesh . . . (John 1:14).

It is clear that God has spoken through this Jesus just as He spoke earlier through the prophets (Hebrews 1:1-2) and man must act responsibly in the light of that Word (Hebrews 2:1-3). What is different is that now the "fulness of God" was revealed in Jesus (Colossians 1:19).

A New Life: — It did not take people long to realize that a new life was being lived in their midst during Jesus' public ministry. He spoke in his own authority (Mark 1:21-22), He cast out evil spirits (Mark 1:23-27), He healed the leper (Mark 1:40ff.), forgave sins (Mark 2:1ff.) and stilled the storm (Mark 4:35ff.). But what is highlighted above all in this life is that He revealed the depth of God's love and He was obedient, even to the death on the cross.

The work of Jesus was essentially one of obedience to God (Philemon 2:1-11). He came to do the will of God. This is expressed by Jesus Himself in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:32ff.) and in His fulfilling of the prophetic word of Psalm 40:6-8 as bringing the perfect sacrifice of obedience to God. He presented His body as a living sacrifice in obedience to God, and Paul could say "For as by one man's disobedience [Adam's] many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience [Jesus'] many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:19). Jesus was what God meant man to be. He was in perfect communion with God, obedient to God in all things and manifesting God's love to all men. Though it meant suffering, and even death, Jesus did not become disobedient (sin) nor did He do other than meet people in love. As Peter says:

> He committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. (I Peter 2:22-24)

Jesus overcame evil with love and in His obedience to God He bore our sins on the Cross. All this He did in order that we might be righteous, that is, become obedient to God ourselves. He is our example in love and obedience.

A New Call : — those who have *heard* the new revelation in Jesus have received a call to follow Him — a call to be His disciples. Jesus calls men to follow Him — to follow in His steps; to lead the kind of life of love and obedience He lived; to take upon themselves the kind of suffering He had to bear in order to overcome evil with good.

To be His disciples means to take Jesus as Lord; to fashion one's entire life after the example and teachings of

Jesus; in short, to become obedient to the will of God as revealed in Jesus Christ.[3]

A New Command: — The revelation of God in Jesus confronted man with a new command — the commandment of love. Jesus summarized the whole law, the whole requirement of God in the words

> You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets. (Matthew 22:37-40, RSV).

The two commands cannot be separated, for to think one can love God without love to man is self-deception (I John 4:20). The call of Jesus is thus also a call to love — to love as Jesus loved. It is clear, however, that this kind of life can only be lived 'in Christ', in faith-union with Him. Such a faith-union is in essence a life lived in the power of the Spirit. As John says:

> He who says "I know him" but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps his word, in him truly love for God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him: he who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. (I John 2:4-6)

The Example of the Early Church

The Early Church was conscious of the legacy of Jesus. The tradition about Jesus was preserved and was faithfully communicated to the churches. In time it was retained in the Gospels and in the other New Testament writings. The Church made every effort to be obedient to the Way that was revealed in Jesus Christ.

We notice different situations reflected in the New Testament which give us our indication of how the Church sought to be obedient to the Word of the Lord. All of these

situations are also ours today, so that in observing the Early Church we can find help for our own discipleship.

1. On the one level the Early Church had no difficulty — they had *a direct Word from* the Lord. When Paul speaks about the married not *seeking* divorce he settles the matter by stating that on this Jesus has given a Word (I Corinthians 7:10). So whenever they had a direct word from the Lord the question was settled. They simply sought to walk in obedience to that Word.

2. A different approach is taken, however, where there is no direct word from the Lord but where the message is nevertheless clear on the basis of the total revelation received in Jesus. These commands are spelled out by the apostles in their teachings in the churches. They include the exhortations for slaves to be obedient to their masters and remain in the station in which they have been called (I Corinthians 7:17ff.); that wives should be subject to their husbands (Colossians 3:18), and that citizens should be subject to the powers that be (Romans 13:7).

The Apostle Paul makes much of having been entrusted with the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:11-12) and of being a guardian of the tradition. He repeatedly refers to the 'tradition' or the teachings *(paradosis)* that they have given to all of the churches (Romans 6:17; 16:17; I Thessalonians 4:2). In this ministry the Apostles spelled out what it meant for Christians to follow Jesus and to be obedient to His Word. These Words were, at least in part, recorded in the New Testament letters and so are available also to us today. They call us to the same obedience.

3. A third level of situations are those in which there is no Word from the Lord and which are not spoken to on the basis of the apostolic teaching. They are new situations altogether. In such situations Paul recognizes that he can only speak a correct word as he is guided by the Spirit (I Corinthians 7:40). He speaks as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy (I Corinthians 7:25).

But Jesus earlier promised that He would send His Spirit and that He would lead us to know all truth. Throughout history the Christian Church has found itself in new and trying situations. Always there was a searching of the Word, a consultation with the people of God and a reliance on the Holy Spirit to give them a knowledge of God's will. In this way the Early Church sent out its first missionaries (Acts 13:1ff.). Once clarity is received on such an issue it is handed

down to others in the Church. Often it has also been decided for the successive generations in the Christian Church. Thus, once slavery was seen as being contrary to the will of God it was not newly debated by each successive generation. It became simply a question of obedience.

4. There are, however, instances in which the decision is valid only for that generation or for a very specific situation and this presents us with a fourth situation of obedience.

The Word must be applied to specific situations, and the situation determines in part what ought to be done. Thus Paul recognized that in Christ there was neither male nor female (Galatians 3:28) and the early Church allowed women to participate in the regular services. But because both the Jews and the Greeks would be offended by too active a participation of women since they did not allow it, Paul asked the women to be silent in the Church.

Other injunctions such as the eating of meat offered to idols (I Corinthians 8:4ff.), the veil (I Corinthians 11) and the braiding of hair (I Peter 3:1-6) are culturally conditioned and apply to that time but not necessarily to all times. These decisions must be made afresh in each generation and in each new situation. Here again there must be a dependance on the Holy Spirit in knowing what is the appropriate thing to do. Such questions are spoken to by jointly seeking the guidance of the Spirit. It is easy in these matters simply to go one's own way and do what one deems to be right at the moment. Since, however, there is no specific Word given to guide us and we need to be sensitive to what, at times, is a very complex situation, we need very much the counsel of the community of faith and the guidance of the Spirit. This kind of obedience we must learn in the Church.

Command and Obedience Today

We are confronted today by the same Word. The whole history of revelation from Abram to Jesus is known to us in the Scriptures. This Word confronts us with the same command of God. We too are thus called to a life of obedience.

This obedience is one of discipleship — of following in the Way and the Spirit of Jesus. Many things have been clearly outlined in the Scriptures and in the example of Jesus. On these things there is only the question of bringing to them the obedience we should. This includes all those things directly spoken to in the Scriptures and exemplified in the life of Christ and not tied to a particular culture or situation. These things we learn to know by studying the Word under the guidance of the Spirit. Nevertheless, the spirit of the times is such that we often read the Scriptures as through colored glasses. In our time we have so imbibed the spirit of individualism that we do not take seriously the biblical view of the Church as a fellowship in which we help each other to know the will of God.

We have so accepted the materialistic values of our time that we do not have time to consider spiritual and personal values; we have so accepted the struggle for economic and political power that we often carry that spirit into the Church of Christ; we have so accepted the spirit of competition and conflict built into our society that even war is accepted by many who profess the way of love. It is in such areas of spiritual blindness that we need to seek repentance and return again to an obedient following of the Lord.

But there are also the new situations, those not spoken to in Scripture. In such areas we have allowed everyone to go his own way. We have all too often acted on the dictum "If it is not forbidden it must be permissible". But it is precisely in these areas where we should take seriously the Church as a fellowship in which we seek to help each other to ascertain the will of God. There are so many questions that need a spirit-guided answer — questions about how we as Christians are to walk *in* the world without being *of* the world. How does the Church respond to the world problems of hunger and starvation, poverty and overpopulation, exploitation and domination, conflict and war? How does the Church respond to economic and political structures that cause the 'haves' to have more and the 'have-nots' to lose what they have? How does the Church respond to injustices in its own society? How does the Church speak to countries that deplete their natural resources and poison the environment to the detriment of all?

How does the Church speak to broken homes, the offender, the poverty of the rich, the meaninglessness of daily living, the non-Christian practices accepted in various

vocations, and many other problems present in every congregation? Can we do more than walk around them from week to week? It is these questions that touch us in our daily lives and in which we must learn to know the Will of God. We can only do this by taking seriously the Church as a community of faith in which we exhort each other to know what belongs to our discipleship.

Together we must know what the Scriptures have to tell us about the Way of Christ; we have to learn to know the situation (the world) in which we are called upon to be obedient; and we need to rely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit to bring these two together in a knowledge of God's will.

In this searching of the Scriptures and in our being yielded to the Lordship of Christ, God will meet us through the Holy Spirit — the command will then be clear and we will be called anew to a life of obedience.

Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, p. 218. It is significant that "seeing" God is usually held to be an eschatological event that takes place when the Lord comes to Zion and men are no longer of unclean lips (Isaiah 60:1ff., Job 19:26f.).

Paul Althaus, *The Divine Command* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 8.

H. S. Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision*, MQR April 1949. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1951).

3

Living by Promise

Helmut Harder

I

Our daily living is guided to a large extent by promise. We make promises to persons, and then proceed to organize our time and energy with the intention of fulfilling the promises we have made. Persons make promises to us, and we let our living be guided by the expectation that such promises will be kept. We live by the over-arching assumption that a promise is a promise; that promises are made in order to be fulfilled. Guided by this hope, our pilgrimage into the future finds direction and meaning.

Within this framework we find that sometimes the ideal is realized, and at other times it is not. Sometimes promises are kept, and sometimes they are broken. When agreements between persons are made and kept, life moves forward positively. When agreements are made, but are not kept, the movement of life is frustrated. A fulfilled promise assures us of the integrity of the promissor; but a broken promise calls the trustworthiness of a person into question. It does happen that a person experiences disappointments to the extent that he no longer trusts any promise. By and large, however, man orientates his life within the framework of promises.

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II

Our experience of life within the tension between promise and fulfillment helps us to understand the relationship between God and man as described in the Bible. The biblical God is sometimes spoken of as the God of promise.[1] He is known primarily as the God who promises faithfulness to man, and who asks that man be faithful to him in return.

According to the biblical record, God makes himself known through a history of promise. That is, the Bible reports a series of events which had their beginning in an originating word of promise, and resulted in a succession of historical events. Although the theme of promise can also be found in the first eleven chapters of the Bible, the promise to Abraham (Genesis 12) is considered the beginning of this history. It is evident from the biblical record that the generations of families succeeding Abraham structured their life more or less consciously in the light of the Abrahamic promise.

God's call to Abraham has four important aspects: the promise of land (Genesis 12:1 — "Go . . . to the land that I will show you"); the promise that Abraham will be the father of a large and important family (12:2 — "I will make of you a great nation"); the promise of a special relationship between God and Abraham's family (12:3 — "I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse"); and the promise that all the people of the earth will benefit from what God is doing through Abraham (12:3 — "By you all the families of the earth will be blessed").

This promise became a creative force, shaping the day-to-day living and the hope of Abraham and of the generations of people who succeeded him. The history of the children of Israel is the story of how a people lived under the expectation that the promises to their father would be fulfilled. In part, at least, this hope was not disappointed as far as the immediate offspring of Abraham could tell. The promise of land came true when Abraham found a place to settle with his family; and after four hundred years in Egypt and forty years in the wilderness wanderings, his kindred possessed this promised land once more. The promise of a large family was also fulfilled. After some

tensions, Isaac was born; and by the time of the exodus from Egypt, Abraham's family was a multitude of people. The promise of a special relationship between God and the children of Abraham was also kept alive in the ensuing years. This relationship was substantiated again and again when God rescued his people in difficult situations. The relationship was formalized in the covenant which God made with the people at Sinai after the dramatic escape from Egypt. The promise that all the people of the earth would be blessed through Abraham was not emphasized as explicitly in Israel's early history as were the other aspects of the promise. In the early years the family was more concerned with self-preservation and self-perpetuation. Nevertheless, the expectation that God was doing something special for mankind through his people was kept alive as a glimmering light, and became a strong emphasis during the time of the prophets, and once again, of course, with the coming of Jesus Christ.

In addition to the word to Abraham, another highpoint in God's history of promise occurred during the reign of King David. In his old age David received the promise that he would always have a descendant upon his throne, and that his kingdom would extend into the future endlessly (II Samuel 7:12-13). In the years following the death of the King, the promise did not come to fulfillment as the people had expected. Rulers who were not descendants of David managed to gain power; and furthermore, the Israelite kingdom was torn by conquest and disrupted by exile. What the recipients of the promise did not realize at the time is that with the coming of Jesus Christ the Davidic promise would undergo a radical re-interpretation.

III

When we turn to the New Testament, we find that the emphasis is not first upon the God who makes promises, but upon God as the one who fulfills promises. Jesus Christ is now proclaimed as the fulfillment of all Old Testament expectations. Paul writes to the Corinthian church that now "all the promises of God find their Yes in him (Jesus Christ)" (II Corinthians 1:20). The birth, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus made such an impression upon those who

witnessed this succession of events, that they could do nothing less than claim that God had visited his people and had fulfilled the promise to Abraham (see especially Hebrews 11).

The realization that God was revealing himself through Jesus Christ in a final way called for a radical revision and expansion of the Old Testament promises. The promise that God would do a special work with one family of the earth was now expanded to include all peoples. This new emphasis was already present with the strains of "peace on earth" which accompanied the birth of Jesus. The universal dimension of God's revelation through Jesus became clear as well when Jesus purposely ministered not only to the people of Israel, but also to Samaritans and Gentiles. The promise was implemented again when the first Christians went "into all the world" with the Gospel. The promise of land to Abraham also took on boundless dimensions with the coming of Jesus. The whole earth became the promised land. Furthermore, the eternal throne promised to David was now occupied by the Lord whose kingdom would never fade away. To be sure, the kingdom of which Jesus spoke was not a political territory as the people had thought, but a kingdom which is spiritual and universal, having no boundaries.

Although it is true, as we have emphasized above, that the New Testament must be understood as the fulfillment of the Old, this was not the end of the history of promise. Jesus Christ was seen not only as fulfillment. He became, once more, a word of promise for the future. His birth brought with it the promise of "peace on earth, good will toward men". His ministry conveyed the promise that the sick will find healing and the hungry will be fed. His death and resurrection offered the promise that all men may find forgiveness and victory over death through him.

This insight has implications for what it means to be a Christian. Man must be confronted not only with the question of the self-authentication of the Bible. He must also decide whether or not he will trust in the promises which Jesus' words and works offer. Man is called to believe in Jesus Christ to the extent that he will seek, through Christian pilgrimage, to assist in the fulfilling of the promises which Jesus announced, and to the extent that he will set his ultimate hope beyond death upon their fulfillment.[2]

IV

The biblical promise must be understood as dynamic in character if we are to sense how it can be meaningful for the present day. Unfortunately the Christian Church has sometimes presented the promises in a stereotyped way, as though God was somehow the director of a puppet show. He has only to pull the strings, and everything works out perfectly. The promises must not be thought of simply as one-sided pronouncements on the part of God which only ask man to listen, to believe, to await the fulfillment, and perhaps to add his "I told you so" at the end. Rather, while the word of promise is recognized as coming from God, it is expected at the same time that the hearer will begin to shape his life on the basis of what the promise holds out for him as a goal. This held true for Abraham, and it applies as well today. Promises open the possibility for a partnership in which God and man work together in bringing the promise to fulfillment.

To be sure, God is the stronger partner in the project. He has a breadth of vision and a measure of patience and perspective which exceeds that of man. Nonetheless, the responsibility for fulfillment is shared by man as well. It is expected that man will help to shape history on the basis of promises given in the past. This is already the case in the Old Testament. For example, the promise that because of what God is doing through the people of Israel, the nations will one day "beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks" (Isaiah 2:4), is followed immediately by a call to the people to "walk in the light of the Lord" (2:5). The hearers are invited to participate in the word of promise by beginning to walk in obedience toward the time and place of the fulfillment of the word. In the New Testament this mood is captured very well in the call to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for God is at work in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12b-13).

When the word of promise is taken with seriousness, it brings about a series of events. This history of promise is not strictly man's work, nor strictly God's work. It results from a cooperation between God and man.[3] The sequence

of events which follows as the after-effects of a word of promise does not fall into place automatically. A history of promise takes shape with the original word of promise as its reference-point; but this by no means excludes struggle and change. The difficulty with which a history of promise takes shape is attributable not only to man's disobedience, but also, on the positive side, to the continuing challenge of seeking to make the promise applicable to every new situation.[4] Thus it is understandable how the original word of promise to Abraham was allowed to develop and expand to the extent that the fulfillment far exceeded what the original words would have meant to Abraham. A strong faith and trust is a necessary ingredient in one's attitude toward the future.

At the same time the biblical man of faith did not allow the mere day-to-day events to determine the direction of his life. Although he was open to the future, he also took it upon himself to shape the future. He made responsible decisions by asking the question: How can the course of action which we decide to take be guided by the promise of God? When that question was asked, it already became clear to an extent which decisions were good ones and which were not. Where this was not clear, the decision-making process required increased prayer and trust and discussion among the people involved. A degree of risk was often a necessary factor in the forward movement of life.

V

We have described the main aspects of the biblical understanding of promise, and must now ask the question: In what sense does the theme of promise offer guidance for Christian life and thought? We will make two observations which seek to relate the theme of promise to the present day. The first has implications for the work of the Church. The second refers our theme to life generally.

Within the context of the General Conference Mennonite Church in Canada, ministers and teachers have organized their presentation of the work of God as described in the Bible, under the theme of promise *(Verheissungen)*. The Bible was presented in terms of the promissory thread

which began with the promise of hardships to Adam and Eve after the Fall (Genesis 3:16-19), and ended with the coming of Jesus Christ. In addition to the emphasis upon Old Testament words which found their fulfillment in Jesus Christ, preachers and teachers also pointed to the promises in the books of Daniel and Revelation, and impressed upon their congregations and classes that one could await the fulfillment of these words in the yet-outstanding future.

The emphasis as characterized above was helpful inasmuch as it provided a wholesome perspective upon God as the God of promise. An understanding of God as the One who reveals himself through a history of promise, as the One who fulfills his word in Jesus Christ, and as the One whose work is not yet totally completed, was communicated to the hearers. It was not always clear, however, what man's part in this work of God should be. The stories and prophecies were related mainly, it appeared, in order that the listener should believe that God stands by his word, and should see that the Bible is true from cover to cover. The listener was encouraged to be comforted or unsettled (depending upon the individual need) in the light of fulfilled or impending prophecies. The question remained: What is man's part in God's work besides that of announcing that God makes promises, that he has kept them in the past, and that he will keep them in the future?

More recently, within the context of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, there has been a shift of emphasis. The accent is on man's responsible participation in God's work. The Christian is called primarily to take seriously his task of doing the works of the Kingdom of God which were announced by Jesus, but which have obviously not been carried out completely as yet. There is less concern with matching prophecies and fulfillments in order to prove that the Bible is true, and there is more concern with the Bible as a resource book for the life of Christian discipleship.[5] The Bible is read not first in order to strengthen an inner piety, but in order to provide guidelines for practical living in the world. Promises are there not only for God to keep, but for man to keep as well.

Broadly speaking, this more recent emphasis is wholesome. It recaptures a dominant theme of the biblical record; namely that promises are given as calls of obedience to Christian pilgrimage. Faith is applicable not only as an inner assurance that God is in his heaven, but also as an outward expression of life. The biblical promises are not

only to be regarded as fixed proofs that God exists, but also as words which call man to responsible participation in the unfinished work of God.

It would be unfortunate, however, if the central contribution of the earlier approach were lost to view as we move into the future. We refer to the sense of awe and mystery that surrounded the view of God as the author and finisher of his work. While we can rightly claim that man has a crucial role to play in shaping the history of promise, we must also confess that this history is guided by the transcendent power of God.

Practically, this means that the truth we pursue lies beyond the outermost limits of human thought; that our particular conception of what the work of the Kingdom entails in our day is always open to further insight; that the work we do must be offered in humility to God. The particular way in which "the kingdom of this world shall become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ" transcends our best imagination. This does not mean that we stop dreaming dreams and that we cease our work. It does mean that we offer our visions and our work to God in humility and openness, letting the promises which are explicit and implicit in the revelation of Jesus Christ guide our way into the future.

VI

Our second observation relates to the question of how present day man can live under the biblical theme of promise in society. We began this essay with the observation that in the present day man lives to a large extent under the impetus of promises which he makes to others and which others make to him. We think here of the broad spectrum of promises which are represented on the one side by the immediate promise to keep an appointment on a particular evening, and on the other side by the promise of mutual loyalty that is implied, for example, by virtue of the fact that we are citizens of a certain country.

As compared to our grandfathers, relatively speaking, we enjoy a high degree of openness with respect to the course which our life can take. We live in an open situation.[6] This means that we have greater freedom to form relationships

with various people; that we have more possibilities with respect to vocational choices; that we have a broader choice of places in which to "settle down".

That does not mean, however, that life has become less burdensome. The fact that man is free to choose from among many vocations, that he decides upon his mode of behaviour from a broad array of choices, and that he is quite mobile, can also be a problem. The question which presses in upon man in the open situation is: How do I decide upon my allegiances in life? Within the context of the title of this essay, the question is: What are the promises that I shall make as I determine the course of life?

The person who professes Christian faith has, in effect, decided upon a frame of reference within which he can seek a resolution to such questions. He has said that he will offer his life to Jesus Christ in the sense that he will commit himself as an assistant in the fulfilling of the promises introduced by Jesus' coming: the promise of healing broken relationships and diseased bodies, the promise of walking honestly with one's neighbor, the promise of bringing joy and comfort to people, etc. The Christian does not assume that he can fulfill these promises fully and concretely. Rather, he offers his life as a sign that the promise is hastening to fulfillment. The ultimate fulfillment will be given by God. With this in view, the Christian anchors his view of life and his course of action to the promise of life beyond death, the promise which is offered with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Promises which we make in life can be evaluated, broadly speaking, on the basis of whether or not they fall within this frame of reference.

Christian pilgrimage into the future must be undertaken with a sensitivity to the biblical promises of the past.

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[1] Recently, biblical scholars have brought to light the centrality of the idea of promise for an understanding of the Bible, particularly the Old Testament. *Cf.*, for example, Walther Zimmerli, "Promise and Fulfillment", in *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, ed. Claus Westermann, trans. James Luther Mays (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1963), pp. 89-122.

[2] For a helpful discussion of the relationship between the historical Jesus and the future expectation of Jesus, *cf.* Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, trans. James W. Leitch (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1965), chapter three.

[3] In the modern period it has been typical to speak of history as man-made. From a biblical perspective, however, it is more appropriate to see historical events as occurring because of man's willingness and/or unwillingness to cooperate with the work of God. This means that in a sense God is the driving force of history.

[4] We have sometimes misunderstood the relationship between change and changelessness with reference to the Christian Gospel. When we say that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever, or that God never changes, we cannot mean simply that there is only one way of stating the Gospel, but rather that the Gospel is relevant and applicable (and thus in some sense adaptable and re-statable) to every new situation.

[illegible] In the Mennonite Church the emphasis upon discipleship has been revived particularly through what is known as "the recovery of the Anabaptist vision". See especially the first essay by Harold S. Bender, entitled, "The Anabaptist Vision", in the *Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, ed., Guy F. Hershberger (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1957).

[illegible] For a helpful characterization of the open situation in which modern man finds himself, *cf.* Wolfhart Pannenberg, *What is Man?* trans. Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970).

4

Sign and Belief

Waldemar Janzen

Why Signs

A sign is a visible or otherwise perceivable clue to something hidden, something out of sight. The sign tells us that something exists and, perhaps, in part, what it is like. A road sign pointing towards a town makes sense only where the town itself is not yet in view, or not identified as to its name, population, and the like. The sign indicates that the town lies ahead, and it shows also how it can be reached. Let us illustrate by another example: Imagine a child storming into the house and seeing mother standing in front of the closed bedroom door, with serious face and a finger held over her mouth. Mother is giving a sign. She tells the child something about something in the room. The child does not know what is happening in that room. Is someone sick? Has a guest arrived and is resting now after traveling through the night? Or could there be a thief? The child cannot tell, but it is certain that there is something unusual in that room, for mother has given a sign. The child knows also at least one fact about that something behind the door: It is important enough that one must take special note of it, and the right way to take note of it is to keep silent.

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When the Bible speaks of signs that point to God and his purposes with us, it treats God as if he were hidden, figuratively speaking; as if he were beyond that hill, like the town in our first illustration, or behind the closed door, as in our second example. It speaks of God as "transcendent", in the technical language of theologians. We see and know of him only as much as he reveals, or "unveils", about himself.[1] This never happens fully, so that mystery surrounds him no more. We find out only certain things about him, according to the clues or signs that he grants us. These signs do not describe God; who would have the words for that? They indicate to us, instead, his existence and reality, and they tell us how to respond to that reality. In this they are quite like the sign of the mother to the child in front of the closed door.

Apart from such signs, God is hidden from us. The observable world, the sky, mountains, trees, animals, and even men, do not express what God is like. This does not mean that God is not at work in the whole universe; it merely asserts that his ways do not become understandable and meaningful to us except through signs. The various features of the universe are like a veil; they both reveal and conceal God. A veil may allow certain features to show through, but not enough to let us recognize the person or determine, for example, whether he is friendly or angry.[2] Another illustration might be helpful: Imagine a man standing in a large factory hall, surrounded by complicated machinery, with wheels turning, pistons pushing, lights flashing, and so on. The whole thing is awe-inspiring, perhaps impressive, but meaningless. He may not even know — assuming that he had never seen anything similar — whether he is surrounded by one purposeful process, or by a chaos of unrelated activity. But suddenly he is struck by the recognition that a certain wheel at one end of the hall starts to turn whenever a green light goes on at the other. This becomes to him a sign that there is connection between the various things he sees. He generalizes that, if these two features are related, all the rest may work together in some fashion also. There is purpose here! In fact, he hesitates now to touch a lever here or stop a wheel there, for that might interfere with the whole, a whole which still remains mysterious, but about which something has been revealed to him now through the green light and the wheel. These two, in their togetherness, have become for him a sign.

To understand the whole, this man would have to study

engineering for several years. From his present short stay in the factory hall he could never comprehend it. Too many factors for its understanding lie outside the hall. The Bible sees man's situation in the universe in similar fashion. It opposes those religions and philosophies which say that man can study the universe, or experience it intuitively, and arrive at insight into the nature of the whole. Our standpoint is too limited and our life too short to "read off" God's purposes from the visible phenomena around us. Only through signs, through certain features that will suddenly light up with meaning for us, can we sense the hidden realities as being there and are we able to know how to respond to them.

Here Biblical faith has a much more profound understanding of God and his world than those religions and philosophies that consider the universe as a more or less decipherable blueprint. In their search for God, Truth, Reality, Being, men ancient as well as modern have always attempted to arrive at an understanding of these by observing the visible world. Thus the ancient nature worshippers of the Near East, as well as those of Greece and Rome, experienced the powers operative in nature — storm and lightning, sunshine and fertility, mountains, rivers, and the sea — and worshipped them as gods. These ancients observed, further, certain relationships, such as those between rain, sunshine, and the growth of vegetation on the earth. They expressed these relationships in story form. Such a story might tell, for example, how the sun god kept the rain god in captivity for some time, but how the latter was freed eventually, married the goddess of fertility, and produced offspring. Such stories are called myths. A myth is a story that relates the deified phenomena of nature to each other.[3]

While the gods of the Canaanites, Egyptians, Mesopotamians, and other ancient nature religions are no longer worshipped today, it is still equally tempting to seek ultimate truth through a study of the visible world. The visible world should be studied, of course; that is the legitimate domain of the natural and social sciences. But if the insights arrived at in such study are considered as ultimate, that is, as having the possibility of unlocking the meaning and mystery of the universe and of human life, science has become Scientism, a faith which can be considered the counterpart of ancient Baalism. How such Scientism affects us might be illustrated from the way men try to deduce right

and wrong from "what is natural". Is it right or wrong to go to war? Well, observe the animals, or primitive societies; do we not always find a struggle for survival? Therefore it is natural to fight, and what is natural — so Scientism assumes — is right. But Biblical faith holds that the matter of moral right or wrong is more complicated. Through Jesus Christ, who has given us a sign of the presence of God's reign or kingdom in the world, we have come to see that what is ultimately the will of God often transcends nature. It is natural — in nature which shares in man's fallen state — to fight, but God's intention for man is to attain to love and peace. There is a mystery to the fulness of God, a mystery which is not "immanent" in the visible world in such a way that it can be deciphered, but "transcends" it, so that it becomes accessible to us through signs.

Signs in the Bible

The Old Testament speaks of "sign" (*'ôth*) close to 80 times. The corresponding term (*semeion*) appears some 73 times in the New Testament. The usage varies somewhat between the Testaments and within each Testament, but certain main lines seem clear.[4] These words are not reserved for specifically religious contents. The kiss of Judas, for example, was a sign pointing out Jesus to the soldiers (Mt. 26:48; *cf.* also Num. 2:2; Ps. 74:4). On the whole, however, both Testaments associate signs with those acts of God that make him known to men.

Even so, however, signs are not necessarily miracles, in the sense of unusual and normally impossible happenings. Circumcision is a sign (Gen. 17:10ff.), and so are the twelve stones from the bed of the Jordan (Josh. 4:6ff.), as well as the fact that the Jesus-child had a manger as his bed (Luke 2:12). On the other hand, the miracles in the Bible fulfill the function of signs, in particular the miracles associated with the Exodus from Egypt (*Cf.* Ex. 7:3; Dt. 11:3; 29:3; Josh. 24:17; Jer. 32:21; Ps. 105:27; etc.) and the miracles of Jesus.[5] That the latter are called signs only in the Johannine writings (Jn. 2:11; 2:23; 3:2; 4:54; 6:2; 11:47; 20:30; etc.), while the Synoptic Gospels characteristically refer to them as "mighty works" (*dynameis*; Mt. 11:20;

13:54; Mk. 6:2; Lk. 19:37; etc.), has to do with the particular vantage points of the writers. John intends to demonstrate that Jesus is the Christ (Jn. 20:30f.) and sees his acts (often interpreted by longer speeches) as signs or pointers to that fact. Matthew, Mark, and Luke see these acts, first of all, as manifestations of the Divine rule or kingdom which is showing its power in Jesus. From the recipient's vantage point the manifestation of God's power becomes a sign.

The term sign describes an act or happening or object as to its function, not its content. The most varied events — some "natural", in our contemporary terminology (Gen. 17:11; Is. 20:3; Lk. 2:12), and some "miraculous" (2 Kgs. 20:8-11; Jn. 2:11) — can be called signs as long as they perform the function of pointing up the power and leading of God *for some who perceive them.* The last phrase is important. It is not quite right to say that a certain event "is a sign"; it "becomes a sign to" some individual or group. In the Old Testament we find such formulations as "This is/will be a sign to/between . . . " (Gen. 9:12; Ex. 3:12; 12:13; Nu. 16:38; 1. Sam. 2:34; etc.).

Furthermore, a sign is never "there" externally, waiting to be discovered by human intellect or intuition. It proceeds from God's initiative and is given, as promise or judgment, to a group or a person. The "raw facts" of nature and history are mute; they need interpretation.[6] Even the observable aspects of a miracle do not yet constitute a sign, but become so only as they are understood in their pointing capacity by a receiver. The interpretive sermons that accompany them frequently in the Gospel of John (e.g. chapter 6) make this clear, though the understanding that makes the facts light up as a sign may consist also of a completely inward awareness (*e.g.* John 2:11; 4:53f.).[7]

The "raw facts" may be interpreted differently by different observers, and are therefore inconclusive in themselves (Jn. 9:16; 11:37; *cf.* Ex. 7:11; Mt. 12:24). To those for whom some event or fact has become a sign pointing to a Divine reality, however, alternative interpretations are no longer open. The sign-character of an event imposes itself inescapably when it breaks in on someone and evokes in him a *subjective* certainty, even though he knows intellectually that others may see it differently.[8] When the Bible says — as it does frequently in both Testaments (*cf.* Ex. 7:13; Num. 14:11; Amos 4:6-13; Mt. 11:20-24; 12:37; etc.) — that signs have been rejected or missed because of unbelief, it

refers most probably to the absence of that stance of faith generally which needs to precede the reception of a sign, rather than to faith evoked by the sign; disbelief in a sign appropriated as a sign would be a contradiction in terms.

The relationship between sign and belief is well illustrated in Jn. 4:46-54. The official from Capernaum whose son is ill requests healing from Jesus. Jesus rebukes him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe" (verse 48). Then he reassures the man that his son will live, and "The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went his way", even before he had seen the healing. When he hears that his son has recovered, we read again "and he himself believed, and all his household" (verse 53). Faith, then, precedes the sign and makes receptive for it, but is in turn supported by the sign. Where faith does not prepare the ground, a sign is not likely to be given (Mt. 13:58). We note also the interpenetration of sign and word. Signs are part and parcel of the proclamation of God's word (Ex. 4:28, 30; Mk. 16:20; Heb. 2:1-4). Word and sign mark the ministry of Moses, the prophets, Jesus, and his followers. Signs separated from the context of a Biblical confession in words and life are to be discounted (Dt. 13:1-2; Mt. 7:21-23).[9]

Once received, the sign brings a new and powerful dimension into the life of its recipient, a dimension that makes him see life in a different focus. The signs which Israel perceived in its history led it to a self-understanding not shared by any other nation. The sign-character, not only of the individual signs of Jesus, but of their totality which made up his life (Lk. 2:34), changed their perspective on their existence for the disciples. This change of perspective does not remain intellectual, although a sign certainly leads to new insight and understanding; it becomes a claim upon the life of the person or group that experiences it. Thus it not only interprets life, but calls to new forms of life, to responsible action based on a new commitment.

Even this is not its final effect. Beyond the action which it calls forth it becomes an impetus to praise. For what shines through in every particular sign — different as one is from the other in its specific content and in the insight and action it evokes — is ultimately the glory of God (Ex. 10:1; Num. 14:22; Is. 66:12f.; John 1:14), and a taste of the glory and majesty of God issues in praise.[10]

Praise of this kind, *i.e.*, praise evoked by recognizing certain acts or events as showing forth with special clarity

God's will and activity, results in festive celebration (Ex. 13:9), when expressed communally. The great festivals of Israel are the praises of a people for the manifestations of God in its past. Here the sign takes on the character of a memorial recalling and affirming the relationship to God, the covenant (Gen. 9:12; 17:10ff.; Is. 55:13). In the Old Testament even a commemorative item can be called a sign (Dt. 6:8; Josh. 4:6ff.). As a succession of festivals was called forth, there arose an awareness of the ongoing presence and leading of God, *i.e.*, of a "Heilsgeschichte," a salvation history.[11]

Such a response to signs, a response consisting of the intellectual, ethical and emotional subjection to the impact of the taste of a new reality, is faith, in the Biblical sense. But while God's people celebrate the sign-events experienced in the past, one could say that a sign is extended to man from the future into his present. The city that lies ahead is not yet visible, but the road sign which the traveler has seen some stretch back has transformed his journey from groping and uncertain wanderings to a purposeful pursuit, even though the road seems externally the same and the means of travel may not have changed. A sign, then, sets up a promise which draws the traveler ahead to its fulfillment. It defines him in relation to a destination and it leads him on. Even when the sign lies far behind the wanderer, it keeps its effectiveness, though a further sign along the road may reinforce and confirm it.

Signs Today

After we have considered the significance of the sign in the Bible, we must turn to the question of its significance for us. This question has two aspects: First, we ask what the Biblical signs mean for us. Secondly, we ask whether we can expect signs in our time and experience.

In the Bible the sign has a double impact. There is, first, its content. God calls, leads, forgives, restores to life. Secondly, it evokes certainty concerning God. The healed man, for example, comes to see that it was God at work to heal him. While this latter function is the sign-function proper, it is only the former, the content, which can be handed on

to later generations, or even to contemporaries. That Jesus healed the official's son (John 4:46-54) became to the official a sign that evoked belief. For us today it does not have that power to convince, at least not at first and automatically. Its report merges with the rest of Biblical proclamation to say something about God: When God's power is at work, it is a healing power. The official's faith, on the other hand, is not immediately transferable to the reader of his story.

While we get the content of the Biblical proclamation from such Biblical accounts, that which gave certainty to the believers in the Bible cannot be our source of certainty.[12] Only as divine reality breaks through *my* observable world, that is, as something in my world lights up in such a way as to give new focus to my life — only as a new sign is given to me —, will I be gripped with that certainty which, though subjective, is nevertheless sure. To say this is to say that each time derives its certainties from its own signs.

To illustrate, we might consider the discovery of electricity. Certain experiments convinced Edison of the existence and the properties of this phenomenon. The content of his discovery comes down from him — elaborated and perfected — to our time. Our certainty concerning electricity, its existence and its properties, does not derive for us from Edison's experiments, however, but from that which happens every time we throw a switch.

Now, that "something" which may become a sign for us may be a Biblical word. God speaks again, to us, through the words of Scripture, including those that tell of signs. But it need not be so. Many things that gave assurance of God's acts to Israel and to the early Church are read with detachment by modern readers, including Christians, and do not grip them in the same powerful way, even though these modern readers may derive instruction about God's ways from such reading. The effect of sign-stories on the modern reader may be parallel to that of parables, which also teach divine truths without having the character of signs.[13]

With these observations we have already entered upon our second question: Can we expect signs in our own time? To my mind it is clear that we not only can, but that we must, if there is to be faith at all. To say this does not mean that each Christian can expect an equal ration of signs. Some lives may be blessed with abundance, while others may live a life of faith by giving the benefit of the doubt

to the testimonies of those in the past and present whose lives have won their confidence. And further, the important question is not whether we can and ought to be sign doers, but whether God will grant us to be sign receivers. Will his Word and his World light up for us here and there in such a way as to grip us with his reality and draw us into his service?[14] That is the question.

On the basis of Biblical teaching and of Christian experience we can confidently answer in the affirmative. Signs are God's continuing way of pointing to himself and evoking certainty. There have been and will be differences in signs. Some are more frequent, others rarer. Some take on a more unusual form, others remain ordinary and yet shape lives and give certainty. Some will have more private character, while others may produce a wider impact. Some such signs may be miracles, in the sense of unusual, unexpected and unexplainable phenomena: healings, instances of protection, of guidance, etc. To believe this does not mean that one ought to jump on the bandwagon of movements that glory in the irrational; it simply means that one does not limit God in his possibilities.

Some signs will appear more common and modest. A little incident of reconciliation may so irresistibly impress itself on someone in its ultimate rightness that it may call forth in him belief in the Biblical peace teaching, for that teaching's truth, its ontological truth, to speak with the philosopher, has been tasted by him in sample form. Thus lives of people may become translucent for us to the will of God concerning right and wrong. All illustrations run the risk of seeming trivial to him for whom the event in question has not become sign. Nor can its significance as a pointer to God ever be demonstrated, though its unusual features, if such are present, may be pointed out.[15]

While each age derives its certainty of faith from its own signs, these signs are not unrelated to the Biblical message, just as the signs reported in the Bible are intimately related to the Word. For the Christian it is this divine Word, handed on through the centuries, which defines the content of that faith for which a sign can evoke certainty. In other words, a measure of faith comes first, but is supported and strengthened by the sign. For the people of Jesus' time the preparation for receiving his signs was provided by their Old Testament faith. Such preparatory, or communal and historical, faith — whether the community be Israel or the Church — affects us doubly: It prepares for

the appropriation of new signs, and it provides criteria for them.[16] The latter means that there can be no contradiction between signs which claim to point to the same God.

When we say that each generation needs its own signs, we do not mean, therefore, that God reveals himself in a discontinuous way, showing sporadic signs intermittently. Signs are embedded in an ongoing tradition of faith, a tradition which prepares new times for new signs and which, in turn, is authenticated by these. There is discontinuity of *certainty*, however, from generation to generation. Each young Christian builds on the witness of others, tests and doubts this secondhand faith,[17] and struggles for personal certainty. And yet the *content* of his faith is not discontinuous, but comes from the tradition within which he stands.

More than that, there is some continuity in the signs themselves. As persons and groups have witnessed to the events that became signs to them, certain themes emerged: Signs tended to be acts of leading, of sustaining life, of healing, of deliverance from external and inner enslavements. Though there have been terrifying signs, signs of warning and of punishment to come, the balance weighed heavy on the side of favour, grace, salvation, and that with a consistency which, in itself, became a revelation of the ways of God. The Bible calls it his faithfulness.[18]

With such observations we have left the discussion of the sign, in its more specific definition, and have crossed over into the more comprehensive topic of revelation.[19] The individual sign, taken by itself, does not reveal such credal content as God's grace or faithfulness; instead, it testifies to the truth or rightness of love, justice, peace, forgiveness, etc. But as the cumulative witness of the ages shows forth certain themes, the chain of signs becomes God's revelation of himself, supported by the signs, and in turn providing criteria for evaluating signs and preparing for the possibility of new signs.

To speak thus may raise the question whether we are not extending the meaning of "sign" to become synonymous with "revelation". While these concepts belong to the same divine self-manifestation, so that statements made about the one will often be true of the other also, they are nevertheless distinct, and that in three ways: First, the term "sign" derives from common life and retains its non-theological usage, both in the Biblical languages and in English, besides its specialized theological usage. "Revelation", on the other hand, is basically a theological term, though it has spilled over into common talk. Secondly, "revelation" has the totality of God's self-manifestatiog in view while "sign", when employed theologically, designates a specific instance of revelation. Signs are revelation in dissembled form, one might say. Therefore "revelation" is most properly used in the singular, while "signs", in the plural, is appropriate and customary. This is so in spite of such plural formations as "revelatory

events" on the one hand, or the singular use of sign to refer to the whole life and ministry of Jesus (Lk. 2:34). Thirdly, "revelation" concerns itself with the content of God's self-disclosure, while "sign" focuses on the certainty evoked in the recipient. "Revelation" is the more comprehensive concept, but the "sign" is revelation at the point of most intense impact on man. For a helpful discussion of revelation, see Gordon D. Kaufman, "The Concept of Revelation", *Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), pp. 13-40.

[2] Theologians have long debated the existence of "natural revelation", *i.e.*, true knowledge of God available to every man through reason, feeling, and conscience. The proponents of natural revelation believe that man can discover certain insights pertaining to God, while those opposing it, notable among them Karl Barth, assert that nothing about God can be known unless he initiates such knowledge specifically. My formulation in the text is not meant as a rejection of all natural revelation; but even where the Christian accepts the possibility of such, it must be understood as revelation, *i.e.*, as a *selective* manifestation of truth, rather than as truth spread out before man like an open book in all phenomena of nature and history.

[3] An excellent exposition of mythical thinking in the ancient Near East is given in H. Frankfort, *et al.*, *Before Philosophy* (Pelican Books A198); first published as *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1946).

[4] For a detailed and thorough word study of the Geek term *semeion*, "sign", in the New Testament, as well as its Old Testament antecedent, *'ôth*, see K. H. Rengstorff's article in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, VII, 199-261. A collection of scholarly studies on miracles has been edited by C. F. D. Moule, *Miracles* (London: A. R. Mowbray, 1965). *Cf.* also Quell, Gottfried, "Das Phänomen des Wunders im Alten Testament", in *Verbannung und Heimkehr*, Arnulf Kuschke, Herausgeber (Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1961).

[5] The association of "signs and wonders" in both Testaments highlights this proximity of sign and miracle. *Cf.* S. Vernon McCasland, "Signs and Wonders," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 76 (1957), 149-152.

[6] The relationship between act and word has been debated by both theologians and philosophers. Some say that reality is basically non-verbal, but is interpreted secondarily by words. Others argue that reality is basically linguistic, and that man appropriates it in language symbols, or not at all. For our purpose it suffices to say that a sign can take the form of a word, as well as of a less overtly verbal act, but neither words nor acts are signs in themselves; they may light up with illuminating significance here or there, a significance that goes beyond their inherent natural meaning.

[7] The same is true of the relationship of the so-called symbolic acts of the prophets (e.g. Is. 20; Jer. 13; Ez. 5; etc.) and their verbal message. The acts are often interpreted, but they need no special interpretation, as they carry their message within themselves, for him for whom they become a sign. *Cf.* G. Fohrer, "Die Gattung der Berichte über symbolische Handlungen der Propheten," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 64 (1952), 101-120; also the same author, "Prophetie und Magie," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 78 (1966), 25-47; and G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, II, (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 95-98.

[8] This statement pertains to the relationship between sign and certainty; to the extent that something is a sign, it creates certainty. It does not mean that a specific person need be certain that something is a sign. If our earlier characterization of the sign as "revelation at the point of most intense impact on man" (above, note 1) is correct, one can think of a continuum of increasing impact, from that revelation which is relatively unfocused and general to that which is appropriated fully as being a sign. But to the extent that something is appropriated as a sign, to that extent it evokes certainty.

[9] L. Monden, S. J. in *Signs and Wonders* (New York: Desclee Company, 1966, first Flemish edition 1960), says that a miracle, to be acceptable to the Christian, must be free from qualities that contradict the salvation-oriented intent of divine revelation, on the negative side. Positively, the authenticity of a miracle requires three pre-conditions: 1. The person performing it must be himself one transformed by the Christian revelation. 2. The context must be fitting, which means that it must be above all, prayerful. 3. Its specific features, or content, must be in keeping with the symbolism of salvation (pp. 58-79). Some such context is expected for the sign also, though not every sign is a miracle. (In spite of many good insights, Monden's book can not be recommended here, as it is overtly tendentious. The Protestant reader is shocked to hear that genuine miracles, while abundant in Catholicism, are almost by definition absent from non-Catholic Christianity!)

[10] Some passages speak of the terrifying signs, particularly of the end time, performed by the anti-Godly powers (Rev. 12:1; 13:13; 16:14; 19:20; etc.). This is not surprising, as these signs point to a reality of Evil that is much more "diabolical" than the sum total of what we perceive as "evils" here and there in the world. In a different sense, every manifestation of God has something terrifying, awe-inspiring about it, so that those who see his holiness or glory break through may express their fear (e.g. Is. 6:5; Lk. 2:9) or even ask Jesus to depart (Lk. 5:8; Mt. 8:34). And yet man is attracted to this awe-inspiring God. *Cf.* Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, tr. by John W. Harvey (New York: Galaxy, 1958).

[11] *Cf.* G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, II, *op. cit.*, pp. 99ff.

[12] This is a strong statement, to make a much neglected point clear. In its details, the matter is more complex. Signs and miracles cannot be lumped together here, nor are either of them all of one kind. With respect to miracles, G. F. Woods, in a cautious and sober study, arrives at his own tentative conclusion that some Biblical miracles can perhaps make certain truths of the Christian faith more probable to us today ("The Evidential Value of the Biblical Miracles," *Miracles*, ed. Moule, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-32. C. S. Lewis' chapter "On Probability" in *Miracles* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), pp. 121-130, points in the same direction, though the author is more optimistic.

[13] Cf. John R. W. Stott, "Christ's Dramatized Claims," *Basic Christianity* (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1965), pp. 30-32.

[14] A most helpful and clarifying discussion of the possibility and the significance of miracles is the book of C. S. Lewis, just cited (see above, note 12). The real problem does not lie in this or that phenomenon and its evaluation, but in the total world view within which one approaches life. The concept of transcendence, of a reality beyond that which is accessible to the methodology of the natural and social scientist — no matter whether understood in Newtonian or Einsteinian terms — presents the basic problem to many in our time, for whom the historian of science Mary Hesse may be representative when she says: "The offence of particularity is still with us, whether these special acts violate or conform with the laws of nature. The fundamental problem is not about miracle, but about transcendence." ("Miracles and the Laws of Nature," *Miracles*, ed. Moule, *op. cit.*, p. 42.) For a defence of transcendence, and the subsequent need for revelation through the particular, see G. D. Kaufman, *Systematic Theology*, *op. cit.*, pp. 94-116, and throughout. An analysis of more recent tensions between transcendence and immanence within theology can be found in E. Farley, *The Transcendence of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1958).

[15] It is their person-directed quality that makes the recounting of signs seem as trivial as the sincerely meant — and thus received — love declarations of a young couple. Nevertheless, signs are not altogether private, but impress themselves at times upon a group, either as a group experience or as a number of sufficiently similar individual experiences to create a sense of communal unity among the individuals involved. The Mennonite migrations from the Soviet Union to America contain some moments — such as the unexpected possibility of certain groups encamped at the gates of Moscow in the 1920's to leave Russia, or the unexpected escape of some thousand Mennonites from Berlin to West Germany in 1945 — which were experienced by many as significant beyond the everydayish when interpreted in faith. While our time is reticent — and rightly so — to affirm the sign character of such experiences for their participants boldly, these are nevertheless recounted with awe as significant for faith. For the descendants of the participants, as well as for detached observers, they become no more than stories, such as Barbara Smucker's children's novel *Henry's Red Sea* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1955), based on the Berlin escape referred to. We can assume that, due to the reticence of our age in this respect, more sign experiences are treasured by individuals and groups than receive publicity.

[16] G. Kaufman's analysis of the inter-relation of revelation on the personal-individual level and revelation on the cultural-historical level applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the sign also. (*Op. cit.*, pp. 23-32). If tradition would not provide criteria for individual experience, the sign would become a phenomenon limited to personal and mystical piety, but that is patently not the case.

[17] When we speak of such faith as "second-hand," we do not at all mean that it is ungenuine, but rather, that it is based on trust in the authority of others. In a sense, most of our knowledge comes to us first as someone else's claim, and only a certain amount of it is eventually validated through personal experience. What is not so validated, need not be false; few of us validate through astronomical observation and calculation what we hold concerning the movement of heavenly bodies.

[18] C. S. Lewis (*op. cit.*, pp. 159ff.) makes the further claim that there is consistency between miracles and the nature of the world: "I contend that in these [Biblical] miracles alike the incarnate God does suddenly and locally something that God has done or will do in general." (p. 162). And: "Christ's isolation [as one doing unusual acts] is not that of a prodigy but of a pioneer" (p. 163). **Used by permission of Wm. Collin Son & Company Ltd.*

[19] See above, note 1.

5

Grace and New Beginnings

Peter Fast

Grace is the central theme in the Biblical understanding of God and his relationship to man and creation. The Bible tells how God is continually and faithfully at work in the world saving and redeeming the world. It is this purposeful, saving activity of God which the Biblical writers understand as the grace of God. Grace is an affirmation of our existence and our history. It is more. It is the basis of the Biblical view of history. Grace makes history possible because it opens up new possibilities for man to make new beginnings. From this emerges the confession of God's people that he is gracious and merciful, ready to forgive man's sins and to redirect his course so that he will not miss his goal and destiny.

It is clear that in the history of Christian thought, grace has not always been understood in this way. It is also evident that in the history of religions the Biblical faith isn't the only faith that has an understanding of God as a gracious God. Before embarking on a further explication of the Biblical view of grace and new beginnings, it will be helpful to see how Christians have sometimes understood the grace of God and to see what it means in theologies whose source of inspiration has not come from the Bible.

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I

We begin our descriptive analysis of grace of God theologies in a faith that has some distinct roots in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Islamic faith. In Islam, God (Allah) is frequently described by such "beautiful names" as the Merciful, the Most Compassionate, and the Forgiver. The inspired Scripture of the Muslims, the Koran, opens with these words:

> All praise belongs to God, Lord of the Universe
> The Merciful, The Forgiving (1:1).

The gracious God of Islam has given a revelation of himself to man in order that man might walk in the right path. History shows that mankind has repeatedly strayed from the right path marked out by God, as did the Jews and the Christians. But by renewed acts of divine mercy on the part of God, restoration has come through many prophets, like Moses and Jesus, Mohammed being the last in a long series.

The Muslim is made conscious of these gracious acts of God through the Koran and confessional statements. For example, the formula, "In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful," appears before each chapter in the Koran (with one exception!) and is repeated frequently in Muslim religious life in invocations and benedictions.

In Islam, God condescends in grace and mercy to show man the true way of salvation.

Various sects in Hinduism worship a God *(avatar)* who descends in order to provide salvation for his devotees. Songs written by the worshippers of Vishnu or Shiva, or one of their numerous *avatars,* express the faith that God's grace is unconditional and available for all who seek it. A devotee of Shiva expresses himself in these words:

> O! marvel unto men like me,
> The workings of Thy grace are wondrous!

The famous writing *Bhagavad Gita (Song of the Lord),* although not a theologically consistent piece of writing, generally extols the grace of God.

> Abandoning all duties,
> Come to me as thy sole refuge.
> From all sins I will rescue thee (18:66).

In this tradition the Alvar poets and the Tamil saints, the devotees of God, express their devotion to God who is able to free them from the inexorable law of birth and rebirth. In his grace he becomes their refuge.

Buddhism, originally, developed a system of self-deliverance in which God's intervention to help mankind was denied. In the course of time Buddhism developed a school of thought in the Mahayana tradition which stated that man is incapable of self-deliverance. The only way out of this degenerate and depraved world is to give up hope in one's self and to take refuge in the Buddha Amitabha. He has a superabundance of good works which he willingly gives to the sinner in order to save him. Amitabha made a vow that he would save all beings by his infinite merit. Through faith in Amitabha and through the recitation of his name, man has access to the Pure Land of heavenly bliss.

Some arguments of both the Hindu and the Buddhist theologians sound familiar to the Christian. They center in the problem of man's contribution to his salvation in a grace of God theology. Some Hindu theologians argued that God's grace comes to man only after a sincere effort on the part of man to follow the way of devotion to God. Similarly in the Buddhist camp some said that man has within himself the root of goodness and is thus capable of a reward, small as it may be.

Others in both Hinduism and Buddhism argued that a "works-righteousness" is entirely excluded. The faith and devotion that one brings to God is not something that contributes to man's salvation. Faith in God comes to man as a gift of God's grace, completely undeserved on the part of man. This understanding of grace is often compared to the way a mother cat carries her kittens. The kitten is carried out of the burning house (symbol for this world) by the mother cat with no effort on the part of the kitten. The kitten passively surrenders completely to the mother cat. Likewise, all that a person can do for his salvation is to surrender himself passively to God. The true worshipper doesn't want to ascribe anything to himself. Everything depends on God's grace to whom he humbly submits.

One may contrast with this the way a monkey carries her young. The baby monkey is actively engaged with its

mother in order for it to be saved out of the burning house. It has to cling to the body of the mother. Likewise, a man has to bring something to God (faith or devotion) before the grace of God becomes effective in him.

These, in very brief compass, are some of the grace of God theologies operating in non-Biblical systems of faith. Although devotion to God is expressed in different ways, the central motif in these theologies is that one cannot find liberation by one's own strength or knowledge. Ultimately salvation is a work of grace, a gift of God.

These grace of God theologies exhibit striking parallels in the theological language they use and the religious attitudes they instill in the hearts of the worshippers, to much of the Christian's understanding of Biblical faith. The relationships are complex. Similarity in language and attitude, however, doesn't mean identity. One needs to take the content of theological language into consideration in order to understand the parallels.

II

God's grace in the Bible can further be clarified by seeing what grace has meant in the history of Christian thought, particularly at the time of the Reformation, cursory as such a discussion here has to be. For a fuller treatment of this topic with particular reference to the contribution of Menno Simons, the reader is referred to an article by J. A. Oosterbaan, "Grace in Dutch Mennonite Theology", in *A Legacy of Faith* edited by Cornelius J. Dyck.

It was Menno who clearly saw that grace does not begin at the point where God forgives man his sins, but at the point of creation itself.[1] God has always been gracious. The quality of grace is not an addition to God which he assumes at the appropriate time in his relationship to man. Nor is grace primarily a disposition of God towards man, however favourable that disposition might be. Menno's concept of God's grace is a dynamic understanding of God's power to create anew. Out of grace God created the first Adam. Out of grace he creates the new man. God's creating love sent Christ into the world to continue God's work of making new.

This work is God's work accomplished by a free and sovereign Lord. No institution is needed to dispense grace. Grace is not a quantity that is dispensable. For the Anabaptists, grace was the context in which one lives, involving the totality of man's life and existence, not only his "soul" life, but his physical, bodily life as well. The ethical life of man becomes a significant facet of living in grace. Ethics are neither incidental nor insignificant, but central to a life lived in God's grace.

Freeing God's grace from an institutional framework enables Menno to view God in a Biblical way. God is the God of changing history rather than the changeless One who does not become involved in the ever-changing stream of man's existence. Menno's theology of grace leaves room for history, for development and change. It is not surprising that the Anabaptists emphasized the importance of the Holy Spirit in the Trinitarian context.

In contrast to this, already in Tertullian, grace came to be viewed as an entity, different and superior to man's nature, like the superiority of the permanent to the transient. The mediation of grace was thought of as an infilling or infusion making man the object of grace. Grace could be dispensed by the Church through the instrumentality of the sacraments. The institutional aspects of the Church became important because assurance of salvation came in the form of various sacramental acts. Grace was an effect of the sacraments. Grace thus is institutionalized and controlled by the Church, losing its dynamic, historical orientation. It came to be seen more in psychological terms than in historical terms. Theologians were interested in trying to define the relation between man's will and the offer of God's free grace. This problem was similar to the one encountered by the Hindu and Buddhist theologian who worked in a grace of God theology.

Luther decidedly turned against every attempt to work out an agreement between the unconditional grace of God and the nature of man's will. On the part of man Luther saw only resistance and opposition to grace. Grace is God's favourable disposition. It can never become a characteristic of man. Christ himself is God's grace for us.

In both Roman Catholicism and the Lutheran Reformation grace has become too narrow and exclusive. In Catholicism grace is an entity which is dispensed by the Church. In Lutheranism it came to be seen too narrowly as God's favourable disposition to the sinner. Thus Luther can find no

positive place for law in the history of God redeeming his people.

These narrow conceptions of grace inhibit us from seeing the grace of God in the broader context of creation and history.

III

The Bible sees the grace of God as the history of God's dealings with man and his creation. It must be understood from the outset that the grace of God does not form one particular theme or doctrine alongside of which one may add many more. Grace is primarily an historical way of experiencing God. In Biblical faith, the grace of God is more than a favourable sentiment or an attitude of God toward men. Grace is God himself being God for us. It is God's presence with man, his active participation in the affairs of men which sustains man's existence and gives it shape. The Biblical writers have always understood God's grace as not being an inherent quality in man. Nor is it something that God creates and dispenses at his will or through the instrumentality of the Church. Neither is it best understood as a fund of merit attained by Christ which God now makes available to sinful man.

In Biblical faith God's grace begins at the point of creation. God calls creation into being as an act of grace. There is nothing that exists in or of itself nor is there anything that continues to exist in or of itself. All that is, including man, has a dependent relationship to God. The Biblical writers cannot comprehend a world without God. God for them was not a metaphysical abstraction. Nor was he the "watchmaker" God of the Deists who creates the universe like a watchmaker fashions a watch. After the watch is made it has no longer any need for the watchmaker.

The Biblical view sees man as having been created by God's grace. God is for man. Our life is the result of God's gracious act of creating life. Man finds his destiny and goal in faithful response to God in love and hope, in love because God has shown himself to be for man and in hope because man stands looking forward to the future. God's grace does not cut man off and leave him futureless. If that were

the case then man would have reason to despair. Now, because of God's grace, man can be open to the future in expectation and trust in God. God is not only the ground of our being. He also has time for us, a fact supremely demonstrated in Jesus Christ.

Viewing grace as God's loving concern for this world and as his guiding presence among men, sheds light on certain traditional ways of thinking about God's grace. It cannot be thought of in degrees, as though God gives more of his grace at one time than at another. Nor can it be thought of as though a person can possess more of his grace at one time than at another. Grace as God's active participation in the world operates on the all-or-nothing principle. Either God is all for us or he isn't for us at all. The grace of God is the context in which we live out our lives and in which the universe unfolds. Thus seeing God's grace as a quantity which is dispensable according to the need of the situation is too narrow a view. It fails to emphasize adequately the dynamic, historical character of God's grace.

God's active presence in history also illuminates the Christian doctrine of merit. Christ's redeeming work cannot be thought of primarily in terms of achieved merits enough to pay God the debt which sinful man owed him. It is a way of explaining the unmeritorious nature of God's grace. The apostle Paul saw the necessity of affirming this fact when he, as a result of Christ's work, found it imperative to exchange the principle of works with the Biblical principle of faith. Christ redeems because in Christ God opened up a new way for man. This was God's way of righting the wrong. It is God's way of saying that the future lies open before man. God has not condemned man. He has provided a way out of man's dilemma. Jesus Christ was a free and gracious act on the part of God. From this point of view it makes sense to talk about the free, unmerited grace of God.

But it needs to be emphasized that the grace of God did not begin with Christ. Nor does it begin at the point where man is sinner and requires God's grace to restore him to a righteous position before God. Creation itself is already an act of God's grace. The New Testament writers see Jesus Christ as the culmination of a long series of God's acts in history.

To say that God's grace is God active in this world opening up the possibility of new beginnings for man, is to hear God's word of forgiveness. This word has become necessary

because man is in bondage and experiences judgment. He is missing the mark for which he was created. Israel was assured of forgiveness because of her relationship to God, the Lord of history, who can break the bonds that bind Israel and restore her. Likewise Jesus' words of forgiveness open up ways of recovery of wholeness, of health. Both Israel and the Church have used various ways to describe the consequences of sin, the necessity of repentance and the new conditions which God's word of forgiveness creates for man. Reconciliation and justification are some of the ways of describing the new conditions.

God's forgiving grace is the basis of man's freedom. As facing the future, he need not be burdened down excessively by the past. The Christian need not carry the burden of guilt of his past failures. Nor need he stand before the future in fear and trepidation lest he will not be able to survive the consequences of his present actions and decisions. He need not sink into the mire of despair even in the face of the threat of failure. A Christian knows that the judgment on his failure and sin cannot be that of final condemnation by which his future is denied. He knows that the last word to be spoken over him is not the word of the law, but the word of grace. Law speaks the ultimate word of condemnation upon every infraction. It does not know what it means to forgive and to admit that every person has the right to a future.

The redemptive movement of God's grace in the world gives shape and meaning to human existence. It creates a community of faith where grace is the motivation for carving out a way of life. This community of faith cannot speak of perfection. Were it not for God's grace it would long have ceased to exist as a viable organism in this world. It can identify with the lostness of humanity and its despair because it knows what it is like to live without a purpose and a goal. It can tell the lost that their condition is not eternally determined by their despair in not having a future. In love and compassion this community of faith is always open to the lost. It creatively seeks out new beginnings for them which will liberate them from bondage and oppression.

God's redeeming movement in the world is a hopeful movement. It keeps the future open for new beginnings. It gives man the opportunity to re-structure his life in such a way that he will not ultimately miss his goal and destiny.

In the Bible we have seen God as a kind and gracious God who is able to change with the changing circumstances in order to give us this opportunity of making new beginnings with him and with our fellow men.

IV

In conclusion it must be stated that this perspective of the grace of God, active in creation, present in history creating new possibilities for man, is a faith perspective. The Christian believes that God works purposefully in history which is moving toward a divine goal. The Christian lives his life in this context of faith. He believes that herein lies his salvation and the salvation of mankind. The call for the Christian is to live faithfully in this dynamic of God's grace.

This faith perspective cannot be taken for granted. It is a matter of deliberate choice and belief for there are other ideologies and faith perspectives, including other grace of God theologies, available for man, as well.

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[1] Cornelius J. Dyck, ed., *A Legacy of Faith* (Newton: Faith and Life Press, 1962), p. 181.

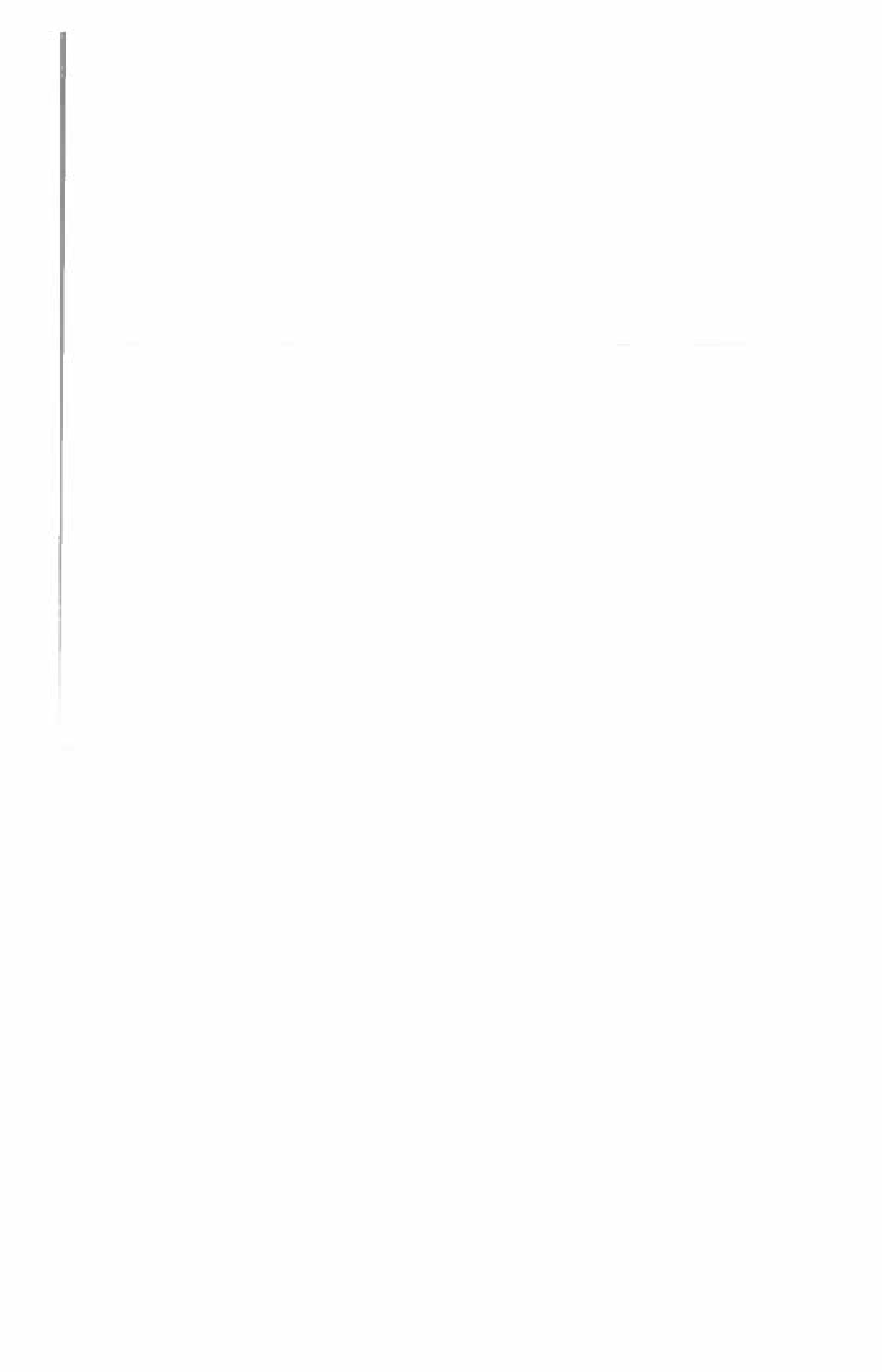
I

Roots of Faithfulness

The Bible

A Common Heritage

A Caring Community



6

The Old And The New

John Friesen

How do we relate to the past and the future? Do we feel bound by the past? Do we fear the future? Do we attempt to live in a present which rejects the past and denies the future? Our view of history, of our past and future, is crucial for our life of faithfulness to Christ.

What is history? According to some, history is a chronicle of the events, people and movements of the past. They equate history with tradition. They see history as static, as "back there", and lifeless. According to this view, history for Mennonites would be the pilgrimage of our people going back to pioneer days, to Russia, to Prussia and to Holland. It also would mean village life, special food, Low German language and all those characteristics which constitute the Mennonite way of life. Is this what we mean when we speak about history?

In the following discussion, I shall consider two dimensions of the topic of history. The first discussion will be on the nature of history. This will involve asking what role the past and the future play in the life of the present. The second discussion will be on our heritage, focusing especially on the Christian life of the sixteenth century Anabaptists. We will attempt to see what their quest for faithfulness has to say to our quest.

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History

The first discussion will deal with the constitutive elements in the topic of history, including the past, the present and the future. Of crucial importance is their interrelationship. How does the past relate to the future? Of what significance is the present? What does all of this mean for the life of the Christian community? To accomplish this, an attempt will be made to draw the basic framework and the essential relationships from the Biblical witness.

History: Openness to the New

We tend to resist change. We become satisfied with situations in which we find ourselves. We feel comfortable with our ideas, our life style, our standard of living, and our church. We fear new ideas and movements which are sweeping over us today. Why?

Often we resist change simply because we fear the unknown. We become comfortable with the present in spite of its inadequacies. We learn to live with injustice, lovelessness, lack of concern for each other. We fear the idea of disturbing all this and entering a new order, because the new holds forth so many uncertainties.

Sometimes we resist change because of our vested interests in the way things are. Every system, every society, and every church has those who stand to lose when change occurs. In Jesus' day, there were many religious leaders who feared loss of prestige, power and vested interest in the new order which Jesus proclaimed. That is probably also often the case when we are confronted with change.

At other times we resist change for theological reasons. We feel that the institutions and ideas of the Church are good because they seemed good in the past. We argue that what God could use in the past, He can surely use in the present, because God does not change. We believe that God is unchanging, and so we conclude that our expression of faithfulness to Him ought also to remain the same in the future. Our static view of God results in a static view of reality in which there is no room for a future that is new. It then seems that change is "of the evil one".

Does such a static view agree with scripture? On the one hand, Jesus challenged the comfortable status quo with his message. His message of a new community challenged the existence of the old community. It was clear from the Jews' response to Jesus that they feared his message, and they dealt with their fear by killing him.

The Church has been willing to admit that the advent of Jesus initiated change. But this change has usually been seen as a one-time event. The salvation story was concluded in the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus. The change which Jesus initiated need not, can not and must not be expected today. We are simply called to be faithful to the first century message.

There is some truth in this view. However, the New Testament writers add to this. Jesus himself refers to a "comforter" who will come to lead the believers. The implication is that the believing community will be faced with new challenges, which they do not yet anticipate. In other words, the promise of a comforter calls the Church to be open to new leadings.

The New Testament writers anticipated that even Jesus would reveal himself in a new way in the future. For them the salvation story of Jesus was a paradox. On the one hand they acknowledged the work of reconciliation as complete and fully adequate. On the other hand, they were still open to the new coming of Jesus in the future. For them, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus were of ultimate significance, and yet they acknowledged that new revelations could be anticipated.

The orientation of the New Testament writers to the future is one of openness and expectation. They expected something new to happen. For them the new day, or new age, held the promise of great things. For them life was not static, defensive, or a mere repetition of the past. The new life in Christ allowed them to expect great things to happen to them, because they knew that Jesus was also the Lord of the new age.

In reading the book of Acts, it seems that to be open to the future was a very important dimension of what it meant for them to be faithful to Christ. Only as they were open to the future, were they able to be in mission, going where the spirit would lead them. Only as they were open to the future were they able to forgive each other and take

up a new life together in service to Christ. So to a great extent their faithfulness to Christ was dependent upon openness to new challenges and leadings of the future.

History: Dialogue with the Old

Every Christian community needs to be in dialogue with its past, because the present is built upon the shoulders of the past. All institutions, languages, categories of thought, and expressions of faithfulness are a heritage from the past. We have been shaped by others. We are not self-created. We therefore have the option of knowing the past, or remaining unaware of it.

Knowledge will not guarantee appreciation of the past. Knowledge may in fact cause some to despise their past and try to adopt another as their own. However, in so doing they are denying themselves. They are refusing to see themselves as they really are. They are also refusing to hear what the past is trying to tell them. Thus they are condemning themselves to repeat the mistakes of the past, and even failing to benefit from the wisdom it offers.

Those who can understand and appreciate the past can become free from it. The determinism of false decisions of the past can be avoided, and the freedom to make new commitments in the future can be attained. The Christian community can be inspired to go beyond the past into new areas of discipleship. Thus man can choose whether he wishes to be free or determined.

This leads us to the second aspect in our discussion of relating to the past. Not only does the knowledge of the past come to us. Not only are we informed about the past. But when we study the past we also get involved in the issues and struggles of that past. For example when we study the Anabaptist Reformation, we get into Conrad Grebel's struggle about the nature of the Church; Pilgram Marpeck's struggle about faithfulness in a government office; Jacob Hutter's quest for a reconciling community. Their questions become our questions. Their options also become our options. They challenge us.

For this reason study of the past is not a safe study. We run the risk of being changed. We run the risk that the past

may analyze issues in ways that we have not considered before. We run the risk that the past may judge our efforts and insights as inadequate. We run the risk that the past may make new persons out of us who may not "fit in" any more.

Jesus, in his life and ministry, identified with his Jewish past. His harsh sayings to and about the Pharisees did not indicate that Jesus rejected that past. Rather he rejected the Pharisees' interpretation of that past. He argued that the law and the prophets had laid the ground-work for his message, but that the Pharisees had obscured that. Jesus very clearly identified with the God of Abraham, and called him his Father. He identified with the faith of the Patriarchs, the critique of the prophets, and the intent of the law. However, Jesus did not woodenly recapitulate the past. He set it into a new context and gave a new meaning to the past. In this task he saw himself in dialogue with the law and the prophets. His message went beyond the message of the Old Covenant and initiated a new age and a new community.

We can also look at the relationship of the present to the past from the standpoint of the activity of God. In the second century Church there was an attempt to view Christ as completely unrelated to the God of the Old Covenant. Marcion, for example, argued that the creator God of the Old Covenant was an angry God who judged man on the basis of the Law. The Father of Jesus, he said, was a God of love, who forgave man even when he did not deserve to be forgiven. He concluded that there must be two Gods, and the creator God should be rejected in favour of the loving God.

The Church gradually saw that such a rejection of the past was not possible for them. The Father of Jesus Christ was not only a God of the "now", but he was also the God of the past, including creation. Thus to deny the God of the forefathers, was to deny Jesus himself. Conversely, to accept the Lordship of Jesus for the present, meant also to accept the Lordship of the same Jesus over the past.

For us this seems to suggest that if our concern is faithfulness to Jesus Christ, then we need to take seriously the faithfulness of those whom God has led in the past. To deny that God led men in the past, may deny that he can lead us in the present. In our encounter with God, his Son, his Spirit and his faithful followers from the past, may come

his message which will free us to face the challenge of the future.

Renewal: Tension Between the Old and the New[1]

We have seen that history involves both a dialogue with the past, and an openness to the future. In that tension between past and future we find ourselves. Thus the focus of our interest in history is on the present. Our primary concern in this discussion is the Christian Church's faithfulness to its Lord. The Church is not called to be static, but dynamic. It is not called to be closed, but open. It is not called to preserve its own purity, but to be in mission. Thus a faithful church is one which is continually open to be renewed by its Lord for new mission.

The Anabaptist Heritage

What did our Anabaptist forefathers believe?[2] We know the teachings that have come to us in the preaching of the Church. However, during the past number of decades, Mennonites have been restudying their past, especially the sixteenth century. There has been a new attempt to discover what the early Anabaptists believed, what they did, how they interpreted scripture, and why they were persecuted. What can we now conclude from these studies?[3] Is there something in the Anabaptists' faith and life which may help us in our quest for faithfulness today?

The Church: The Old and the New Community

Originally the early Anabaptist leaders were Catholics caught up in church renewal. Most of them became followers or partners of either Luther or Zwingli, the major reformers. Their first love became the renewal of the Church of Jesus Christ. Their vision was not for a separate

church, but a church open to the leading of Christ. Thus they read and re-read scripture to discover what faithfulness to Christ meant.

A major conviction (perhaps *the* major conviction), was that Jesus became incarnate in order to create a new community. When Jesus called people to believe in him and to follow him, he also called them to become part of a new community. It seemed to the Anabaptists that the scripture passages dealing with discipleship, reconciliation, and leadership could best be interpreted if one understood Jesus as founding a new community under his Lordship.

In Zurich in 1523-25 this conviction of the centrality of the Church in the Christian gospel began to emerge in the dialogues between Zwingli and some of his followers. Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz, George Blaurock and others challenged Zwingli to reform the Church according to the wishes of the town council. Zwingli, together with his dedicated followers, among whom were Grebel, Manz and Blaurock, had concluded that according to scripture, belief in Christ required taking up a new way of life in a new community which acknowledged the lordship of Christ.

To them it also seemed that according to scripture, to become part of the new community required commitment by the individual. No one was "born" into the Church. Infants could not be baptized into the new community because they were incapable of committing their lives. Thus the Bible study led these men to the conclusion that infant baptism perverted the gospel at the very core. It distorted the call, the nature of man's response, and the nature of faithfulness. To Grebel and Manz, and even to Zwingli at first, it seemed clear that infant baptism would have to be given up in exchange for baptism of adults who had truly committed themselves. Only these persons should be baptized who had clearly given up the priorities of the old community for those of the faithful Church.

When Zwingli tried to abolish infant baptism in accordance with his understanding of scripture, the town council of Zurich refused to allow it, because they feared that anarchy would result. The civic order would be disrupted, they argued. For them infant baptism and citizenship were very closely related.[1] Consequently the town council refused to allow infant baptism to be abolished.

After some hesitation Zwingli co-operated with the town

council, and baptized infants. To Grebel this decision by Zwingli was a denial of the authority of scripture. Even more seriously, it was a denial of the lordship of Christ. It seemed to him and his associates that Zwingli had placed the Church under the authority of the town council instead of under the authority of Christ. They refused to baptize their children in order to affirm their belief that the true Church was a church of committed adults.

On January 18, 1525 the town council of Zurich, at Zwingli's insistence, ordered all parents to baptize their children or suffer banishment or punishment. Three days later, these brethren met, and realized that a biblical view of the Church could not exist in the established church. They decided that they would rather be faithful to Christ than to the state. Thus they baptized each other, served each other communion, and took upon themselves a life of faithfulness which they knew would include persecution. Yet they went forth joyfully, proclaiming the new community that God had created. Thus an Anabaptist congregation was begun.

The tension that developed was not between state and church. The tension was between an unfaithful church and a faithful church; between a community which refused to acknowledge the lordship of Christ, and a community which accepted it. They saw this tension in the context of Paul's terminology of the "principalities and powers" opposed to God. They saw the Church as a new community, visible, and living all dimensions of its corporate and individual lives according to the priorities of the new community of Christ. For them faithfulness to Christ included commitment both to him and to his body, the new community. The one was inseparable from the other.

Commitment: The Old and the New Man

The concepts of commitment and conversion probably sound very familiar to North Americans. At evangelistic crusades people are called to make a "decision" for Christ. Those who make such a decision are said to be "converted".

However, these ideas of commitment are heavily influenced by the North American culture. This makes it difficult to appreciate fully what the Anabaptists meant

by these concepts. The North American culture emphasizes the individual, his efforts, his search for meaning, his rights. Out of this view have sprung the romanticized rugged individual, "and the myths that promise to all that they can pull themselves up by their bootstraps". Poverty is considered the consequence of laziness. Sharing is seen as somewhat cowardly, or at best as less than manly. In short the culture, according to its popularized propaganda, extolls individualism.

In evangelism we meet terms and phrases such as "making a personal decision", "personal faith in Jesus", and "making things right between you and Jesus". Evangelistic campaigns may have altar calls which are designed to "bring people to Jesus", after which the new born Christian is encouraged to join the church of his choice. This almost seems to make the Church optional for coming into the right relationship to Christ.

For the Anabaptists the Church was central to the New Testament message. For them the gospel meant that men were called to become part of a new community whose Lord was Jesus Christ. They emphasized clearly that the commitment was a personal decision which could not be inherited nor forced. But the personal commitment was a commitment both to Jesus Christ and to a new community; both to the head and to the body, to use biblical language. As the Schleitheim Confession of 1527 implies the two commitments were inseparable.

This dual commitment to the community and to its Lord was central to the Anabaptist's understanding of what it meant to become a new man in Christ. According to scripture, they concluded that the chief characteristic of the old man, the man outside of Christ, was selfishness and self-centeredness. From Adam down through the ages, sinful man had been more concerned for his own welfare, than for the welfare of his neighbor. The natural man protected himself and his property from others. The natural man's love was *eros* (love for self) rather than *agape* (unselfish love).

So the Anabaptists concluded that a person who was turned around (converted) by Jesus Christ, also had his self-centeredness changed to selflessness. In their view the person who was committed to self was less than God had intended him to be. He was not fully human. Only the person

who had been opened to live for others; who had been opened to commit himself to others; who had committed himself to a new community; only he had become a new man in Christ.

Anabaptists expressed this concretely in a number of ways. First, in a committed community they felt that one expression of unselfish love was to share with one another. They found both biblical and practical reasons for sharing. They were convinced that a Christian community ought to overcome selfishness at both the spiritual and material level. The material was certainly no less significant than the spiritual. The Christian community was not only a spiritual body. As the incarnate body of Christ had been physical, and had lived in history, so the present body of Christ was also physical, identifiable and historical. Thus the physical and material dimensions of the Christian ought also to express unselfish love.

From various documents it is evident that the Swiss Brethren were free to share with each other as needs arose. The Anabaptists in Moravia believed that Jesus' admonitions to share were not only intended for circumstances of special need. They became convinced that biblical sharing ought to become a style of life. Thus they organized their Church into a commune, in which all material possessions were held in common, and where everyone used according to need. As a result of the sharing in the community, many were freed to carry the good news of the gospel to all parts of southern Germany and Austria.

Despite the Dutch Anabaptists' shattering experience in the Muensterite Kingdom in 1533-35, we see Menno Simons developing a view of the Church in which the communal commitment is very important. For Menno, commitment to the Church meant willingness to share at numerous levels, including brotherly admonition and material sharing. This has been expressed in the history of the Dutch-German Mennonites through various agencies designed to help the needy.

Second, the Anabaptists noticed that according to Jesus' teaching, unselfish love extended also to the enemy. The new man in Christ could not hate or kill those who hated him. To return evil for evil was the way of the old man in the old community of law. Jesus had shown that the new man overcomes evil with good. To return evil for evil perpetuated evil in a cycle of retribution. To return good for evil stopped that cycle and initiated reconciliation.

Third, they realized that the new man does not live for himself. His mission is not to preserve his own self, his goodness, or his purity. When the new man commits himself to the new community, he commits his life to service and mission.

A striking characteristic of the Anabaptists is their mobility, their freedom, and their dedication to share their new life. The Swiss fanned out in all directions from Zurich to Bern, St. Gall, Tyrol and South Germany. The Anabaptist leaders at the Martyr's Synod in 1527 assigned each other states and cantons in which they were to preach. The Anabaptists in Moravia sent men out to Tyrol and South Germany. Many of them never returned, but were burned, drowned or beheaded. Menno Simons travelled all the way from Amsterdam to Danzig, preaching and organizing new congregations.

The Anabaptists seemed to live for the purpose of calling people to become new men and new women. The gospel which they proclaimed was about the possibility of a new life in this world. They called men to a new life of faithfulness under new lordship, new priorities, in a new community.

Peace: The Old and the New Age

When the Anabaptists struggled to express their vision of a faithful church, they discovered that their church was very threatening to the state and to the other churches. They were constantly accused of being revolutionaries; of destroying the order of society. It seemed that every established authority feared a biblical Church.

At first the Anabaptists were puzzled by this response. In 1524 Felix Manz wrote to the town council of Zurich, declaring that his desire was simply to live according to the teachings of scripture. He said that he had no interest in taking up the sword or in preaching revolution.

During the same year Conrad Grebel wrote to Thomas Muentzer, a south German reformer who was preaching revolution. In his letter Grebel complimented Muentzer for his witness to the teaching of scripture. Grebel concluded,

however, that he was very disturbed to hear that Muentzer was willing to take up the sword to bring about the new Kingdom. Grebel pointed out that the use of the sword was completely inconsistent with life in the new age in Christ. The sword belonged to the old age. It was used by those who refused to acknowledge the Lordship of Christ.

Thus we see that the tension between the Church and the world focused very quickly upon the sword. The Roman Church, as well as Luther and Zwingli, argued that the state had been ordained by God to use the sword to control evil. According to the Catholics, the secular ruler was the representative of God ordained to establish order in the "secular" realm. According to Luther the rulers established order in the "outer" realm. To them the peace stance of the Anabaptists was unchristian, because by it the Anabaptists were despising and resisting God's representative.

To the Anabaptists this theory seemed like an excuse to live in an unchristian manner. They agreed there should be governments. They also realized that governments would use the sword. But they disagreed that the Church was called by Christ to preserve order in society. According to their understanding of the New Testament, the Church had a different task in society; a task which might even challenge and threaten unregenerated society.

They believed that the Church was called to be faithful to Jesus Christ. One dimension of that was "to love your enemies", and "to do good to them that hate you and despitefully use you". They saw no biblical justification for taking up the sword either to defend themselves or to protect society. They saw that there were two ages, each with its priorities. They discovered that the priorities of the new age clashed with the priorities of the old. To the world it seemed that they were revolutionaries.

The Anabaptists fully realized that by taking up Jesus' way of love and reconciliation they might be killed by the world as Jesus was killed. They realized that faithfulness to Christ would not guarantee them physical protection, nor an easy life. They realized that the conflict between the two ages might make them homeless and leave them without citizenship. Many native Swiss were banished from their cantons. Yet many were willing to accept joyfully a life of suffering faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

Reconciliation: An Old and a New History

Reconciliation changes the past and allows a new future to come forth. Through reconciliation, that which breaks fellowship ceases to have that effect. The old past becomes a new past with a new future. The former enmity becomes the basis for renewed fellowship.

Reconciliation is emphasized time and again by the Anabaptists. In the context of the Christian community they referred to it as the "rule of Christ", and based it on Matthew 18:15-20. The Anabaptists recognized that the new community would continue to be tempted by the sinfulness of the old community. They realized that the Church might sin and become unfaithful. Hatred, jealousy and misunderstandings might arise even within the Church.

They were, however, firmly convinced that the Church had been called to precisely this task of reconciling broken fellowship. They felt that a faithful community was challenged continually to heal the broken relationships within itself in the context of trust, openness and sharing. They were convinced that those who allowed themselves to be led by Christ and his spirit would be brought back into fellowship.

This conviction was based on their view of Christ and his work. They said Christ was born a man in order to reconcile man to God. As such he fully revealed God, and yet he also fully identified with man and his plight. Jesus became man to reveal that God's new way of dealing with man's disobedience and selfishness was not to punish him according to the magnitude of his sin. Rather, Jesus came to show that reconciliation was only possible if the one who had been sinned against (God) was ready to forgive man's sinfulness. Jesus' life and death indicated that to be ready to forgive meant to serve, to love unselfishly, and to be willing to die.

The life of Jesus also exemplified that some would reject the offer of reconciliation. They would be closed to restoring fellowship. They would rather destroy the one who loved them. Thus reconciliation could not be forced upon man. Others might respond to the call and be forgiven. Upon being forgiven, their past would be changed. Their past disobedience which kept them from God would be forgiven, and the resulting reconciliation would become the basis for

fellowship with God. At this point they felt that the spirit of God created them anew and "turned them around". Their past life of selfishness was now changed into a new life of mission. Thus for them to kill an enemy was a denial of Christ's message, and a denial of their discipleship.

The Anabaptists looked to the resurrection as the supreme event announcing to all the world that a new age had begun. The resurrection proclaimed that Jesus' life and message was not only human wisdom and effort, but that in him God was working to create a new community. Thus Menno Simons could speak about "walking in the resurrection." The resurrection had become the universal sign of God's message to all men. In the resurrection, God was calling all men to a new life of faithfulness to Christ.

The challenge from the past and the future comes to the Christian community today. Will it be found faithful or unfaithful?

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[1] For the basic categories of history I am indebted to Dr. Egon W. Gerdes, Associate Professor of Historical Theology, Garrett Theological Seminary.

[2] The term "Anabaptist" is used here to refer to those radical reformers in the sixteenth century who seem most clearly to be the founders of the churches now called Mennonite, Hutterite and Amish. Thus the present usage excludes many in the Radical Reformation of the sixteenth century who went in other directions.

[3] One of the best summaries of recent Anabaptist studies is: Cornelius J. Dyck, editor, *An Introduction to Mennonite History*, Scottdale: Herald Press, 1967.

[4] An excellent discussion of the social threat that the Anabaptists posed to the structure of 16th century Europe is: Walter Klaassen, "The Nature of the Anabaptist Protest", *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, XLV, 1971, 291-311.

I

Roots of Faithfulness

The Bible

A Common Heritage

A Caring Community

The Church As Community

Adolf Ens

God's call to Abram (Gen. 12:1-3) came to him in the context of a specifically named community: "your country and your kindred and your father's house". God's *command* to Abram was to leave that community. But it was not through a solitary faithful individual that God meant to accomplish his purpose, for the command to leave one community is coupled with the *promise* to create a new community: "I will make of you a great nation." This promise to create the new community was solemnized with an "everlasting covenant" (Gen. 17:7; *cf.* 15:18) which included not only Abram, but his descendants after him throughout their generations. The *sign* of this covenant between God and his chosen people was circumcision (Gen. 17:11). The *new beginning* thus made in human history was the beginning of a *new community*. It was in the context of this new community that God's subsequent self-revelations were made and received, interpreted and proclaimed, applied or rejected.

The community of this "covenant people", Israel, preserved and recorded the memory of God's acts in its midst and on its behalf, and of God's self-revelation to it through individuals within the community. By thus developing and preserving its history the community of the covenant people developed a *tradition*, which came to have

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a greater and greater influence in shaping the community in subsequent generations. But God continued to deal in new ways with his community and reveal himself in new ways to it. His supreme revelation in Jesus Christ was made in the context of the covenant community and first of all to the members of that community. But before the close of Jesus' ministry, God's revelation through him had so altered the concept of "people of God", that he laid the foundations of a new community through a "new covenant" (I Cor. 11:25; *cf.* II Cor. 3:6, Heb. 9:15).

The prophets from Moses to John the Baptist responded to God's specific call to them because they were deeply aware of their general calling, as members of the covenant community, to be God's people. Jesus called individuals from within this community to be his followers (e.g., Mark 1:15, 19, 2:14). But prior to that he had already announced the new community into which these individuals were to be incorporated, the "kingdom of God" (Mark 1:15). This new community, in contrast to the communities of disciples of other rabbis or would-be messiahs (Acts 4:35-39), survived the death of its leader. And after his resurrection the community of Jesus' disciples, like the earlier covenant community of Israel, preserved and recorded the memory of the things which God in Christ did and spoke among them.

Eventually both covenant communities gave a special significance to a portion of their written records, which thus became their Bible. But alongside of this 'normative' tradition, they also preserved and continued to add to a less normative and less universal tradition, both written and unwritten. The Church of today needs to remind itself that it was the covenant communities which preceded and produced both the Bible and the tradition. The role of individuals and of the Holy Spirit in this process is of course acknowledged, but it is the role of the community in creating Bible and tradition that has too often been neglected.

The function of the community in mediating God's call is not limited to this indirect, though important, contribution of the past, however. As it was the community that recorded and preserved Scripture and tradition in the past, so it is also the community that studies, interprets and applies that Scripture and tradition today. It may be individuals whom the Spirit leads across new frontiers in our time, but it is the community of believers who are called on to test whether the leading was indeed of the Holy Spirit or of some other

spirit (I Jn. 4:1; I Cor. 14:29). For example, the many questions raised by the accepting of Gentiles into the Church had not been answered by Jesus during his teaching ministry among his disciples. When, after Pentecost, non-Jews joined the believers, some way had to be found to reconcile the apparently conflicting directions of the Spirit's concrete leading in Antioch and the requirements of earlier revelation supported by Jewish-Christian leaders. It was the gathered community that made specific adaptations of the received tradition to meet the new situation (Acts 15). Even this Jerusalem decision was not a final one for all time and all places. The Christian community at Corinth consulted Paul further about at least one aspect of it ("abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols" Acts 15:29; *cf.* I Cor. 8:1-13; 10:18-33), which resulted in a further modification of the Church's position on this point.

This studying and interpreting Scripture together by the community, especially on points where the Church lacked clarity because of the new context in which it lived, was a feature of the first centuries after the New Testament era. It became a feature again in the Reformation era, when a renewed emphasis on the authority of Scripture demanded its understanding and application in the sixteenth century context, and when its availability in the vernacular made such community study possible once more. The earliest Anabaptist "confession of faith" (Schleitheim, 1527) characteristically described itself as "brotherly union of a number of children of God concerning seven articles." It was a product of the community's study of the Scriptures to achieve unity of mind on current issues of local significance. Such "corporate exposition of Scripture by the band of believers" was even more characteristic of the Marpeck circle of South German Anabaptists.[1] It was an underlying principle of the disputations between the Swiss Brethren and the Zwinglian Reformers, where Balthasar Hubmaier spelled it out very concretely on the basis of I Cor. 14.[2] In this way the community of believers continues to have a vital role in mediating God's call to faithfulness.

The community can also be very specific in extending God's call. It can single out individuals and call them to specific functions. The earliest Christian communities did this. At Jerusalem the "brethren" were urged to "pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom" to be appointed to specific tasks in the congregation (Acts 6:3). At Antioch the gathered,

worshiping community, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit "set apart" Barnabas and Saul for a special work (Acts 13:2f.). Elsewhere "the churches" elected two unnamed "brothers" to join Paul and Titus in the task of handling the relief offering of the Corinthian church (II Cor. 8, esp. vs. 19, 23). Note that in none of these examples the assigned task was designated as a specifically "spiritual" one; two of them, in fact, dealt with financial or material aid.

The congregation thus functions as a community of discernment not only in matters of testing the spirits and interpreting Scripture, but also in recognizing the gifts of its members. That the Holy Spirit has endowed the Church with a variety of gifts was obvious in the earliest Christian communities (Rom. 12:6-8; I Cor. 12:4-11, 28; Eph. 4:11f.). But already then the community needed to be reminded that each member be permitted and encouraged to exercise the service for which his particular gift fitted him. In one way or another the Church in subsequent centuries has continued to call specific individuals for specific tasks. But these tasks have usually been limited to functions within the Church. Certain covenant communities however, continue to exercise a strong influence on their members in the choice of occupation. By discerning the needs of contemporary society from a specifically Christian point of view, they provide for their members a context in which such life-work decisions can be made in the light of Christian commitment and needs in the world.[3]

A very important role of the community in helping its members to be faithful is that of mutual upbuilding. This may take the form of admonition and the mediating of forgiveness in the case of a brother committing sin (Mt. 18:15-18).[4] It may be mutual aid in the form of the sharing of material goods with the needy brother (Acts 2:44f.; 11:29f.; II Cor. 8:13f.). It may be words of encouragement and exhortation or consolation in times of stress (I Cor. 12:3; Rom. 12:8). It may be in teaching and admonition (Col. 3:16; II Tim. 4:2). All of the gifts of the Spirit to members of the Church are to be used in equipping the fellow saints for service and building up the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12).

But the covenant community of believers mediates God's call to faithfulness not only to those already within its

membership. It not only preserves or renews faithfulness in its members. The community, as a community of believers, is itself a witness and a call to faith to those outside of it. Paul pictures what would happen if an unbeliever would witness an assembly of the community of believers in the process of mutual exhortation and admonition. The effect on him would be so overwhelming, that "falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you" (I Cor. 14:25).[5] The Church's mission consists not only of sending out messengers of reconciliation, but also of being the "community of reconciliation". The Church is the "historical community in which God's love is known as real," without which the preaching of its sent-out messengers would remain abstract and theoretical.[6]

There is a danger that the Church while understanding that her task is missionary may think that this task can be accomplished with a strategy and program of world evangelization conducted by one of her several boards. Such a view overlooks the fact that the Church is not to conduct mission merely as one of her many activities, but that she has in all of her activities a mission, that she is "a missionary people" and "a saving community."[7] This role of the Church as community in the missionary enterprise of the Church has not yet received sufficient attention.[8]

In contemporary western society, where individualism is so highly regarded, where "doing one's own thing" has developed a half-defiant corollary attitude of "it's none of your business", where an indiscriminate tolerance has tended to accept unchallenged a variety of attitudes and beliefs with which it does not agree, it makes sense to reissue the old call: Let the Church be the Church! Let the community again exercise its gifts of discerning the truth among the contemporary cross-currents of teaching and doctrine. Let it boldly pick out and set apart specific members of its fellowship for specific tasks to which God is calling His Church today. Let it function again as the binding and loosing community: free under the Holy Spirit to liberate its members from old cultural restrictions which no longer apply; firm in convicting those out of fellowship with God and His people so that they may find forgiveness and restoration. Let it so order its communal life that by its very *being* the covenanted community, its Lord may add to its number day by day those who are being saved (Acts 2:47).

[1] William Klassen, *Covenant and Community: The Life and Writings of Pilgram Marpeck* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 81; see especially section II. D. "The Interpreter and the Church," pp. 77-87.

[2] John H. Yoder, "Is There Historical Development of Theological Thought" in C. J. Dyck, ed.; *The Witness of the Holy Spirit: Proceedings of the Eighth Mennonite World Conference* (Elkhart: Mennonite World Conference, 1967), pp. 386-388.

[3] For a discussion of the relation between baptism into the Christian community and one's "calling", see Virgil Vogt, *The Christian Calling*, (Scottdale: Mennonite Publishing House, 1961).

[4] For a discussion of the role of the church as a forgiving community, see Henry Poettcker, "The New Testament Community" in Maynard Shelly, ed., *Studies in Church Discipline* (Newton: Mennonite Publication Office, 1958), pp. 13-34; William Klassen, *The Forgiving Community* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), pp. 140-173.

[5] Paul M. Miller has written a paper on "Evangelism by the Life-Style of the Congregation" as the product of an inductive study of evangelism in the Pastoral Epistles (Elkhart: Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, 1969), mimeographed.

[6] Gordon D. Kaufman, *The Context of Decision* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1961), p. 56; see esp. ch. 3, "The Church and the World", pp. 48-70. See also Peter J. Klassen, "The Anabaptist-Mennonite Witness through Mutual Aid" in A. J. Klassen, ed. *The Church in Mission* (Fresno: Mennonite Brethren Board of Christian Literature, 1967), pp. 101-111.

[7] John Bright, *The Kingdom of God: The Biblical Concept and its Meaning for the Church* (New York: Abingdon, 1953), p. 257.

[8] For a brief treatment of this see John Howard Yoder, *As You Go: the old mission in a new day* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1961), esp. pp. 25-29.

II

Experiences of Faithfulness

As a Church

As a People

8

The Conference of Mennonites in Canada

H. J. Gerbrandt

The Earlier Roots

The prayer of the Lord Jesus, " . . . that they may be one, even as we are one" (John 17:11) may be considered the basis and pinnacle of all conference concepts. The Apostle Paul gives shape to this concept when he admonishes the Corinthian believers not to cause division of the Church by being followers of men (I Corinthians 3:10-13). John goes beyond Paul's admonition by testing a believer's faith in God by his love to the brother (I John 4:20-21).

This scriptural norm of oneness and unity was under trial already in the Early Church. Hebrew Christians like Paul, born in Cilicia, and Barnabas, born in Cyprus, reacted differently to the Gospel than did Peter and John who had been nurtured in the sheltered society of Judaism. The Christians of regions like Corinth, Ephesus and Thessalonica all brought their varied cultural and ethnic peculiarities into the Church.

In spite of these discordant notes the Early Church has emerged as the perfect ideal for all time. Reformers and leaders of renewal movements through the centuries have

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repeatedly attempted to restructure the existing church according to that ideal of the Early Church. But too often the Early Church has been seen only through such beautiful phrases as, "and all who believed were together and had all things in common. . ." (Acts 2:43ff.). Though no one should want to challenge the beauty and the tranquil oneness of those primitive believers, it behooves every follower of Christ to move beyond the initial birth phase of the Church to walk in the footsteps of its ongoing development. It did not always remain so tranquil.

Possibly no other issues have hurt the Church's image in the world more than its divisiveness and resulting fragmentation. Denominationalism has weakened the Church and caused it to use so much of its energy and resources to secure its borders. Almost as harmful as denominationalism has been a top-heavy ecumenism that operates on the assumption that denominationalism can be overcome by mergers. This pressure to merge so often disregards the fact that ethnic and cultural heritages, geographical influences and socio-political moldings are more often the causes of church divisions than are scripturally theological positions. Forced mergers frequently fail to speak to these basic causes of divisions.

Many fine attempts have been made throughout the history of the Church to overcome the curse of denominationalism by the formation of church conferences. For the Mennonites of North America a noble move towards unity was made in the discussions that took place in West Point, Iowa on May 28, 29, 1860, when brethren from four churches met in a Methodist church to talk about oneness. Emerging out of that discussion came the statement, "That all branches of Mennonite denominations in North America, regardless of minor differences, shall extend to each other the hand of fellowship."[1] That statement in summary has come to mean, "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty."[2] On this position the General Conference Mennonite Church was founded.

The General Conference Church inspired Elder Johann Funk, Alt-Bergthal, Altona, to say at four specially called Brotherhood meetings in January of 1892:

> We do not consider it wrong but our duty to allow other ministers who share our confession of faith, to preach in our pulpits.

> The Scriptures instruct us to have fellowship one with another. I John 1:7; III John 8. Such visits we see in agreement with the Word of God that says, "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." I Peter 4:10
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> How can our brethren serve us if we do not want to have them? We also consider it wrong that we separate ourselves from churches, who share our own confession of faith, and have shown this by the migration from the Fatherland (Russia) for this faith. The Lord's prayer much more instructs us, "That they all may be one," that it is His reasonable will that we should have a brotherly union and reconciliation with such churches.[3]

Though well-intentioned, Funk's aggressive moves resulted in another division before healing could take place. But the embryo for the structuring of a conference is evident in the Bergthaler Church Minutes of December 31, 1897 and May 5, 1899, with the decisions to call all Mennonite churches of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Langdon, North Dakota, USA, to meet at Hochfeld, Altona for discussions on unity.

Development

During the early nineties large numbers of Mennonites poured into Saskatchewan. These settlers came from southern Manitoba, the United States and the various countries of Europe. One of the Prussian immigrants of 1893 was Elder Peter Regier. Before going to his new home at Tiefengrund, Saskatchewan, he spent some time at Gretna. He renewed acquaintance with the Ewerts and also found open doors in the Bergthaler Church. Through correspondence and visits from 1893 to 1902, it became evident to Regier and the Manitoba ministers that something had to be done to make it easier for the former Manitoba Mennonites in Saskatchewan to unite with the Rosenorter people.

In 1901 Elder Johann Funk and Jakob Hoeppner visited their members in Saskatchewan and urged them to join the Rosenorter Church. But these people hesitated to break ties with the Manitoba Church. In 1902 the Manitoba Bergthaler Church again delegated two men, Benjamin Ewert and Johann M. Friesen to visit their brethren in Saskatchewan. An agreement was reached in the compromise that if the two churches, the Manitoba Bergthaler Mennonite Church and the Saskatchewan Rosenorter Mennonite Church were to unite, the transfer might be made. The discussion for this union took place in the garden of Elder Peter Regier, Tiefengrund. Present were Benjamin Ewert and Johann M. Friesen, Manitoba, Peter Regier, David Epp, Johann Dueck, Heinrich Warkentin, David Toews and Gerhard Epp, Saskatchewan, and J. E. Sprunger, Berne, Indiana.[1]

The following year, 1903, representatives of these two churches met on July 20 and 21 in the Hochstadt Church, three miles north-east of Altona. It appears only Peter Regier and Gerhard Epp had come from Saskatchewan. J. W. Kliewer had come from Wadsworth, Ohio, and J. E. Sprunger from Berne, Indiana. The other participants were the ministers of the Bergthaler Church, and one lay member, H. H. Hamm, Gretna.

For almost a quarter century the Conference was primarily a Saskatchewan-Manitoba entity. In Manitoba the Bergthaler Church was alone until 1919, when a group of immigrants from Oklahoma joined as the Herold Mennonite Church. Until 1937 the Conference had been hosted in Manitoba 11 times. In Saskatchewan there were three clusters, the Rosenorter Church of the Rosthern area, the Northstar Church of the Drake area and the Herbert Church. Though the Bergthal Mennonite Church, Didsbury, Alberta was part of the Conference since 1910, the Conference only met in Alberta for the first time in 1955. Since the 1920's migration many more churches emerged in Alberta and joined the Conference with the Coaldale and Gem churches leading the way in 1929.

The 1920's migration from Russia gave the Conference a much broader base. By 1924 clusters of new immigrants began to gather in the Kitchener-Waterloo, Vineland, St. Catharines and Leamington districts. From the beginning Ontario churches participated in conference work. Sessions have been held in Beamsville, Leamington, Niagara-on-the-Lake and St. Catharines. Rev. J. H. Janzen, who did much

to unite Ontario Mennonites was also very active in Canadian Conference work.

The postwar migration also brought British Columbia into the Canadian Conference orbit. In 1931 the First Mennonite Church, Sardis, joined when the Conference met in Langham, Saskatchewan. Three ministers, N. Banman, and Heinrich Dyck, Sardis, and Nikolai Friesen, Yarrow were in attendance. Since then the B.C. Mennonites have played an important role in conference development and have hosted the sessions at Greendale, Abbotsford, Clearbrook, Leamington and Vancouver.

Thrusts and Emphases

Under the chairmanship of Elder Jacob Hoeppner the 1903 sessions spent two days listening to papers on practical Christian discipleship. The Conference also began immediately to set its goals by the appointing of a constitution committee, the establishing of a treasury to assist the building of a church at Rosthern and by accepting an invitation to meet at Eigenheim in 1904. In summary, that conference, " . . . set goals to strive for, laid down a basic church polity, established the foundation for Home Mission work, attempted to protect itself from the evil influences of society, drew attention to evils in the Church that needed to be removed and stated that brotherly love should not be quenched."[5]

The 1904 conference sessions at Eigenheim, Saskatchewan established a constitution which, with minor modifications, remained the constitution of the Conference for more than 50 years.[6] Called "Konferenz der Mennoniten im Mittlern Canada," the Conference set itself up as a body that would provide fellowship, would give unity in work and would bring strength to the participating churches. The constitution demanded that participating churches should adhere to the Articles of Faith of the Mennonites of Prussia and Russia, and would have no adherents of secret societies in their membership. At the Laird sessions in 1932 the name was changed to General Conference of Mennonites in Canada. In 1959 a major revision of conference structure brought forth the name, Conference of Mennonites in Canada. The

early constitution had permitted the Executive to name committees as the needs arose. In 1959 five boards were established: Board of Missions, Board of Christian Service, Board of Education and Publication, Board of Canadian Mennonite Bible College and Board of Finance. The chairmen of these boards, together with the Conference officers, the chairman, vice-chairman and secretary, constituted the Executive. With the growth of the Conference, a work centre was established on the College campus in Winnipeg, with a treasurer being engaged part time from 1957 to 1965, and full time since then. The Winnipeg office has also been staffed with executive secretaries for the Executive, the Mission Board and the Education and Publication Board. The 1971 sessions in Vancouver adopted a new constitution that reduced the number of boards to three. The Boards of Christian Service, Education and Publication, and Finance were combined in a new Board called Congregational Resources Board. This also called for staff reduction and the Executive assumed responsibility for finances and the newly created Mennonite Foundation.

There has been considerable movement in policy and emphasis during the seventy years of conference life. In earlier years the Conference was not concerned much with projects. A listing of papers presented at the conference sessions demonstrates the heavy emphasis on practical Christianity. Conference visitors of the years 1903-1906 heard the following presentations, "What is the goal, purpose and value of the Conference?" "How might the scattered members of our people be served most adequately?" "Is it unscriptural and contrary to our conscience if we as Mennonites accept positions in public life and participate in the civic elections?" "Should members of our churches take issues to civic courts before they have sought the mediation of the church?" "What position do we take to such worldly activities as drinking alcoholic beverages, dancing and gambling?" "Churches working together in fellowship"; "The meaning and value of the schools for the churches" (reference was here made to the Sunday Schools and private district schools); "Why don't we sing the chorales in Sunday School?" "Value of visiting the sick"; "Is it right that members of our church accept civic offices like judges, for which they have to swear oaths?" "How do we train and keep our young people for our churches?" "Are our church structures practical?" "What advantage would our churches gain by joining the

General Conference Mennonite Church?" "What objectives should our conference set for itself in Home Mission work?" "Church discipline, when and how to practice it, and what shall it achieve?" "The responsibilities of ministers to their churches"; "Responsibilities of churches to their ministers"; "How may we bring more spiritual life into our churches?"

Although the Conference always maintained a Home Missions ministry to assist its smaller congregations and scattered brethren, its predominant emphasis was fellowship and a united search for practical Christianity, until a major restructuring gave it its boards and its Winnipeg centre. This moved the Conference into its projects spiral and the mushrooming budgets. The Mission Board developed its MPM program and subsidized city and rural churches. More than $100,000.00 were loaned to churches for new buildings; CMBC enlarged its facilities; the Board of Christian Service initiated a Pension Plan for ministers and became involved with numerous social and political areas of need. The Board of Education and Publication published devotional materials, subsidized conference related periodicals, and undertook to publish materials like the Bulletin and supportive promotional pamphlets.

The climax to this spiraling workload and deficit budgeting came to a grinding halt at the 1970 conference sessions in Winkler, when the delegates decisively told the Boards, that unless contributions had caught up with spending by January, 1971, the budget was to be reduced by about 25%. This is what happened, and the January Council of Boards reduced a $416,600.00 budget to $310,000.00. The money crisis may have precipitated a search for new identity and purpose. The Conference may again tend to be less project conscious and again move more into the direction of faith, conduct, and fellowship. Hopefully the pendulum swing will not be excessive.

Theological and Scripture Interpretation Issues

The first conference session in 1903 already concerned itself with the issue of political involvement. For the southern Manitoba Bergthaler members this was a burning issue. Their delegates' reception and experiences in 1873 had

shown them that Canadian government officials were ordinary commoners and were easily accessible. The introduction of the municipal council into the Mennonite Reserves caught the progressive Bergthaler people off guard. Whereas they had worked formerly through the "Gebietsamt", they now consented readily to the election of municipal council members. This brought with it the administration of the oath, and close associations with government offices. From the municipality it was a small step into provincial politics.

During the year 1903, when the Conference met in Hochstadt, Bergthaler people were already deeply embroiled in party politics. The two ministers, H. H. Ewert and Johann M. Friesen were on opposite sides. If the Conservatives were to win the next provincial election, Johann M. Friesen might get Ewert's Inspector position. Under the shadow of this struggle, Jacob Hoeppner presented his paper, "Is it contrary to the Scriptures and our conscience to assume public offices and participate in public elections?" The conference did not decide the issue. Each church and individual would have to continue to participate according to conscience. A warning, however, was issued against assuming public offices and agitating for or against persons running for office. At the 1907 Conference in Drake this position was strengthened through a paper presented by Johann Gerbrandt. Now the Conference decided it was wrong to attempt to influence voters through bribes, liquor and slander. The trend was definitely moving in the direction of civic involvement, but that involvement should be guided by Christian principles. This has remained the position of the Conference Mennonites ever since.

Another issue that emerged at many conference sessions was that of becoming Christians. Already in 1892 Elder Funk stressed newness of life. During the early years of Bergthaler Church history the issue of the radical new birth was debated. The Mennonite Brethren missionaries and Home Mission Board workers N. F. Toews and also J. B. Baer stressed the radical conversion. H. H. Ewert believed in this new life, but he took the position that it should come through teaching and training. For him, new life was the result of a gradual acceptance of the riches in Christ. He did not appreciate the pressure for decisions which some of the evangelists had adopted.[7]

Although the new birth was a live topic for many years it was during the 1920's that men like Gerhard Buhler

and Is. P. Friesen gave it new impetus. At the 1921 conference sessions in Herbert, Saskatchewan, Buhler presented the paper, "Evangelistic meetings, their origin, their purpose and the need for them." Again at the 1926 sessions in Altona the question was raised whether a person should know absolutely whether he had been born again. Once more, Jacob Hoeppner, the aging elder answered with an unequivocal "yes".

A third issue that has emerged at various conference sessions is that of eschatology. Mennonites have not doubted in life after death. They have stated their belief in the resurrection in all confessions of faith. After the turn of the century new emphases entered the brotherhood. Dispensationalism became an issue in the Bergthaler Church in its early beginnings when J. J. Balzer was active in Altona. At the 1914 sessions in Rosthern P. J. Epp presented the paper, "How can we prove our teaching of the Resurrection?" Again in 1916 at the Altona sessions, H. A. Harder presented the paper, "What do we understand as 'The first resurrection' and when will it take place?" At the same conference W. J. Bestvater presented the paper, "What is the Scriptural concept of the millenium and when can we expect it?" Then in 1919 at the Gretna sessions, Michael Klassen presented the paper, "What events may we expect will precede the final judgment?" In 1925 at Eigenheim J. J. Nickel spoke to the topic, "Why every believer should be more knowledgeable about the second coming of Christ". The Conference has continued to abide with its general position on the resurrection without accepting a formal position regarding Dispensationalism.

A final issue that may need some mention is the tension between faith and social action. Although this problem is as old as the books of Galatians and James and has received attention in both Mennonite and non-Mennonite circles, it became most crucial in the Conference during the years when the Board of Christian Service attracted attention to major social ills in society.

The two conference meetings that probably highlighted this struggle were the 1966 sessions held in Winnipeg and the 1971 sessions held in Vancouver. In Winnipeg the social action mood was very pronounced and many conference delegates began to feel rather ill at ease and insecure. The pendulum swung in the opposite direction in Vancouver. There the emphasis was heavy on pietistical, mystical experiences and a different group of delegates became rather

uneasy. The burying of the Board of Christian Service may be a partial manifestation of this mood. Although many believe the tension has now forever been resolved, it may not be so simple.

Laymen in the Conference

From its beginning in 1903 the Conference has been considered to be a delegate body made up of representatives elected by its member churches. The constitution has never spoken to the ratio of ministers-laymen participation. At the first session there was one layman present. J. G. Rempel's "Fuenfzig Jahre Konferenzbestrebungen" carries the bibliographies of about 200 conference workers. Of these about 20 were laymen. After the constitution revision of 1959 more laymen came into the boards. In 1971 almost 25% of the elected Board members were not ordained people. Due to the fact that ministers are more widely known, and because of their availability, they are also more easily sent to the sessions than are farmers, business executives, professional people or industrial employees. The above ratio will probably continue until the constitution speaks to the question.

Youth Participation

Canadian Youth participation in the Conference began through the Sunday School and Youth Committee. In its earlier stages few young people were actually involved with the work, but were rather the object of the work. Then in the early fifties at the conference sessions at the Leamington Conference a mild youth revolt brought more young people into responsible positions. For many years a youth session was a vital part of the annual sessions with a separate constitution and separately elected delegates. During the early sixties the focus of youth work moved into the provinces and in 1965 the Canadian youth organization dissolved. Youth activities at the sessions have since been assumed by the Board of Education, working through that provincial

youth organization in which the Conference is hosted in any particular year.

During the height of their activities, youth groups sponsored Saengerfeste, Summer Bible Schools, Camps, travelling libraries and the publication of the "Y.P. Messenger". The movement paralleled a far-reaching renewal among Canadian young people. Many missionaries, ministers, teachers and other church workers of today were first tapped for Christ and the Church during those years of active youth activities.

It is impossible to give recognition to all who have served well in this short history of the conference. The following have served as chairmen: Jacob Hoeppner, 1903-1905; H. H. Ewert, 1906, 1907, 1912, 1913; Johann Gerbrandt, 1909-1911; David Toews, 1914-1936; J. H. Janzen, 1936; David Toews, 1937-1940; Benjamin Ewert, 1941, 1942; J. J. Thiessen, 1943-1959; J. M. Pauls, 1960; G. G. Neufeld, 1961; Paul Schroeder, 1962-1964; H. P. Epp, 1965-1967; P. G. Sawatzky, 1968; Ed Enns, 1969-1971. David Toews served 26 years and J. J. Thiessen 17 years. Thiessen's tenure was cut short by the new constitution that came into effect in 1959. Since then chairmen have only been elected for three consecutive one-year periods.

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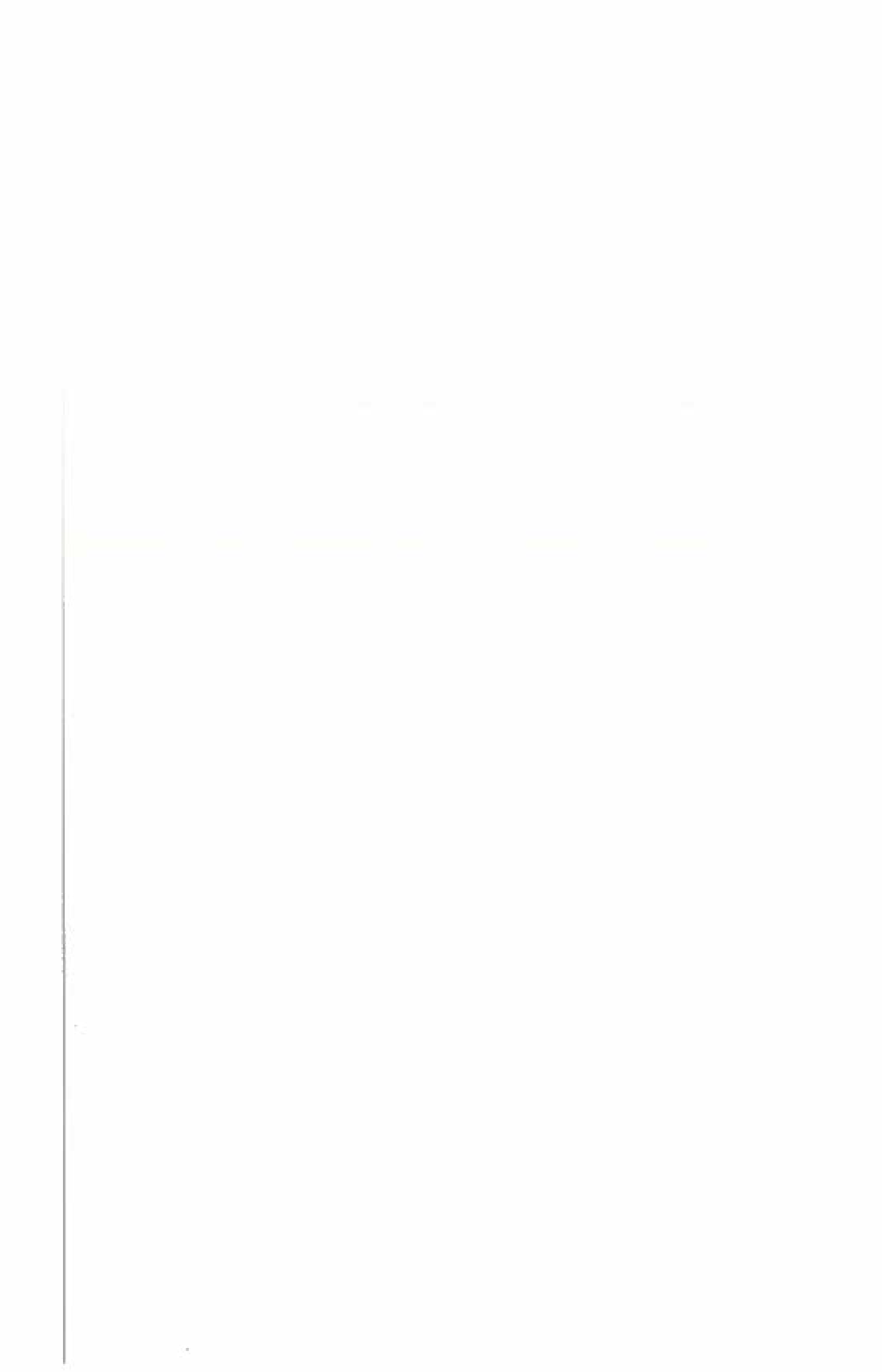
[1] H. P. Krehbiel, *History of the General Conference Mennonite Church* (St. Louis, Missouri: Published by H. P. Krehbiel, 1898), p. 56.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 57.
[3] H. J. Gerbrandt, *Adventure in Faith* (Altona: The Bergthaler Church and D. W. Friesen and Sons Ltd., 1970), p. 89.
[4] J. G. Rempel, *Fuenfzig Jahre Konferenzbestrebungen* (Steinbach: Derksen Printers Ltd.), p. 7.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 25.
[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.
[7] Gerbrandt, *op. cit.*, p. 106.



9

Forms Of Ministry

Herman Enns

Ministry for the Mennonite minister means a way of life. Having been born into a family that experienced a "ministerial explosion" (my father and two of his brothers were "Aeltesters" while another brother was a deacon), I can say like the writer John, "that which I have known from the beginning, which my eyes have seen and my hands touched" is what I am writing about. These men lived for the church even though the farm was the livelihood for three of them; one, the minister of a large city congregation, received a salary, but that also did not make a difference. When they or their colleagues met they talked church; purity of doctrine, pastoral care, ethical living, Christian education, conference involvement, optimal participation in ministry, or how to counteract the seductive external influences on youth. I have no reason to believe that these men were not representative of the many who served and are serving the congregations of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada.

To gain a broader perspective, however, I sent questionnaires regarding the meaning of ministry to 45 of the ministers in charge of congregations and to several elders

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including a few in retirement. I received 36 responses, 5 from men ordained in the 30's, 6 in the 40's, 12 in the 50's, and 13 ordained in the last decade.

From these responses it becomes possible to determine when and why forms of ministry have changed. It also becomes clear that the minister's own understanding of what his task and role happen to be is related to the particular period of time in which he serves. It is not as easy to determine to what degree the minister was responsible for changing the form of ministry or to what degree the changed form affected his ministry. Some felt comfortable and free to do an effective ministry within a particular form of ministry, while others felt that a particular form distorted and limited their ministry. The tension of having the right wine poured into appropriate wine-skins continues through the decades. It is a healthy tension and absolutely essential for a viable and valid ministry. There is a dynamic inter-relationship between the minister, his ministry and the form of ministry.

Although drastic changes have taken place regarding the ministry it is equally noteworthy that some things have not changed. There is a profile the Mennonite ministers have in common. This commonness is not based on external factors. In response to a question whether a particular person had served as a model for them only five men mentioned persons such as Jacob H. Janzen, David Toews, Benjamin Ewert, Johannes Regier; the majority denied there had been anyone whom they had tried to emulate. One minister, noted for his Biblical orientation explains, "One is our Master, Jesus Christ".

A look into the libraries of these men makes one wonder how striving for a theological unity could ever have seemed to be a realistic goal. Only three men mention Mennonite authors as being helpful to them in their sermon preparations and pastoral work. The list of authors includes Thielicke, Trueblood, Barclay, Larson, Keith Miller, Rienicker, Kroeker, Schlatter, Sauer, Funke, Frommel, Gerok, Spurgeon, Brunner, Gollwitzer, Pannenberg, Shoemaker, Barth, Kierkegaard, Thurneysen, Wenger, Bender, Augsburger, Ellul, Toffler, Dyck, John Miller, Osborne, and others. There is a truly surprising heterogeneity of reading materials; at the most five persons draw inspiration from the same author. It becomes apparent that the Mennonite periodical is serving a crucial unifying function.

To search for this commonality in external factors is fruitless. It cuts across such major distinctions as to whether the minister is elder or non-elder, salaried or non-salaried, rural or urban, self-taught or institutionally trained. The root system for this striking similarity that has remained steadfast through the decades is located within the minister himself and is directly related to what it means for him to be a minister. In this there is a very high degree of consistency.

To be a minister means to lay one's life on the line. For those who initially accepted the call to the ministry while still in Russia it could mean risking banishment or death. For the elder, ordination in the 30's and 40's meant covenanting himself to one specific congregation for life. It was taken no less seriously than the marriage covenant. The elder who because of the Mennonite diaspora became separated from his congregation felt as bereaved as a widower. But for everyone to be a minister meant to lay oneself open to the whole range of the human feeling spectrum from grief, sorrow, anger and despair to hope, faith, love and joy. It meant coming to terms with these feelings within oneself before others could be ministered to with compassion and understanding.

The Mennonite minister assumes that his own life shall serve as an example of Christian living. His personal life, his life in the context of the family, or of the community, or in his place of employment, is an open book. His confidence in being able to do so is based not in a presumptuous claim that he has more direct access to spiritual powers, but in the conviction that the gospel brings hope to every aspect of life. Where this does not happen there is no ministry. It is also based on the claim that the dynamics of the Christian fellowship become operative in every life when directness in relationships is practiced, when forgiveness is being offered and received, where there is a striving after wholeness in all relationships, and where acceptance and love provide the good soil for this to happen and he is a man who knows that he walks on feet of clay, but who with a holy boldness proclaims not only the sufficiency of the gospel in providing people with the means to cope with life, but that it yields a harvest of abundant living.

A third characteristic all have in common is a deep sense of caring. For some it appears that the congregation as such has been the prime object of caring, that it be faithful and pure; for others it would appear that the individual

member and his experience of faithfulness was the prior concern. The shape of the ministry was to some extent determined by this distinction.

The caring for the congregation manifested itself in a variety of ways. Often it was marked by a very realistic awareness of where the congregation was at, a "feeling in the bones" as to whether the moment of readiness or acceptance had come for a new undertaking or change in program. The visionaries and prophets might have a clearer sense of where things should be going, the elders were masters at the art of keeping half a step ahead of the consensus vote. The more aggressive members might get impatient, and sometimes withdraw in anger. The tension was real. The minister could have moved faster alone but his caring required him to move together with a people.

A further caring for the congregation manifested itself in the striving after unity which was focussed not in the personality of a strong leader, or in a specific brand of theology, but in the concept of brotherhood and fellowship. One clear hazard of the multiple ministry has always been a tendency toward power struggles sometimes carried on in the name of purity of doctrine, or in the name of a higher degree of spirituality, more intensive evangelism, or more purposive social action. The leader needed to exert leadership in order to let the multiplicity of gifts enrich rather than divide the congregation. The Church was to be a "seeking, saving, serving, sending church", a church with which Christ would be pleased.

The more personalistic thrust is demonstrated by the elder of a thousand member church who felt compelled to know every family and each of its members by name. They shall know individually that "they are God's workmanship created in Christ for good deeds". A full experience of being in Christ shall come to each member and each person shall have the assurance that his faith is working for him. The practical emphasis is on discipleship, a conscious and deliberate commitment to the way of Christ.

If any faithfulness awards are to be designated and accounted for, it should be done on the basis of the depth of caring on the part of the ministers.

A very basic component of an effective ministry is the relationship between the minister and the congregation he serves. Unless there is mutual trust and acceptance a fruitful ministry is unlikely. Usually this trust was based on the

fact that the person had grown up in the midst of the congregation and had become rooted in the congregation's way of life. Such a person simply needed to be set apart through ordination for ministry. Selection was weighed in favor of personal qualities and abilities; academic achievements were secondary and possibly even somewhat suspect. An "outside" minister even in the 60's is someone who has grown up in another congregation of the Conference. But he also was known to at least some of the congregation's members through conference involvement. Only very few congregations have accepted a minister on the basis of academic qualifications, references and interviews. This is a crisis that will need to be worked through in the decade ahead by many congregations.

Trying to adapt to change is like learning a new language. Almost each congregation knows through experience how difficult that is. A few words of a foreign language are useless, for not only must a whole vocabulary be learned but also the grammatical structures that make the vocabulary a useful tool of communication. Such an analogy is useful when considering the changing forms of ministry. To think that a salaried minister is the rough equivalent of a properly ordained elder and that really not very much has actually changed is a gross over-simplification. The continued practice and future hope for a multiple ministry, something on which there was perfect agreement in all the responses received in the questionnaires, only veils the magnitude of the changes that have happened over the decades.

For the minister ordained in the 1930's, 40's, and less frequently in the 50's, the call of God to the minister came through the still, small whisper of the congregational ballot. When it came, some simply did not feel free to resist understanding the priesthood of believers to mean that every baptized member was a potential candidate for the ministry and that there were no valid personal grounds for exemption. Others saw in it a confirmation of inner personal inclinations toward the ministry which they had felt for some time. God and the congregation of his people had called and they were ready to bring integrity, respect and dignity to their calling. In return they too received honor and respect and frequently a deep affection, but only extremely minimal material reward.

His latter day counterpart is much more thrown upon

himself; he has to rely on the validity of his own inner and personal convictions which draw him to the ministry. Significant persons in his life may from time to time give him encouragement, but it is basically in faith that he attends Christian colleges and seminary. All this time his social science peers explain to him how it is a compulsive kink in his personality that is leading him as it were like a lamb to the altar. The call comes and is responded to with joy. But alas, things have changed. The feeling of being a shepherd is difficult to sustain where there is little positive feed-back to affirm him in his calling. Many, after two years, some after 12, look for the nearest honorable exit, one that doesn't resemble too closely a fire escape, while others search for new avenues that may lead to a viable and relevant ministry. The minister who does not sense a crisis is a rarity.

The search is leading in various directions and currently does not have one objective as its focus. Some are moving in the direction of a new charismatic outpouring and are already testing it in the congregational context and are making such preliminary observations as, "There is more power in a (Jesus-freak) than in a seminary professor". Others are giving priority to an evangelistic methodology and are going to Coral Ridge, and Probe 72 and Key 73 and puzzling over the Sutera twins, in the hope that this can be reduplicated at home. Some are hopeful that their congregations can relinquish their quaint and familiar ways and live in the present century also when they come together for worship, inspiration and fellowship even as they are doing in every other area of their life. Others again are emphasizing the practical expression of Christianity, taking seriously the confession that the word and deed are a unity and that the word shall become flesh. A full ministry can only become available through a faithful people. The expectation is that as they minister in love a theology of hope, of reconciliation, of faith becomes a necessity and the motivation for learning is awakened. Such a theology no longer represents an assortment of highly desirable but hardly attainable ideals, but rather it becomes the humble supplier of the effective tools for a loving trade.

It is significant that there is a high expectation of the contribution that Canadian Mennonite Bible College, other Christian colleges and the Seminary can make toward training for an effective ministry. This expectation, however, is qualified. These schools shall make a full effort

to deal with the burning "how" of ministry. The wisdom of the ages, interpretive, analytical and diagnostic skills are basic components of ministry but merely in a preliminary sense. How can vitality and health be restored to the congregation of God's people so they can become the bearers of hope and faith and the demonstrators of God's love in a hurting and despairing community? The Seminary is applauded for its move in the direction of supervised pastoral education where the field is the world and the compulsion for the shelter of books is overcome. The task of these institutions is not primarily one of reminiscence, or having to do with the restoration of the Anabaptist vision, but it is a revelatory task which will enable the Church to lean into the future with a confident faith and with the words of the Lord's prayer on its lips, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

The minister in the current decade is in a crisis situation. In several ways he himself must assume responsibility for this. He has resisted receiving a sense of authority that was based on factors external to himself. In most instances he was not granted such authority by the congregation. A seminary B.D. was not the equivalent of an eldership. Where he did accept the eldership he rejected the traditional authority vested in it, insisting that the ordination had changed nothing, he was still a minister as he had been before. The authority he claimed was in himself, in his calling, and had come to him through Him who had called. Where this sense of calling became dim his ministry became wobbly. Self-doubt easily happens where concrete and visible results come only seldom. The chasm between the minister and the congregation has widened, even as his pulpit has been lowered. He is a specialist among specialists and as such is often very lonely.

His task has changed, not in ultimate goals but in complexity. The alert lay member recognized this change and refused candidacy for the ministry or ordination. He was willing to assist but not to assume full responsibility and this was his wisdom. Men like John F. Funk, Jacob H. Janzen, David Toews, Benjamin Ewert, Johann P. Klassen accepted with courage and genuine dedication the difficult but clearly defined task of drawing a scattered, immigrant people into a brotherhood. Their vision, their administrative abilities and leadership gifts enabled groups of people to elect from among themselves preachers and deacons. Through their gentle often down-to-earth moulding and

consistent encouragement, a harvest of growing, serving churches sprang up throughout the land. Organizational structure and order made good sense to an uprooted people, to strangers in a foreign land many of whom had experienced political anarchy in their own flesh.

The men who followed, too many to name, built on this foundation. Their task was essentially that of gathering and facilitating the integration of the newcomers representing a variety of Russian colony backgrounds. The energy of the people was invested in establishing an economic foothold. Retaining faith and hope in the depression years was essential to survival. Meaning was derived from doing God's kind of work, being fruitful and multiplying, tilling the soil and feeding a hungry, growing family and a hungry world, and transmitting a faith and a way of life in the context of the family, the Church and the community. The German language served as a screen and as an anchor. In terms of inter-generational sensitivity and in terms of ministering to new immigrants from Europe and from South America it could be justified. Christian education was part of a total experience and was resented and resisted as a special learning experience. Inter-congregational unity was largely cultivated through personal rather than through organizational links, conferences represented opportunities for people to meet each other, the program was dynamic and not routine. Inter-church commerce was minimal. A mixed marriage was one between a Mennonite Brethren and a General Conference person.

The shock of living in a wall-less society has been so profound and so subtle that for the most part there is no conscious awareness of what has happened. When asked regarding major outside influences the respondents to the questionnaires are puzzled and are at a loss to identify any. A Mennonite boy from a little-known village in Russia finds himself sitting beside the Prime Minister in Ottawa. Vocationally, academically, economically, professionally, socially there are no walls. All the restraints, if there are any, come from within. This new found freedom is heady stuff. Nothing has changed and everything has changed.

The layman has come of age. When the minister says he has a word from the Lord the layman wants to know by what process it came to him. He holds to a scientific world view mostly. The break-through for him is that the sacred and the secular have become integrated. The Sunday/Monday cleavage no longer rings true; all of life has

religious overtones. The manifestation of this shift is the loss of the distinctive function of the "Lehrdienst" as looking after spiritual matters while the church council looks after administrative and physical matters. In most congregations the church council is assuming responsibility for the full range of congregational concerns. A hierarchical structure has very quickly given way to a democratic polity more in keeping with an Anabaptist concept of a believer's church. The layman's coming of age does not mean, however, that he does not need the Church or its ministry. He may not want it but he needs it more than ever.

There is conflict between the minister and the congregation. One minister makes reference to the seasonal migrations of his flock, north in summer, south in winter, another admits that beginning evening services at 7:30 p.m. so as not to conflict with Walt Disney improves attendance. There is anger at the minister for having to pay him for what it seems his predecessors did as a labor of love, and guilt for not paying him enough. But these are peripheral issues. The heart of the matter has to do with again discovering meaningful and purposeful living. Materialism has yielded not merely physical comforts but through drugs it has yielded religious experiences. But everything is from without. Within there is a vacuum, little joy, minimal hope, much anxiety. The personal core is hollow. The most promising relationships are weak at the center, whether the family, or the fellowship of the Church. This is where the burden of ministry falls.

Can equilibrium be restored at the center? Can meaning and purpose come in the multiplicity of vocations and professions each having its own 'pollution' component or a 'meaninglessness' quotient? What does it mean to do responsible living when birth and life and death decisions have been entrusted more fully to man than in any other generation? The minister's task as enabler and equipper is to lead the way in reclaiming an inner authority and authenticity, in demonstrating in his own life the dynamics of the gospel as well as the love and caring of God. He is the bringer of hope and faith, creating relationships and environments of trust where God's people can become the Church, the instrument of His love. God's people need to become free, not in a vacuum or free to do their own thing, but in the context of relationships.

The mushrooming of the small group movement, the renewal of the house church are dramatic manifestations

of the desire for more intimate fellowship, more direct and honest sharing and caring. They can serve as models, not as solutions. Community which once happened because so much was experienced in common must now be deliberately and consciously and sometimes even clinically created as a result of diversification and specialization. Only the search for meaning and purpose is held in common. The congregation will continue to be the viable organization, but it may depend on other models as half-way houses. The insights of the social scientists, the new breed of deacons, need to be integrated with theological insights and become fruitful in establishing a church that serves this age and is able to affirm joyfully that "now is the acceptable time".

The eyes for new ministers are upon the young, young men for the time being. There is one who continues to call, who himself gave meaning to ministry, even Jesus Christ whom we call Lord. Where there is a faithful minister there will be an authentic ministry together with God's people. Appropriate forms will follow.

10

A Century of Private Schools

Rudy A. Regehr

A hundred years ago when our ancestors left Russian soil for Canada in search of yet another Utopia there was no debate about the necessity for the private church school. Just as the church and the school stood together at the center of the Russian Mennonite village, so the church and the school stood side by side in the minds of the people. There were no divisions of sacred and secular in education. All education was sacred as the three divisions of students, the "Fiebler", "Bibeler" and "Testamentler" would imply.

Today, four generations later Canadian Mennonites have again reached that high level of sophistication and wealth which they once enjoyed in Russia. The attitude toward schools, however, is very different. In most communities the church and the school do not stand together. In the minds of very many Mennonites including some of our church leaders there is some ambivalence about the necessity for the church school. It remains a subject that can be vigorously debated. While the debate has not been finally adjudicated it is already clear that unless there will be a new enthusiasm for the Mennonite private school the debate may yet be adjudicated in favour of the negative side.

Mennonite private schools related to the Conference of Mennonites in Canada have a history that can be traced back nearly one hundred years on Canadian soil. This essay

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is an attempt to review a century of private schools in Canada.[1]

Humble Beginnings 1889-1908

When Russian Mennonites from the Altkolonie came to Manitoba in the 1870's to help open up the Red River Valley they planned to continue not only their methods of agriculture but also their own private school system. Grade schools were established immediately, creating a demand for teachers who were acceptable to both the people and the government. By 1889 a school for the preparation of Mennonite teachers was opened in the midst of considerable controversy. It took the courageous initiative of one Johann Funk backed by the progressive leaders of the Bergthaler Mennonite Church to do so. The Mennonitische Lehranstalt (now the Mennonite Collegiate Institute) opened with 60 students and one teacher, Wilhelm Rempel. In 1891, with some agitation from the Manitoba government H. H. Ewert, an educator from the Halstead Seminary in Kansas, was brought in to head up the school and to serve as inspector for the Mennonite grade schools in Southern Manitoba. Ewert, a man of unusual vision and perseverance, led the MCI through 43 years of crises and controversy. Thus began the heated, often angry, yet usually fruitful debate about the Mennonite private school in Canada.

Meanwhile in the Saskatchewan River Valley 600 miles west and north another group of Mennonite immigrants seeking their cultural and religious fortunes were establishing the German-English Academy, known today as Rosthern Junior College. The German-English Academy opened its doors in Rosthern in 1903. Herman Fast, the first teacher, was joined by six students on opening day. By the end of the year there were 21 students enrolled. In the following year David Toews was asked to assume leadership which he continued until 1917. He then became chairman of the board, a position which he held until 1944 alongside of his many responsibilities related to immigration.

These early years were years of struggle for survival. They were humble beginnings in retrospect, but they were

the courageous acts of faith that were to become the models for others to follow.

Pioneer Days 1909-1928

During the twenty years following the opening of the German-English Academy in Rosthern the only Mennonite school to be founded in Canada was the Herbert Bible Institute by the Mennonite Brethren in Saskatchewan. For the Academy and the Mennonite Collegiate Institute these were years of pioneering. There was a new language to learn, and an alien culture to adapt to. In Manitoba the cause of higher education continually had to be interpreted to the people amidst controversy in the Church and with the government. By 1927 the MCI enrollment was still at about 50 and no one knew then that in five years it would drop to 20 students.

In Saskatchewan the dedication and perseverance of David Toews kept the Academy alive. Here there was more openness to education and in the late 20's when a new wave of immigrants from Russia came into the area the enrollment swelled and enthusiasm ran high. No one believed that the difficulties were over, nor would anyone have predicted that these schools would soon be joined by others who would share the struggles of these pioneers.

Proliferation and Expansion 1929-1948

The Great Depression and a new wave of debt-laden immigrants came upon the Canadian Mennonite scene at approximately the same time. Neither circumstance would prompt the prediction that a period of expansion and proliferation of private schools lay just beyond the horizon. But during the ten years from 1929-1938 eight major Bible schools were established among General Conference Mennonites in Canada. In addition there were dozens of smaller local schools which functioned for brief periods.

This tremendous proliferation of schools against the existing odds was undoubtedly strongly influenced by the

latest surge of immigrants from Russia. They recalled with pride and nostalgia the school system which they had been compelled to leave. They knew immediately that the Canadian educational system was designed to assimilate them into the mainstream of this new society. They knew also that their identity as a people depended in large part on how successfully they would transmit their religious and cultural heritage to their children.

A second factor in this expansion of private schools was the Fundamentalist movement which hit its peak in the twenties. The strong emphasis on the Bible and personal piety found receptive minds among the Mennonites in Canada. The Fundamentalists built Bible schools, and Mennonites made an adaptation based on the Russian model. The Bible school became the focus for a great deal of attention. What too few people realized was that this too was an "amerikanisch" movement which also failed to recognize Mennonite distinctives. In addition many of the teachers and certainly the libraries were more influenced by Moody than by Menno.

For General Conference Mennonites the fact that the Mennonite Brethren churches had already established three Bible schools by 1929 and the fact that many General Conference young people were attending them served as an additional impetus.

The first of these new Bible schools to be established was the Elim Bible School in Manitoba in 1929. It was opened as an appendage of the MCI largely on the initiative of the Bergthaler and Blumenorter churches with John H. Enns as the lone instructor. After ten years it was moved to its present location in Altona.

Three years later Saskatchewan Mennonites again followed the example of their Manitoba brethren and established the Bible School at Rosthern with Jacob J. Nickel as founding leader followed by John G. Rempel in 1935 who continued in that role until 1949.

During the 30's and 40's when few leaders had formal theological training the need for Bible study was met in a variety of ways. Since most ministers were also farmers with somewhat less work in the winter, local Bible study was initiated in the form of Bible conferences (Bibelbesprechung) with travelling expositors, usually chosen from the ranks of the ministers, spending several days in a com-

munity before moving on. The writer recalls these in the Tofield, Alberta area as one of the few occasions when Mennonite Brethren ministers came to the General Conference Church and vice versa. In many places from Ontario to B.C. Bible schools were established locally in churches or homes. One such school was established by Rev. P. P. Dyck in Rosemary, Alberta in 1930. Room and board was to be had in the Dyck home for $4.00 per month. By 1934 some teachers even received small honorariums.[2] In 1937 Menno Bible Institute was established as an outgrowth of the Rosemary beginnings and eventually transferred to Didsbury, Alberta.

During the depression many of the dried-out farmers of Southern Alberta were lured to the supposedly fertile Peace River district in Northern Alberta and here too a Bible school was opened for a short time near Wembley.

The forerunner of the United Mennonite Educational Institute in Leamington was a Bible school conducted by Heinrich J. Janzen in the basement of the Oak Street Mennonite Church from 1936-40. During World War II instruction was discontinued but revived again in 1944 by the Ontario Ministers' Conference with teaching centers in Leamington, Vineland, and Niagara-on-the-Lake. A year later all of the Bible schools were amalgamated and moved to Leamington where other academic subjects were added to the curriculum. There were 25 students and two teachers, Elder J. Dyck and John C. Neufeld. By 1948 there were 78 students and 10 graduates.

While Ontario was consolidating its Bible schools, a second Bible Institute was being founded in Swift Current, Saskatchewan with N. Banman as principal in 1936. That same year the Steinbach Bible Institute, now operated by Evangelical Mennonite Church, was established.

The last of the Bible schools to be founded was the Bethel Bible Institute at Aldergrove with 22 students and N. Banman as teacher in 1939.

It was inevitable that with an increasing number of young people attending high school and the general increase in the standard of living that came with the boom years during and after the war that there would be a call for a higher level of religious instruction. In 1945 at the 44th session of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada in Eigenheim, Saskatchewan the subject of "eine hoehere Bibelschule" (a higher Bible school) was first discussed. An oft repeated

reason for such a school was the circumstance that many Mennonite young people were attending interdenominational schools and all too often failed to make the necessary adaptation for work within the Mennonite churches. It is likely not a mere coincidence that this was a year after the Mennonite Brethren Conference established the Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg with two of the better educated General Conference Mennonites, Henry Wall and I. I. Friesen on its faculty.

At that conference in Eigenheim a committee under the leadership of J. J. Thiessen, who only two years earlier had been elected Conference chairman, was established to make a feasibility study of a Canadian school. Overtures were made to the Mennonite Brethren Conference to work cooperatively, but neither group could muster the enthusiasm necessary to carry out the idea.

In September 1947 the Canadian Mennonite Bible College (CMBC) was ready to receive students in the slightly renovated basement of the Bethel Mission Church on Furby Street in Winnipeg. On registration day there were 24 students present despite the fact that the first catalogue had only one statement under the heading of "Courses". It read, "Details of courses to be given are being worked out and will be published later." By the second semester the outline for a complete 3-year B.Th. program was published. Besides President Arnold Regier, who had been imported from Kansas, the first catalogue lists four part-time faculty members, I. I. Friesen, Henry Wall, P. A. Rempel, and John Konrad. I. I. Friesen who later became president remained on the faculty continuously until 1969, when he retired and was named Professor Emeritus at CMBC.

In retrospect it is interesting to note that at the time of the founding of CMBC, two of the present CMBC faculty and several others who would become prominent in General Conference affairs were students at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College.

With the opening of CMBC a new era in the life of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada began. Only the most visionary people recognized the significance of that event, but there were many who were prepared to hitch their wagon to the dream of one J. J. Thiessen, whose address was Canada, and who was to remain the star in this drama for more than 25 years. The growth and success of CMBC can be credited in large part to the breadth of his visions for his people.

At about this same time the Canadian Mennonite Brethren besides establishing Mennonite Brethren Bible College as a Canadian Conference in 1944, were setting up their own high schools: Eden Christian College (1945), Virgil, Ontario; Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute (1945), Winnipeg, Manitoba; and the Mennonite Educational Institute (1944), in Clearbrook, B.C. The latter was opened in cooperation with the West Abbotsford Mennonite Church, a General Conference congregation.

Meanwhile in Ontario the "Old" Mennonites in the Waterloo-Kitchener area founded their own private school, Rockway Mennonite School in 1945. They also operated a Bible School in the First Mennonite Church in Kitchener.

Thus ended an era of proliferation and expansion of Mennonite private schools in Canada.

Consolidation and Refinement 1949-1968

The 1950's and 60's saw only one new high school and one college established in Canada.

The Mennonite Educational Institute (now Westgate Mennonite Collegiate) was opened in 1958 largely on the impetus of the Schoenwieser Mennonite Church and the North Kildonan Mennonite Church. Not too unlike the Mennonite Collegiate Institute and the Rosthern Junior College, Westgate Mennonite Collegiate (WMC) too was established to preserve the German-Mennonite culture — for the first time in an urban setting. Frank Neufeld served as its first principal. The author first became acquainted with WMC in the early 60's and recalls rather vividly how Dr. Victor Peters, then principal, described WMC as "unsere deutsche Schule" to a visitor from Kansas.

School and Conference reports of that era are mottled with accounts of financial stress, low enrollments, talk about closure, and as a last resort amalgamation.

Early in the 60's the Rosthern Bible School was absorbed into RJC without much success. Later the RJC Bible department was in a sense phased into the Swift Current Bible Institute. About five years later, after a great deal of theological and financial controversy in Alberta the Menno Bible Institute in Didsbury, Alberta, was closed. The Menno Bible Institute assets were amalgamated with Swift

Mennonite Private Schools in Canada

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MENNONITE COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE, GRETNA
ROSTHERN JUNIOR COLLEGE, ROSTHERN
UNITED MENNONITE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE, LEAMINGTON
MENNONITE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE, CLEARBROOK
MENNONITE BRETHREN COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE, WINNIPEG
EDEN CHRISTIAN COLLEGE, VIRGIL
ROCKWAY MENNONITE SCHOOL, KITCHENER
WESTGATE MENNONITE COLLEGIATE, WINNIPEG
HERBERT BIBLE INSTITUTE, HERBERT
BETHANY BIBLE SCHOOL, HEPBURN
WINKLER BIBLE INSTITUTE, WINKLER
ELIM BIBLE SCHOOL, ALTONA
ELIM CHRISTIAN EDUCATION CENTRE, ALTONA
ROSTHERN BIBLE SCHOOL, ROSTHERN
SWIFT CURRENT BIBLE INSTITUTE, SWIFT CURRENT
MENNO BIBLE INSTITUTE, DIDSBURY
BETHEL BIBLE INSTITUTE, CLEARBROOK
COLUMBIA BIBLE INSTITUTE, CLEARBROOK
MENNONITE BRETHREN BIBLE INSTITUTE, CLEARBROOK
STEINBACH BIBLE INSTITUTE, STEINBACH
MENNONITE BRETHREN BIBLE COLLEGE, WINNIPEG
CANADIAN MENNONITE BIBLE COLLEGE, WINNIPEG
CONRAD GREBEL COLLEGE, WATERLOO

Current Bible Institute and the latter was formally accepted as Alberta's Bible school. Similarly RJC was brought under the joint umbrella of the Alberta and Saskatchewan conferences. SCBI has seemed to prosper under the new arrangement; RJC, however, has fared a little less well since the new arrangement came into effect. Both schools continue to struggle for a viable base of support.

In Ontario where General Conference Mennonites had only one high school serving primarily the Leamington area and no Bible schools, the pressure to provide private school training finally found expression in the inter-Mennonite founding of Conrad Grebel College in Waterloo, Ontario. Like some other schools its president, Dr. J. Winfield Fretz too was an American with a long history of private college involvement. Conrad Grebel College was seen as a bold new model for post-secondary education under the umbrella of the Church. The core of its existence is the residence for 106 students, and a chaplain. Classes continue to be taken in the regular University of Waterloo system. By 1972 four Conrad Grebel College faculty members have been placed into the larger University of Waterloo faculty.

A Mood for Cooperation 1969-1988

After 80 years of private school history in Canada it is this observer's opinion that the next twenty years will be an era of cooperative efforts. There are no well defined reasons for believing this but there are pressures at work which will urge us in that direction.

The most subtle, yet the most powerful, of these pressures is the climate of our age. We live in a global community in which many of the divisions have little more than history to justify them.

A much less subtle pressure on private schools is the financial squeeze. While we all know that Canadian Mennonites spend more money on luxury items than ever before, the private schools are without exception experiencing economic stress. Since it is more difficult to re-educate the supporting constituencies and since "efficiency" has a very great appeal to a frugal people there will undoubtedly be more unions of expediency where good business sense will override minor theological differences.

Another pressure toward greater cooperation among Mennonites may well be some of the most recent religious movements which have swept through Mennonite congregations of every stripe. It is at this point too early to evaluate the full impact of these movements, but early indications are that those affected by them are experiencing a reduced tolerance level for denominational divisions.

Yet another factor, favoring cooperation in religious education is the pressure of pluralism all about us. In Canadian society today there is no way in which a student can graduate from high school, even a Mennonite high school, without encountering many life styles, and belief and value systems. Given that assumption, it really does not seem reasonable that the purity of a particular Mennonite denomination can, or ought to be maintained in our schools. For the Mennonite student to maintain proper perspective in our society he could be helped by a unified stance among private schools.

A fifth pressure, related to the one above, is in the realm of church structures. Throughout the Christian Church there is a movement toward cooperation even among denominations with very different histories and theologies. The pressure of this cooperation across denominational lines makes it almost mandatory, in the eyes of many, that groups as similar and with as much in common as the various types of Mennonites have, should also move toward greater cooperation.

A case in point is the relationship of Mennonite Brethren to General Conference churches in Canada. It is clear that they have much in common. Most of us have relatives in both groups. All of us have namesakes on the other side of the denominational boundary. Theologically and historically we share a common heritage from Abraham in the Old Testament to 1860 in Russia. In fact, we share a great deal of the last 110 years as well including persecution in Russia, immigration to Canada, relief work all over the world and a large measure of assimilation into the mainstream of Canadian society. Yet somehow history — or our interpretation of it — continues to dictate that we remain two distinct groups. Because we are so similar and possibly because so few outsiders can tell us apart, we feel compelled to fly "flags" for positive identification just like ships on the high seas. Many of these "flags" or symbols are verbal, others have to do with forms of worship, still

others are our associations. All this is not to say that flags are not important. Nor should it be implied that changing flags will change the cargo of a ship, but a change in flags may well allow ships to sail in one fleet.

The choice of the analogy of the flag is no accident. The changing of a flag, as recent Canadian history has demonstrated, is no small task. Just as the new flag did not magically change Canadians so new flags among Mennonites would change little. But if we could rally around a common flag our differences might not seem nearly so crucial.

All speculation about flags and honor aside, there is already evidence that by 1988 the number of Mennonite private schools in Canada will be reduced. The amalgamation of Bethel Bible Institute and Mennonite Brethren Bible Institute in B.C. in 1970 to form the Columbia Bible Institute may well be a sample of things to come. Clearly this is not a union based on theological unanimity but rather it was a union of expediency. Bethel Bible Institute needed to relocate to escape both from inadequate facilities and the unpleasantness of polluted air. Mennonite Brethren Bible Institute needed a broader base of support for its expansion program. The interests of both groups were served by the merger and it was done with a minimum of stress.

Not all cooperative ventures will likely come as easily. The 1971 session of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada passed the following resolution almost unanimously: " . . . that this Conference body instruct its CMBC Board and/or the Conference Executive to hold conversations with the MBBC Board and/or the Conference Executive for the purpose of exploring ways and means to develop a cooperative working relationship, and that the board and executive report back to the conference at the 1972 sessions."[3] This near unanimity must not be interpreted as single mindedness, for delegates voted "yes" for a variety of reasons, not all of which are compatible. The conversation between Mennonite Brethren and General Conference has already begun both formally and informally. The obstacles as well as the advantages are many but in the final analysis the continued existence of both these institutions may well depend upon the extent and the depth of cooperative effort.

In Ontario where inter-Mennonite work has a longer history, cooperative schools will likely take the form of broader bases of support for existing denominational schools such

as Eden Christian College, Rockway Mennonite High School and United Mennonite Educational Institute. Conrad Grebel College of course began as a cooperative effort among several Mennonite groups. The long and pleasant history of association between the "Old" Mennonites and General Conference Mennonites will probably be the focal point of such cooperation here.

The signs of the times seem clear. As Mennonite groups we will either move closer together or lose ourselves in our divisions. The 70's and 80's may well be the beginning of an era of cooperation. It will be a cooperation that recognizes a great many varieties of expression for the faith without a compulsion to create administrative unions. Some of these expressions of our faith will have their origins in our own Anabaptist history while others will be created in our immediate circumstances. These two bonded together in a spirit of love and concern may yet bring Mennonites into a golden age of education, an age in which we will acknowledge our differences yet rally around one flag whose central figures will be Jesus and the cross.

Education to What End?

The most frequent question being asked about church schools is, "How are these students different from those in other institutions?" The tacit assumption is that schools influence people, and Mennonite schools influence them differently than other schools. Intuitively that seems like a fair and just expectation. But how is it measured?

One approach is to ask from whence came our leaders. Even a cursory review shows that the majority of the leaders in our Conference have as a part of their educational experience a time in a church school. Compared to our total membership church school alumni are tremendously overrepresented in leadership positions. Many of our leaders have been touched by several Mennonite schools. In the 1971 Yearbook of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada 39 out of 70 positions on boards, committees and staff are filled by CMBC Alumni. In Saskatchewan one-third of the pastors are RJC Alumni, to cite only two examples.

A second way in which schools influence the Church is

through its faculties. Schools have often been the only place where groups of people with resources for leadership have had enough time together to formulate new ideas and approaches. During this last 80 years more than 325 faculty members have taught in General Conference related schools.

It is interesting to note how many of the leaders in education were also leaders in other areas of work: Johann Funk, H. H. Ewert, David Toews, John H. Enns, J. H. Janzen, J. J. Thiessen, I. I. Friesen, to mention but a few, were all deeply involved in other Conference work as well. Even the present situation in the Conference of Mennonites in Canada sees a strong representation of people from our private schools in its boards. A similar phenomenon exists in provincial and General Conference affairs.

Clearly the largest impact of the schools comes through its students. Time has not allowed for the collection of all the data, but an estimate of 5,000 living private school alumni in the Conference of Mennonites in Canada is reasonable. CMBC, one of the youngest of these schools, already has almost 1200 alumni.

Adequate documentation for the value of Mennonite public schools is hard to come by. It is not unlike asking someone to prove the value of his faith. All that he can do is to give testimony of his own experience. The same holds true for private schools. The testimony of many is that it has been a decisive factor in their lives. It has been the context in which many gained a new and fuller appreciation of the Church and decided to take an active part in it.

It seems to me that God has been at work among us through our schools. Here he has made us one people. As immigrants in a new and often hostile environment it has been our schools that have kept us together as a people. In more recent times it has been our schools which opened windows into a larger world for many people.

After almost 100 years of private schools in Canada we are a people — a people of God. We are a people whose faith has been tested in a variety of settings and has always found ready application. To ask "Why church schools?" is to ask, "Why the Mennonite church?"

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[1] The term "private schools" will be used here to designate a category of Mennonite church-related schools including high schools, Bible schools and colleges.
[2] From private correspondence with Jacob A. Dyck, Brooks, Alberta.
[3] 1971 Yearbook of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, p. 20.

11

Inter-Church Relationships

Larry Kehler

Christian unity and solidarity have been part of the Canadian Conference's dream since its beginning. It was this vision, in fact, which originally led to the founding of the Conference of Mennonites in Middle Canada in 1903.

Seventy years ago in an austere country church near Altona, the Rosenorter Church of Saskatchewan and the Bergthaler Church of Manitoba joined hands to gain the strength of an enlarged brotherhood. That was the first step toward drawing together a diverse amalgam of congregations which eventually stretched from Ottawa westward to Vancouver Island.

At its sessions in Eigenheim, Saskatchewan, in 1904, the Conference adopted a constitution, which, in part, read as follows: ". . . It is not a legislative, but an advisory body. The union it promotes does not consist in agreeable forms and customs, but in unity of love, faith, and hope, and in connection with this a common work in the kingdom of God."[1]

The horizons of the dreams have broadened in the intervening decades, but we err if we think that the present generation is the first to have a lively concern for an authentic spirit of cooperation and oneness.

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As early as 1908, when the Conference held its sixth annual session in Drake, Saskatchewan, H. H. Ewert developed the theme, "Kann etwas geschehen, damit eine grössere Einigkeit zwischen den verschiedenen mennonitischen Gemeinden angebahnt wird?"[2] He encouraged participation in inter-Mennonite Bible study conferences and urged that another look be taken at the factors which led to the divisions within the Mennonite family. He suggested that the Conference be ready to make some concessions on issues of secondary importance, if this would lead to a healing of broken relationships.

There was and is a darker side to the Conference's attitude toward interdenominational relationships. This subject came up for discussion in 1918, again at Drake, when Jacob F. Sawatzky presented a paper to the Conference entitled, "Was ist die Ursache, dass unser mennonitisches Volk ein so fruchtbares Feld für die verschiedenen Irrlehren ist?"[3] Sawatzky proposed that the divisiveness among Mennonites was one of the prime reasons why the various heretical sects were able to make such easy inroads among the Mennonite people.

In more recent times, the Conference has become involved at a modest level in a number of ecumenical ventures beyond the Mennonite family. But it has never joined either the Canadian Council of Churches or the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. Ecumenical involvement beyond the inter-Mennonite circle met with strong opposition almost from the beginning. P. J. Epp, in an address to the 1920 sessions in Laird, Saskatchewan, asked, "Was ist von der interkirchlichen Bewegung zwecks Weltreformation zu halten?"[4] Not much, was his reply. He was strongly supported in his negative assessment by P. Tschetter who described ecumenism to the delegates as "anti-Christian". Its aim, he said, was world improvement, not the preaching of the gospel. The organization was the brainchild of world industrialists, not the churches. He doubted if the movement would even accept churches which profess belief in God's Son.

The vision for unity has been part of the Conference's theology since its inception, but the realization of this dream has often been hampered by a failure to accept the humanness of other Christian groups. It is not the intention of this essay, however, to dwell on the opportunities for a greater degree of Christian unity which have been missed.

Our purpose here is to highlight a few of the instances in which the Conference and its members have thrown open their windows and doors to embrace the broader Christian brotherhood, thus enhancing both their own lives and their joint witness.

Relief, Service, and Peace

It was the tragedy of the Russian revolution in 1917 and the ensuing massive famine which prodded the Conference to join with other Mennonites in its grandest joint endeavor, a united relief and resettlement thrust.

> There is considerable evidence that the Russian Mennonite tragedy and the related two world wars served to bring about some positive developments in the total world Mennonite brotherhood that might otherwise have been delayed many years and generations or that might never have come at all.[5]

The relief and immigration organizations which the Conference and various of its regional groupings of congregations joined — and helped to found — include the following. In the West the first was the Canadian Central Committee (October 18, 1920). It gave way to the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization (May 17, 1922). The same supporting churches in western Canada later formed the Mennonite Central Relief Committee (March 15, 1940). These latter two organizations merged in August, 1960 to become the Canadian Mennonite Relief and Immigration Council.

Two agencies served the Ontario Mennonites, the Nonresistant Relief Organization (January 16, 1918) and the Conference of Historic Peace Churches (July 22, 1940). In southern Manitoba the Mennonites of *Kanadier* background formed the Canadian Mennonite Relief Committee (March, 1940).

This fragmented patchwork of relief committees didn't sit well with the younger leadership which emerged in a number of the conferences during the 1950's. After considerable agitation, a Canada-wide umbrella organization was formed in the early 1960's, and this led in 1964 to the dissolution of all the regional organizations and the establishment

of Mennonite Central Committee (Canada).

The Conference of Mennonites in Canada has been one of the strongest supporters of MCC (Canada) since its birth. David P. Neufeld, then executive secretary of the Conference, was released from some of his other duties to devote some time to the new organization during its developmental stages. He became its first chairman, and served in that capacity until 1972. The Conference of Mennonites in Canada, as the largest of the member groups in MCC (Canada), has also been the heaviest financial contributor.

But recognition must also be given to the leaders of the earlier relief efforts. Had it not been for their untiring efforts, MCC (Canada) would likely not have come into being. David Toews, H. H. Ewert, and P. P. Epp were among the men who devoted much of their energy to the setting up of feeding and resettlement programs for the Russian Mennonites. Shortly thereafter men such as J. J. Thiessen, J. Gerbrandt, J. G. Toews, David Schulz, and William Enns stepped to the fore.

More recently the Conference has provided leadership in inter-Mennonite relief and service endeavors through such people as T. E. Friesen, Frank H. Epp, Aaron Klassen, Henry H. Epp, Walter Paetkau, Helen Janzen, Jake Harms, Arthur Driedger, Leo Driedger, David Janzen, and D. P. Neufeld.

In the United States, the Mennonite Central Committee has taken on numerous other inter-Mennonite tasks besides relief and service projects. It has coordinated mutual aid and disaster service operations, established mental health institutions, set up an active peace department, and served as a liaison between North American Mennonites and the Mennonites in Indonesia and the Soviet Union. The Canadian MCC has been reluctant to assume such extra portfolios. D. P. Neufeld told this writer, "I think MCC (Canada) is going to remain a relief organization. . . . It may become the element which brings about inter-Mennonite and ecumenical talks, but it will hardly play a leading role in terms of leadership."[6]

The provincial MCC organizations, invariably with solid backing of Conference congregations, have not been hesitant to undertake new responsibilities. In Ontario, Craigwood, an institution for troubled youngsters, has been in operation for nearly twenty years. A similar institution, Twin Firs, has been established by the British Columbia MCC

organization near Abbotsford. Saskatchewan has a halfway house at Swift Current and an institution for retardates at Waldheim. Grosvenor Place, a new concept in trying to serve the offender, was opened in Winnipeg in 1971, and early this year a learning center for drop-outs was also opened in the Manitoba capital.

In Toronto, the local United Mennonite Church has served on the advisory committee for the Toronto Service Program, a series of MCC administered projects which are seeking to help families and individuals who are living in difficult inner city settings. Nicholas W. Dick, former pastor of the Toronto United Mennonite Church, was the first full-time director of this program.

Missions and Evangelism

The Conference's and its congregations' ecumenical involvement in missions and evangelism ranges from the co-sponsorship of án industrial chaplain at a giant power project in northern Manitoba to the joint sponsorship of community-wide mass evangelism rallies.

Menno Wiebe of the Mennonite Pioneer Mission has attempted to develop a greater degree of cooperation among the denominations in ministering to the native people in Manitoba, but he has met with only limited success. He has, however, succeeded in making the Youth Opportunities Unlimited center in Winnipeg, which the Conference established as a meeting place for Indians, a more widely representative organization. Three of the eight members on Y.O.U.'s advisory committee are Indians. In several of the MPM locations in central Manitoba, particularly Little Grand Rapids and Bloodvein Reserve, where holiness groups have a strong appeal to the local people, MPM is making a determined effort to try to work cooperatively with these groups rather than to promote their separate programs. This type of cooperation with highly mobile groups is difficult.

The Conference was a front-line participant in the Canadian Congress on Evangelism held in Ottawa in 1970. It appointed a representative to the Congress planning committee, and a full complement of delegates to the week-long event in the national capital. It will also support Probe 72, an inter-Mennonite evangelism thrust, and Key 73 a continent-wide interdenominational effort.

Although there had been diminishing interest in mass evangelism rallies in many Conference churches, the Saskatoon revival last autumn resulted in renewed interest in this type of outreach. Most of the Conference churches in the Saskatoon area were intimately affected by the renewal which the Sutera brothers' meetings triggered. The twins' informal, almost austere, approach somehow gave mass evangelism a new credibility.

In Ontario, where inter-Mennonite cooperation is almost taken for granted, several conferences, including the United Mennonite Conference, have a joint mission and service organization. One of its main projects is a halfway house for alcoholics in Sudbury.

Communications

Radio and television, the electronic twins, hold a special fascination for many Mennonite churches. They communicate instantaneously to a mass audience — at least it is always assumed that there is a mass audience out there — and they have an aura of mystery and sophistication about them which people who wish to communicate find difficult to resist. Radio, because of its more reasonable costs has been used widely for several decades, but usually with a pronounced denominational orientation. Television is a different matter. It is so expensive that none but the largest denominations can afford to use it. It was for this reason that the Canadian Conference approved a resolution in 1968 "requesting the General Conference mission board to consider serious and creative involvement in mass communications through the Mennonite Council on Mass Communications."[7] The General Conference accepted this challenge. Bernie Wiebe, of the Manitoba-based Faith and Life Communications office, was one of the men who spearheaded General Conference participation in an inter-Mennonite endeavor in mass communications. The first project, four television spots on family life, was conceived that same autumn. It was a joint project of the (Old) Mennonites and the General Conference. In Canada the distribution was handled through the Faith and Life Communications office in Winnipeg. "The (Old) Mennonite and General Conference cooperation has grown steadily and readily,"[8] says Wiebe. In 1969 they worked out a cooperative agreement for joint

marketing and production. This led to involvement in the production of several series of CHOICE, a radio program for men, and minute spots on radio. Three additional series of television spots have subsequently been prepared, one each year. The Canadian Mennonite Brethren were consultants in the earlier productions, but gradually they have become more deeply involved in this joint communications effort. In 1971 they became official participants. Bernie Wiebe resigned as head of Faith and Life Radio and Television, the General Conference arm of the joint inter-Mennonite mass communications ministry, in 1971. He was succeeded by Waldo Neufeld, who had prior commercial radio and television experience in Altona, Winnipeg, and Brandon.

A second area of inter-Mennonite communications in which the Conference has participated actively is in the publishing field. It accepted *The Canadian Mennonite*, published by the Canadian Mennonite Publishing Association, as its English-language paper, and it is now promoting *The Mennonite Reporter*, another inter-Mennonite newspaper. The leadership in both these endeavors came largely from the Conference. Frank H. Epp was the founding editor of both. Dave Kroeker served as managing editor first of *The Canadian Mennonite* and now of the *Reporter*. David Schroeder was the Canadian Mennonite Publishing Association's chairman during its difficult formative years in the early 1960's. And it was primarily Aaron Klassen's determined effort after the death of *The Canadian Mennonite* which sparked the founding of *The Reporter*. In the Conference, few have done more to promote readership and financial support for the inter-Mennonite press than Henry H. Epp.

Life Books, a store now jointly operated in Winnipeg by the Mennonite Brethren and the General Conference, is another important landmark in the field of inter-Mennonite communications. Discussions which were begun in 1970 to merge the Christian Press store in Winnipeg and Faith and Life Bookstore in Rosthern, culminated in October, 1971, when the stores moved together. George Dyck, Harold Petkau, and Henry H. Epp were the men who negotiated the merger on the Conference's behalf.

Education

The 1970's began with the sudden and unexpected merger of the Mennonite Brethren and Bethel Bible institutes

in British Columbia. "The overarching force at work in uniting the two conferences in the Bible school work," writes Jake Tilitzky, who was chairman of the B.C. Conference at the time of the merger negotiations, "was definitely economic expediency. The M.B. Bible Institute was deeply in debt, yet needed more facilities. Our Bethel Bible Institute was at a crossroads. We needed to relocate if we wished to continue. A good solution to both our problems was that we build the needed facilities on the M.B. campus and join the program there. So far it seems to be working well."[9]

Brother Tilitzky relates the following story to illustrate how well the school's two hundred students are getting along with each other. One of the students from the Eben Ezer congregation, of which Mr. Tilitzky is pastor, was always raving about her good roommate when she came home on weekends. After some months her parents asked her, "From which conference is she?" With surprise in her eyes, the girl answered, "I really don't know. I never thought to ask."[10]

The school in Clearbrook operated under the name Associated Mennonite Bible Institutes during its first year. Now it is called Columbia Bible Institute. Of its 195 students, over 30 belong to Baptist, Christian and Missionary Alliance, and other non-Mennonite churches.

George Schmidt, who was principal of Bethel Bible Institute prior to the merger, and who now serves on the Columbia faculty, says emphatically that the level of cooperation is "above expectations."[11]

A few hundred yards down the road from Columbia Bible Institute, is a parochial high school, Mennonite Educational Institute, which is also inter-Mennonite. Of its eight supporting congregations, two are members of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada: West Abbotsford and Eben Ezer. "I am certain," says Jake Tilitzky, "that the M.E.I. has done more than any single factor in breaking down barriers between the two conferences in the Fraser Valley."[12]

Conrad Grebel College has been one of the most ambitious inter-Mennonite undertakings in Ontario, the province noted for its free and easy relationship among Mennonite groups. The College, which opened its doors to students in 1964, has been supported by four Mennonite bodies, including the United Mennonites of Ontario. From 1964-65 to

1971-72 the school has had 265 Mennonite students in residence. Fifty-nine percent of these have come from the General Conference, mostly from Ontario. Three of the College's five faculty members belong to the Canadian Conference.[13]

Elim Christian Education Centre in Altona has been supported mostly by Conference churches, but the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference is also a member of the Society which operates the school. This year (1971-72) 40 percent of its students come from churches such as the Sommerfelder, Old Colony, (Old) Mennonites, and non-Mennonite groups, which are not members of the Society.

The Canadian Mennonite Bible College has been in dialogue with faculty and board members from the M.B. Bible College from time to time to talk about greater cooperation between these two Winnipeg schools. Discussions are currently going on again as a result of prodding from the Conference sessions in Vancouver in 1971. A projected series of cooperative evening classes appears to be one of the first tangible fruits of this dialogue. The C.M.B.C. faculty also participated actively in an interdenominational theological colloquium for several years. This forum has brought together a variety of theologians from seminaries and colleges in the Red River Valley, both north and south of the border.

Another aspect of interdenominational "cross-pollination" is the enrollment of Conference students in other church-related schools. The following data are not exhaustive, but they do give us some notion of the degree to which students from Conference churches influence and are influenced by the schools of other denominations and conferences.

During the 1971-72 school year 48 of the 235 students at Eden Christian College, Niagara-on-the-Lake; nine of the 96 students at Rockway Mennonite School, Kitchener; and 31 of the 317 students at M.B. Collegiate Institute, Winnipeg, were of General Conference background.

Steinbach Bible Institute had four General Conference students, three in the Bible school and one in the high school. Winnipeg Bible College, out of an enrollment of 140, had two General Conference students. Prairie Bible Institute had a total of 767 students during the same year, and of these 26 were Mennonite Brethren and 17 were "other kinds of Mennonites."

The extent of General Conference enrollment at most

of these schools was lower than usually supposed. In Winnipeg, for example, it had been rumored that 70-80 General Conference students were attending M.B.C.I.

Broader Ecumenical Relations

Most of the Conference's efforts toward achieving greater unity have gone into the strengthening of inter-Mennonite relations, although it has also become involved in a variety of broader ecumenical contacts, as the foregoing pages attest. It has, however, always balked at the prospect of joining almost any national ecumenical body. The Canadian Council of Churches' suspected liberal bent, for example, has made that organization out-of-bounds for most Conference members. Individual members of the Conference have, however, immersed themselves in various phases of CCC's work. Frank H. Epp, is the chairman of its Commission on Canadian Affairs and two of its subcommittees: one on racism and the other on American immigrants. Menno Wiebe of the Mennonite Pioneer Mission staff was invited earlier this year to also serve on the racism committee. Outside of these selective involvements in CCC's work, the Conference has only limited relationships to the Council.

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, another national organization, has not succeeded in gaining much more support from the Conference than the CCC has received. David P. Neufeld, one of the few members of the Conference who belong to the E.F.C., serves on its council.

It is not possible for a conference to join E.F.C., but congregations may become offical members. This is what Brother Neufeld hopes a number of Conference churches will do. "We cannot join as MCC or as a conference, but we ought to encourage church leaders to become attached to local chapters, to attend annual meetings, and then to involve their churches in affiliating with the evangelical community of Canada,"[14] he stated in a recent article.

"As I reflect on the way the gospel is presented, the way these men are interested in winning people to Jesus Christ, the way they express their theology, I become more and more convinced," says Mr. Neufeld, "that most of our churches would feel at home in the council (EFC)."[15]

In Manitoba, the provincial Conference of Mennonites has for the past twelve years participated in the inter-

faith hospital chaplaincy advisory committee, and, through the leadership of Ernest Wiebe, it has also been a member of the Manitoba Interfaith Council since its founding in 1968.

Locally, most Conference pastors belong to one or more ministerial associations. In some of the larger communities there are as many as three: general, evangelical, and Mennonite. One pastor confided to the writer that he has a closer relationship with a Christian Reformed minister than he is able to have with most Mennonite pastors. Another said, "I find working with M.B.'s a lot easier than with ministers from another denomination because we seem to have the goals more clearly in mind."

The Congregations

In the final analysis, Christian unity grows or withers on the rock of the local congregation. If it doesn't take root there, Christian ecumenism has little chance of becoming a significant reality anywhere.

It must be confessed, I believe, that there has been a tendency in congregations within our brotherhood to become easily isolated from one another. Each local church goes about its business with only limited attention to the concerns and aspirations of Christian congregations all around it. Joint action and celebration still appears to be the exception rather than the rule.

But there are exceptions, and thank God for them. Early in the history of the Conference, when small clusters of Mennonites homesteaded in numerous isolated regions, the members of two conferences would sometimes join together to build one meetinghouse because both groups separately were too small to build churches for themselves. This cooperation was forced by financial and geographic expediency, but a residue of goodwill still lingers from that experience.

There are a growing number of communities now where churches combine their talents to arrange joint vacation Bible school, Holy Week services, Christian education conferences, and of course evangelistic rallies. A reservoir of trust is slowly being built.

So many of the most exciting things our churches are doing — relief and service, communications, education, and even missions — are being done on a cooperative basis with other congregations, conferences, and denominations that it is difficult to understand why there is as much resistance to this wholesome type of ecumenism as there is.

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[61] J. G. Rempel, "Conference of Mennonites in Canada", in *Mennonite Encyclopedia* (Scottdale: Mennonite Publishing House, 1955), Vol. 1, p. 671.

[62] J. G. Rempel, *Fuenfzig Jahre Konferenzbestrebungen 1902-1952* (Steinbach: Derksen Printers, 1952), Vol. 1, p. 53.

[63] *Ibid.*, p. 127.

[64] *Ibid.*, p. 135.

[65] Frank H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus* (Altona: D. W. Friesen & Sons, 1962), p. 478.

[66] D. P. Neufeld's correspondence with the writer.

[67] *1968 Illustrated Yearbook Conference of Mennonites in Canada*, p. 15.

[68] Bernie Wiebe's correspondence with the writer.

[69, 70] Jake Tilitzky's correspondence with the writer.

[71] George Schmidt's correspondence with the writer.

[72] Jake Tilitzky's correspondence with the writer.

[73] J. W. Fretz's correspondence with the writer.

[74] D. P. Neufeld, "Evangelicals in Canada attract Mennonites" *The Mennonite*, Vol. 86, No. 16, April 20, 1971, p. 263.

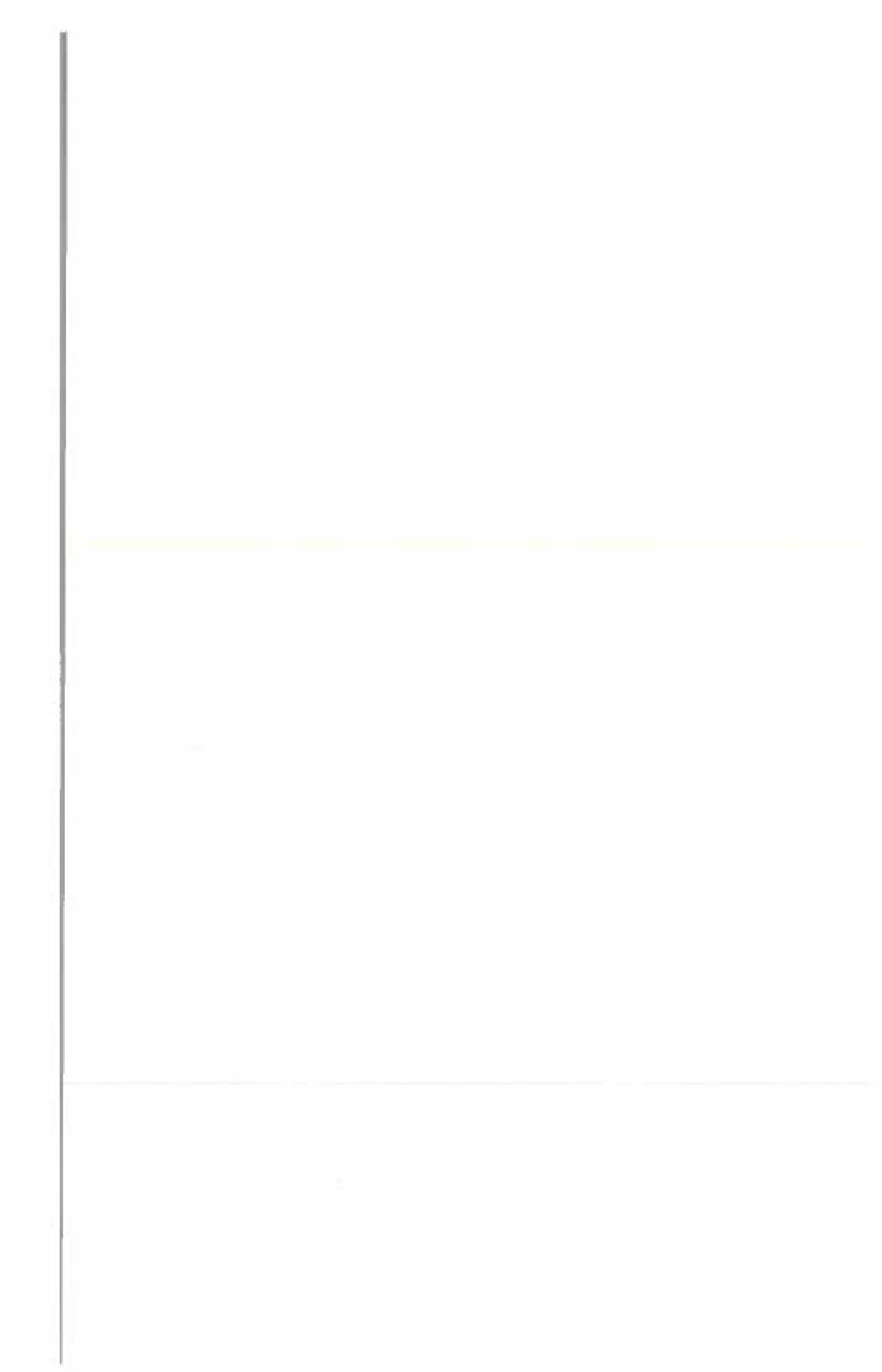
[75] *Ibid.*

II

Experiences of Faithfulness

As a Church

As a People



Mennonites, Coming and Going

Gerhard Ens

It was the Summer of '71.

A group of about 40 Canadian Mennonites were touring some half a dozen cities and two of the former colonies of the Mennonites in the Soviet Union.

To the writer who took part in this tour there was something symbolic about this venture. It was a very representative group. All were emigrants or descendants of emigrants from the country which they were touring as guests of its official tourist agency. There were sons and grandsons of the 1874 emigrants; there were a number of the emigrants of the 1920's, some accompanied by their sons, and there were a number of ladies representing the post World War II emigrants. At least three generations were represented and three major Conferences. All had one common aim besides that of enrichment by travel: to attempt to seek out their roots in a country in which their history and outlook on life had been shaped so decisively, both positively and negatively.

Was the venture a success from this point of view?

Perhaps the question is not a fair one to ask. Just how much can one learn in two and one half weeks of travel in such a huge and diverse a country as the Soviet Union? And yet, the writer believes, that some answers did emerge

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from this memorable trip, this "sentimental journey" as it were, after an absence — immediate or by proxy — of 25, 50, or a 100 years.

One could begin to sense, if not really comprehend fully, how this huge country with its very vastness must have affected the original immigrants to the inhospitable lower Dnepr valley and the Black Sea steppes. "Verloren in der Steppe" is the term that has been both accurately and thoughtfully coined by probably our most erudite writer, the late Arnold Dyck, poet *par excellence,* in his *Heimatkunst*. To overcome this feeling of lostness our forefathers had to turn inward to find the resources for living in themselves and in their own group. Our colonies became "closed colonies" as they had never been before. Our people in Russia became self-sufficient materially, culturally, spiritually and even to a limited extent, politically. And they remained so for almost a century and a half.

This concept of physical and cultural separation from the larger society, beginning already in the Vistula-Nogat valleys and reaching its zenith during the Russian — later Soviet — sojourn of our people, was accepted at first out of necessity. It was enforced by Royal and Imperial "Privilegien", and finally became the ideal of a large segment of our people for another century in the New World, where it again was re-enforced by an Order-in-Council in Canada and Presidential letters of privileges in a few Latin American Republics, notably Mexico and Paraguay. The most impressive memorial to this ideal is undoubtedly the Mennonite Village Museum in Steinbach, Manitoba, administered under the auspices of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society. It is by no means only a curious accident that on the museum grounds there stands the 1889 memorial to Johann Bartsch, the Russian Mennonite pioneer, transplanted from the Rosenthal cemetery to the Mennonite Museum; and that plans are pending to have this memorial joined by its twin, the Jakob Hoeppner memorial, at present still on its original site on the Island of Chortitza in the lower Dnepr. The indebtedness of both East and West "Reserves" in Manitoba to the Russian sojourn is unmistakable and real.

Nor is this entirely undesirable. Our, first enforced, later desired and today nostalgically remembered, "lostness" in the steppes of Eastern Europe and the North American prairies was by no means only a "bad thing". It brought to the fore not only our inherent weaknesses, (and God

knows we have enough of them, not the least of them our unfortunate penchant towards incessant internecine bickering and quarreling, sometimes termed the "Täuferkrankheit") but also some of our very real strengths. Our achievements in the field of agriculture and education on at least three continents are real and in some respects unique and outstanding. In a number of instances in this almost 200-year history since 1789 we have literally pulled ourselves out of an economic, social, cultural and intellectual morass by our own boot straps. One needs to be reminded only of the imaginative and constructive way in which the land problem was handled by the Mennonites in Russia, and the level of educational achievement in their colonies around the turn of the century. While the fires of faith sometimes burned very low, threatening to be smothered in the smoke of traditionalism, there were always enough glowing embers to be fanned into bright flames when the winds of God blew away the smoke screens. We also produced a number of leaders of the highest calibre in these 200 years; Leaders whose presence could have graced the cabinets of nations with distinction had they chosen to seek political careers. There was Johann Cornies, of whom we were envied by the highest circles in the Russian government. There was Philip Wiebe, his successor, B. B. Janz, P. M. Friesen, C. F. Klassen, David Toews, A. A. Friesen, B. H. Unruh, H. H. Ewert, J. J. Thiessen, to name just a few. All of these literally "walked with kings nor lost the common touch."

So it behooves us well to remember these two centuries with fondness and with gratitude. They form a major part of our history and must be seen as part and parcel of the ways of God with His people. It is only too easy and sometimes popular to "debunk" the past, but fortunately the "myths" of history are usually truer than the literal "facts" and certainly tend to outlive them. So let it be with our immediate past.

But having said all this the writer feels constrained to add some further observations to our "coming and going" in the past 200 years. Attention must be called to what the writer considers the most negative result of 200 years of "lostness" in the steppes and the prairies, namely that of our involuntary and largely subconscious confusion of our culture with our faith. Not that there were not remarkable and notable exceptions to this. Johann Cornies and P. M. Friesen, to mention only two influential leaders, were broadminded and "universal" men who loved their adopted

country and its people very much and were able to see things in a much wider perspective than most of their contemporaries. So did most or all of the leaders mentioned above and many not mentioned. But the confining and restraining effects of isolation were none the less real and insidious. Thus at least three or four major migrations of our "coming and going" in these 200 years were not caused by persecution or a threat to our faith but rather by a threat, partly imagined, partly real, to our by now almost sacred way of life — our "closed" communities, our land holdings, our language and our schools. And if, in the Old Country by violence and in the New World by affluence, this way of life has come to an end (keeping in mind that it is still very much a way of life in the Latin Americas and to a lesser extent in rural Manitoba and Saskatchewan), we must also regard this as part of the inscrutable ways of God with His people and we must come to see His ways and purposes in these leadings.

And surely for most of the Mennonite readers of this anthology this way of life is a thing of the past. In a way we have moved full circle. Our movement did not begin as an exclusively rural movement. It began among artisans and labourers and a few intellectuals, as well as peasants, in both city and country. The Anabaptists of the 16th century did not envision a "Mennonite" culture and a "Mennonite" way of life. They envisioned a radical renewal of the entire Church of Jesus Christ with the double emphasis of the New Birth and discipleship. They were Christians who took the call to commitment and discipleship in this world very seriously and who not infrequently sealed their witness with their lives.

Is God through the course of history forcing us into this mould again — to be in the world but not of the world? Is that why there is hardly a refuge left in this world where we can indulge in isolationism again? Does this mean that today we are to be Anabaptist, that is, Mennonite Christians not only in Tiegenhagen but also in Saskatoon, not only in Reinland but also in Ottawa, not only in Plum Hollow but also in Waterloo?

13

Canadian Mennonite Families: Foundations and Launching Pads

Bernie Wiebe

Family is a Primary Unit

"We recognize the family as the basic unit of society and the most important institution for spiritual development and community strength. The family is a primary part of God's creation for the purpose of procreation, training, fellowship and love. The family, however, is not an end in itself. It is responsible to God and exists for the fulfillment of His purposes in the world."[1] These words introduced our General Conference statement on *THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY* adopted in August 1962.

THE FAMILY is the primary unit of human existence. The Bible tells us that man is insufficient to himself: "Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone, I will make him a helper fit for him' " (Genesis 2:18).[2] Man is created for community, *i.e.*, the family. This is evident from the beginning of time.

Anthropologists continue to dig deeper into man's past. In 1959, the Leakeys discovered Zinjanthropus, today considered the oldest known human inhabitant of the planet earth. By potassium-argon dating, the skull of this 16-18 year old youth, has been set at about 1,750,000 years old.[3] This is about twice the age of any human remains previously discovered.

Mr. Bernie Wiebe is pursuing graduate studies in counseling and communications at the University of North Dakota. He has served as pastor of a number of churches both in Canada and the United States, has been a member of several conference boards and committees and has served as director of the Abundant Life Broadcast, sponsored by the Conference of Mennonites in Manitoba. He is a member of the Fort Garry Mennonite Fellowship.

A very significant conclusion reached by the people who are studying the civilization linked to Zinjanthropus, is that man lived in families. Ashley Montagu says: "Thus, monogamy is probably as old as man himself."[4]

Psychologically speaking, the family is absolutely essential to man. Erich Fromm puts it most appropriately: "This awareness of himself as a separate entity, the awareness of his own short life span, of the fact that without his will he is born and against his will he dies, that he will die before those whom he loves, or they before him, the awareness of his aloneness and separateness, of his helplessness before the forces of nature and of society, all this makes his separate, disunited existence an unbearable prison."[5]

Family is a Mennonite Strength

Mennonites have to this date accepted the primacy of family living. In fact, the image of Mennonites to many non-Mennonites, is that of closely knit communes. This is seen in Canada Year Books where under religious denominations, the Hutterites are included with Mennonites.[6] It was also brought to this writer's attention again recently when a citizen of Grand Forks, N.D. upon discovering his Mennonite identity, exclaimed: "Where is your beard and where are your peculiar clothes?"

What makes Mennonites emphasize family life? We are of course, not alone in building strong family ties. The Jewish family and the Oriental family are at least two others that repeatedly stand out for their enduring strengths.

Among the Mennonites, we can conjecture several reasons. Mennonite leaders would like to believe that our basic commitment to a biblical faith and way of life, is the underlying basis for our rich family heritage. Certainly, it is a part of the reason.

From our Anabaptist beginnings, we have been taught that belief is to be put into practice. This has resulted in a strong emphasis on discipleship. Mennonite families have had a basic Christian purpose, *i.e.*, to serve. Our service as Canadian families is well demonstrated in the aid to displaced persons early in this century; in the CO camps; in the MCC and VS programs; and in the missionary endeavours.

We must admit, however, that there also are other reasons for our family loyalties. Historically, Anabaptist/Mennonites were forced to rely on themselves due to persecution. The challenge of unbroken land when our forefathers came to Canada, simply reinforced a need for families to stick together. Customs and traditions developed. Mennonites became an ethnic as well as a religious group.

The Mennonite identity has remained rooted in a rural and exclusive orientation. While urbanization has occurred to our families no less than to the larger population, it can be strongly argued that city-Mennonites are still a rural people who have been transplanted into a strange setting!

Family in a Rapidly Changing Culture

Today's families face a rapidly changing culture. It is not new to face change, but somehow today's pace of change seems accelerated beyond proportion. Scarcely has one new innovation dawned among us before it is complicated by a number of new discoveries with a potential of replacing the former. This leaves our culture in an ongoing "present culture shock". Before inventions or ideas become part of our culture, they are outdated and irrelevant.

This process has special significance for family life.

Consider the issue of *authority*. In Mennonite families, it has traditionally been assumed that God is in charge and he has endowed parents with His authority over children (*cf.*, Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 6:1).

Suddenly, we are in the midst of a world that is very religious, but doesn't necessarily understand God as we have understood Him in the past!

Mennonite parents, God's ambassadors, suddenly find their roles undermined. When the child needs information, he is sent to the teacher or the library. The doctor heals his wounds. The minister teaches him doctrine. Psychologists deal with his mental health. Community clubs provide recreation. Police and fire departments protect his rights.

What role do mothers and fathers assume in a time of "specialists" for everything? Many parents feel irrelevant because their experiences of family living make it almost

impossible to be "models" for their children.

Add to that the rising tide of the feminist movement! The Mennonite family, a traditional patriarchal group, has hardly been prepared for a "shared leadership".

Family functions are changing drastically. When Mennonites first came to Canada, home was a factory and the family was the work force. Industries pursued in most households included canning, churning butter, butchering, harness-making, making soap and medicine, spinning, sewing, knitting and tailoring the family clothing, providing family water and sewage disposal, building and repairing homes, furniture, barns and sheds. The larger the family unit, the greater the production!

Which of these functions are still being carried on in your family today? Instead of producers, today's families are units of consumers. More babies only mean higher grocery bills! Large families have become economic liabilities. When the author with a family of four children, began looking for housing in a University city to attend Graduate school, the response of home owners frequently was: "Gosh, you have a very large family. Sorry, we can't accommodate such large families."

But the Psalmist tells us that children are a "heritage from the Lord. . . . Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them!" (Psalm 127:3-5)

Today's world is changing more and more to an *Open Society.* The electronic media expose us to the whole world. Mennonite children soon learn that we are less than 1% of all Canadians and an even smaller percentage of the total world. There are many Mennonite denominations, other Christian churches *and* many other religions.

Honesty to themselves forces our young people to examine the basic tenets of the Mennonite Church. Are we really a unique "People of God"? Or are we simply peculiar in the sense of being different?

There is a general attitude of searching among today's youth. Sex and drug-experimentation are part of this climate. Divorce and living together out of wedlock, occur among Mennonites too.

In the past, Mennonites built their own villages, spoke a special language and wore unique clothes. Must we try to demonstrate the "separated life" for Christ (II Corinthians 6:17) once again by withdrawing from today's Open Society?

The *Urbanization-Industrialization* changes are making a marked difference in Mennonite families. The 1966 census shows less than 10% of Canadians living on farms. A quick look at Canadian conference yearbooks over a period of 20 years, shows how our families too are in the cities today.

This introduces our families much more directly to the affluent materialistic aspects of everyday living. Economic pressures drive *both* parents to work. Family members soon are gauged by what they can "bring in" so we can "keep up with the Joneses."

Instead of working as a team, urban families tend to be badly split up. Frequently, father and mother are employed in different parts of the city and on conflicting schedules. Family devotions and togetherness give way to occasional meetings on the way out the door. Homes become more like motels. Job transfers and family ties outside of the city make families reluctant to establish deep community or church ties. Those who stay in the city tend to establish rural churches and live by rural mindsets in the city.[7]

The increasing mobility and leisure time of today's families are by-products of industrialization. To a people who have traditionally been work-oriented, this causes some real hang-ups. We have been taught that idleness is the workshop of the devil and the example of the golden calf built by Aaron (*cf.* Exodus 32) well illustrates the negative potential of free time.

Boredom is today considered the number one problem in marriage. Marriage partners spend much time alone and have time to think and dream about what might be.

The infrequent sitting down together as families leads to an alienation of parents to children as well as parent to parent and brother to sister. Consequently, loneliness becomes a multiplied plague in the midst of large masses of people.

Instead of a generation gap, the division between and among the generations becomes more like a gaping hole!

As we can see from the foregoing, the family functions of the past are being very much challenged. Many have been replaced by default. Others are on the verge.

What can we do? What are the really vital Christian Mennonite family functions today?

Emerging Family Life-styles for the Future

The challenge to be Christian Mennonite families today, is akin to God's calling Abraham: " . . . to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go" (Hebrews 11:8).

There are those who say that the family unit is doomed. The present records of family breakdown and disintegration are enough to make us listen carefully.

But, civilization has always been on the downgrade when people fail to act responsibly! We *can* promote Christian family life if we have the courage to follow God's call. Christians are prone to become afraid, defensive and protective, just like anybody else, when danger is present. God calls us to be bold and venturesome.[8]

The whole area of love and understanding has never been more needed than today. Instead of protection for our families, we should be demonstrating affection. Learning how to show and receive affection is today possibly the primary function of the home. Most things can be learned from specialists, but the art of affection is still best learned from experience.

Mennonite families have a strong sense of togetherness. We tend to be one for all and all for one. In the past, we have tended to keep our feelings hidden.

In the midst of today's permissive and shallow expressions of love and affection, the Christian Family has a real opportunity. Jesus himself seems to have been quite free in demonstrating physical contact with those to whom he ministered (*cf.* Matthew 8). If the Mennonite family can learn to demonstrate openly that affection which we inwardly harbour for each other, this will be a great contribution to the future. Not only will it help generations to come; it will also assure a growing Mennonite Church.

The music of our day, the clothes, the student and labor unrest, the drug culture and the youth counter culture all speak of alienation and disruption. Mennonites, with a 450-year history of peacemaking and practical discipleship, are peculiarly equipped to make a very significant witness to our age. The Jesus-way is a way of peace and love for all mankind!

There is a second function of today's family that also holds tremendous significance. The patriarchal family of the past very often used a strongly assertive authoritarianism to train up its children. Today, there is a very strong anti-establishment atmosphere. Authority is challenged at every turn.

The Mennonite family here also is in a peculiar position to demonstrate a Christian alternative. For over 450 years, we have borne witness to alternative forms of witness in place of force. Today we need to translate this principle into family living. Jesus gives us the ultimate example. He "saves" the world by giving himself totally on man's behalf. Authority lies in sharing ourselves.

The father who wants to lead his family will find himself most respected for acts of self-involvement. No gifts of money or comforts can substitute for this personal dimension of living.

Parents and siblings who will give of themselves to each other will always discover that an act of self-giving is an act of inspiration. Too easily in a time of stress we try to assert ourselves by intimidating the opposition. That is, at best, still a cold war! The way of reconciliation in home and country is the way of mutual relationships. God demonstrates this way most clearly in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. He becomes one with us so that we might be reconciled to God and to our fellow man.

Mennonites have historically done a good job of practising this principle in times of war. Our age challenges us to demonstrate it in our everyday domestic living. Inspiration is needed rather than intimidation!

Patterns for Christian family living in the future are emerging very clearly. And they do force us to re-examine our attitudes.

The twentieth century Mennonite family in Canada has frequently been satisfied simply to assume that our children would grow up to appreciate our faith. Often we relegated faith-observances to Sundays or special holy days. We put our trust in once-for-all conversions and prided ourselves in a "simple" Gospel.

The Christian family for today must capture the meaning of faith as a part of our total life. In the early church, faith spread from house to house. Our time reminds us again of the need for Acts 5:42: "And every day in the temple

and at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ." Confirmation classes start in the home. Communion begins at our kitchen table.

Our Christian faith dare not be isolated or insulated from the world. Abraham journeyed to a far country, not knowing what all to expect. Everywhere he went, he sowed seeds of godliness. Mennonites may continue to migrate, but wherever we go, the real test of our spiritual temperature will still be whether our faith can be shared with those about us. Elton Trueblood says it well: "God, we believe, is not primarily interested in religion, but in living, not primarily in churches, but in people."[9] Home may be a place for laying foundations; but it must be more than that. Our homes need to have "launching pads" that equip our families for a radical discipleship in today's world.

Authority rests in families who demonstrate that they themselves accept the will of the heavenly Father as their constitution, because in doing so, our families acknowledge that we are part of God's universal family. We establish our own partnership with Jesus Christ; for he says: " . . . whosoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Matthew 12:50).

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*All Bible references are from the Revised Standard Version.

[1] From statement prepared by Board of Education and Publication for adoption at the sessions of the General Conference, August, 1962.

[2] For those who are deeply troubled by today's Women's Liberation movement, it may be good to reflect upon the thought that it was man who needed a companion!

[3] Ashley Montagu, *The Human Revolution* (New York: The World Publishing Co., 1965), p. 60.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 98.

[5] Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970), pp. 6-7. *Used by permission of Harper and Row Publishers Incorporated.*

[6] *Canada Year Book*, 1968 (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics), p. 210.

[7] This is of course, a personal opinion. However, in the author's many years of travel and ministry among Canadian Mennonite churches, this opinion has only been reinforced. Very few of our churches are building strong bridges of relationships into communities other than Mennonite. Some use language as an excuse, but even if a church uses only the German language, there are many German speaking non-Mennonies in most Canadian cities!

A good test for a city congregation is to examine the art pieces in their homes and the art in SS and other literature in their homes. Chances are that about 50% of the homes will not have a single "city-industrial" picture on their walls! Much church literature still uses predominantly pastoral illustrations even in our day!

[8] Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8. It seems incredible that God would have called that unlikely group of 12 and the new followers to spread the Good News to the world! But God called and they did! The Mennonite family does have a special opportunity today to demonstrate the true meaning of Christian Family Living.

[9] Elton Trueblood, *The Recovery of Family Life* (New York: *Harper & Row Publishers Incorporated*, 1953), p. 120. *Used by permission.*

14

Urbanization of Mennonites in Canada

Leo Driedger

In many ways a discussion of Mennonite urbanization is premature, since much research remains to be done. From time to time however, it may be wise to gather together what information there is to assess our present urban state, and what further research is needed.

It may be well to focus more on "process (urbanization) than on form (city)" so as to convey the highly turbulent change elements of urban life.[1] The three processes of urbanization, industrialization and bureaucratization are integrally bound together, however. This paper will focus on Mennonite urbanization only. The extent to which Mennonites are involved in these processes, will inevitably change their values and life styles.

Urban Mennonite Concentration

Louis Wirth in his classic article suggests that number, density, and heterogeneity of population must be considered.[2] Usually rural populations are differentiated as farm and

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non-farm; and Canadian urban populations living in centers over 1000 population are classified as urban, differentiating between smaller (under 100,000) and larger (over 100,000) cities.

In 1786 when the first Swiss Mennonites came to Kitchener from Pennsylvania, Montreal and Toronto had not yet passed the 20,000 population mark, and only about five percent of Canada's population was classified as urban.[3] During the two hundred years Mennonites lived in Ontario, Canadian urbanization rose fourteen times (5 percent in 1790 to 70 percent in 1961). When the second wave of Mennonite immigrants came to Manitoba in the 1870's, less than a quarter (23.3 percent in 1881) of Canada's population lived in cities.[4] During the 100 years that Mennonites lived in Manitoba, Canadian urbanization rose more than threefold (23.3 percent in 1881 to over 70 percent in 1971). The early Mennonites came to a rural Canada which was hardly industrialized.

How did urbanization affect Mennonites? Of the twenty religious groups listed in the 1961 Canada census, the Mennonites were the only group with less than half their membership in cities.[5] According to Friesen, the Manitoba Mennonite urban movement began after the second world war with only seventeen percent in urban areas in 1945.[6] By 1961, about one third (34.5 percent) of the Mennonites in Canada were urban as indicated in Table 1. Of the third who were urban, about half lived in larger urban centers of 100,000 population or more, so that Mennonites were entering large metropolitan areas very strongly. At the same time somewhat less than half (45.6 percent) of the Canadian Mennonites lived on farms in 1961, which is five times the Canadian 10.7 percent farm average.

Mennonite urbanization varies considerably by provinces (Table 1). Almost half of the British Columbia Mennonites lived in cities (8,507) in 1961; a quarter (5,304) lived in large centers of over 100,000 population; less than a third (6,147) were farmers. Mennonites in the neighboring province of Alberta were the most rural, with only one in four living in cities, and about three-fifths (60.3 percent) living on farms. Mennonites in the other three provinces ranged in between. Well over half of Manitoba's urban Mennonites lived in Winnipeg, a city of half a million population.

Although Mennonites in Canada numbered only 152,000 in 1961, they were concentrated in the five most westerly

Table 1. Mennonite Population in Rural and Urban Areas, 1961[7]

Region	Farm	Rural Non-Farm	Total Rural	Urban Under 100,000	Urban Over 100,000	Total Urban	Total Mennonite Population
Newfoundland	—	18	18	18	—	21	39
Prince Edward I.	—	1	1	—	—	—	1
Nova Scotia	6	17	23	1	7	8	31
New Brunswick	—	2	2	3	—	3	5
Quebec	4	30	34	19	134	163	197
Ontario	13,759	7,151	20,910	3,613	6,425	10,038	30,948
Manitoba	26,151	8,263	34,414	8,814	13,595	22,409	56,823
Saskatchewan	13,761	6,455	20,216	7,717	241	7,958	28,174
Alberta	10,569	2,175	12,744	1,869	1,656	3,525	16,269
British Columbia	6,147	5,278	11,425	3,203	5,304	8,507	19,932
Yukon	—	14	14	—	—	—	14
N.W. Territories	—	8	8	11	—	11	19
Canada Total	70,397	29,422	99,809	28,827	24,805	52,643	152,452

provinces indicated in Table 2. Almost two thirds of these urban Mennonites lived in seven cities with at least 1000 or more in each city. Over half lived in Winnipeg, Vancouver, Saskatoon, and Kitchener. All four cities have large Mennonite rural hinterlands which feed into the cities, and all four have very heterogeneous ethnic populations.[8]

Table 2. Mennonite Population in Canadian Urban Areas of Over 100,000 Population, 1961[9]

Metropolitan Area	1966 Population	1961 Population	1961 Menn. Population
Montreal	2,437,000	2,110,000	140
Toronto	2,159,000	1,824,000	1,375
Vancouver	893,000	790,000	5,260
Winnipeg	509,000	476,000	13,595
Ottawa	495,000	430,000	60
Hamilton	449,000	395,000	250
Quebec	413,000	358,000	0
Edmonton	401,000	338,000	455
Calgary	331,000	279,000	1,220
Windsor	212,000	193,000	85
London	207,000	181,000	115
Halifax	198,000	184,000	7
Kitchener	192,000	155,000	4,480
Victoria	174,000	154,000	45
Regina	131,000	112,000	240
Sudbury	117,000	111,000	55
Saskatoon	116,000	95,000	4,765
Saint John	101,000	96,000	1
St. Johns	101,000	91,000	9
St. Catharines	97,000	95,000	2,515

Studies of urban variations (differentials) among Mennonite groups are incomplete; however, several studies indicate trends. The most comprehensive study of General Conference Mennonites made by Leland Harder compared 1960 and 1970 trends in Canada and the United States.[10] Statistics in Table 3 show that over half (57.5 percent) of the Canadian General Conference Mennonites lived in towns and cities in 1960, which by 1970 had risen to almost two thirds (64.2 percent). Farm residents declined from one third (34.6 percent) to one fourth (25.8 percent). The three fourths (74.7 percent) who lived in urban areas in Manitoba were about as urban as the Canadian national average will be when the 1971 census figures are released. British Columbia Mennonites lived in towns and cities in much smaller numbers than the others, with over half designated rural non-farm. The largest percentages living on farms were in Alberta and Saskatchewan (39.3 and 34.6 percent). Comparing data in Tables 2 and 3, General Conference Mennonites are considerably more urban than Mennonites in Canada, in all provinces except British Columbia where they are about the same. From 1960 to 1970, urbanization rose substantially, which is a clue to what to expect in the coming 1971 census data.

Table 3. Percent of Members of 138 Congregations of the General Conference Mennonite Church in Canada and the United States, by Place of Residence, 1960 and 1970.[11]

Place of Residence	British Columbia	Alberta	Saskatchewan	Manitoba	Ontario	5 Canadian Provinces	5 U.S. Districts	General Conference
				1960				
Farm Residence	17.2	52.2	45.8	24.7	32.4	34.6	39.2	37.9
Rural Non-farm	32.1	2.5	1.2	.6	13.9	7.9	8.3	8.2
Town or City	50.7	45.3	52.9	74.7	53.7	57.5	52.5	53.9
Total Number	511	713	1,786	1,812	2,795	7,617	20,862	28,479
				1970				
Farm Residence	19.0	39.3	34.6	23.8	20.7	25.8	31.5	29.9
Rural Non-farm	52.5	2.9	2.7	1.5	13.0	10.1	11.8	11.3
Town or City	28.5	57.8	62.7	74.7	66.4	64.2	56.7	58.8
Total Number	547	723	1,465	1,844	3,032	7,611	19,444	27,051

Whereas the Harder data indicates that General Conference Mennonites were more urban than other Canadian Mennonites, the Friesen research of Mennonite Brethren yearbooks showed that in Manitoba "54.9 percent of the Mennonite Brethren belonged to urban churches".[12] The urban Mennonite strength then seems to lie with the General Conference and Mennonite Brethren especially in Winnipeg, Vancouver, Saskatoon and Kitchener, while the rural strongholds seem to be located more among Old Mennonite and other smaller Mennonite groups especially in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Ontario.

Urban Mennonite Social Organization

There is much more to urbanization than concentration of population, however. The more important social dimensions are that urbanization changes the social organization, values, and personalities of people. First a discussion of social stratification, followed by changes in social interaction, cultural patterns, and religious life.

1. Mennonite Specialization

Urbanization usually results in specialization, and differentiation of people by occupation, education and income. The first two indicators of social class will be discussed here. When youth move off the farms to seek employment in cities, they may choose a variety of occupations. One of the fastest means of rising in social status is education, because with higher education come more professional occupations and higher income. Educational and occupational aspirations of urban youth also rise as Siemens and Driedger found.[13]

The Leland Harder data in Table 4 indicates that the median educational status of 8.7 years in 1960, of General Conference Mennonites in Canada, was considerably lower than the median grade twelve held in the United States.[14] This had risen to a median of one year of high school (9.2 years) by 1970. In 1960 almost two thirds of the General Conference Mennonites in Canada had not gone to any high school, while in 1970 almost half were still without any high

school. Only one in twelve had attended college by 1960, while in 1970 it was only one in eight. Such relatively low educational standing would also tend to prevent upward occupational mobility.

Table 4 Percent of General Conference Mennonite Members 25 Years Old and Over in 138 Congregations by Level of Education, 1960 and 1970.[16]

Level of Education	British Columbia	Alberta	Saskat-chewan	Manitoba,	Ontario	5 Canadian Provinces	5 U.S. Districts	General Conference
			1960					
Less than Grade 8	60.0	24.5	21.2	32.1	13.2	22.9	17.9	19.1
Grade 8	5.4	35.4	42.5	30.5	49.6	39.9	17.0	22.9
Grades 9-11	22.0	22.3	16.8	23.1	22.8	21.3	13.1	15.2
Grade 12	6.0	5.9	8.6	5.4	8.0	7.3	30.0	24.2
Some College	4.0	6.4	5.7	4.5	2.3	4.2	11.5	9.6
College Graduate	2.0	2.6	3.3	2.0	2.6	2.6	6.5	5.5
Postgraduate	.6	2.7	1.8	2.4	1.4	1.8	3.9	3.3
Total Percent	100.0	99.8	99.9	100.0	99.9	100.0	99.9	99.8
Total Number	350	729	1,747	1,475	2,578	6,879	20,185	27,064
Median School Years Completed	6.7	8.7	8.7	8.6	8.7	8.7	12.1	10.6
			1970					
Less than Grade 8	34.7	15.4	28.4	33.8	10.2	22.1	10.9	14.1
Grade 8	14.0	28.4	24.3	12.7	38.7	25.7	13.1	16.7
Grades 9-11	28.0	26.0	19.5	33.1	28.5	27.4	10.7	15.5
Grade 12	12.8	13.2	11.4	7.3	13.0	11.3	33.8	27.4
Some College	6.1	6.9	8.1	5.9	3.7	5.7	15.1	12.4
College Graduate	2.9	6.1	5.7	3.7	4.9	4.7	10.6	8.9
Postgraduate	1.5	4.0	2.6	3.4	3.1	3.0	5.8	5.0
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	99.9	100.0	99.9	100.0	100.0
Total Number	593	772	1,628	1,886	2,885	7,764	19,452	27,216
Median School Years Completed	9.1	9.7	8.9	9.3	9.3	9.2	12.4	12.1

Whereas less than one third (30.5 percent) of the General Conference Mennonites in 1960 were farmers, by 1970 this had dropped to less than one fourth (23.5 percent). There were as many in Mennonite professional and technical occupations as farmers in 1970 (24.4 percent). Canadian and American occupational trends were very similar (Table 5). Mennonites were most strongly represented in both farming and professional work in Alberta and Saskatchewan in 1970 — one third and one fourth respectively. Skilled and semi-skilled craftsmen were heavily represented in British Columbia, Ontario and Manitoba, possibly because of more industrial opportunities.

A survey in 1961, of Ontario Mennonites reported by Sawatzky showed that eighty percent were in non-farming occupations. Many of the farmers had turned into "big business men with large investments of capital and large plants".[17] Over half of the Mennonites were classified as white collar

Table 5. Percent of Gainfully Employed General Conference Mennonite Members from 138 Congregations in Designated Occupational Categories, 1960 and 1970.[illegible]

Occupations	British Columbia	Alberta	Saskat-chewan	Manitoba	Ontario	5 Canadian Provinces	5 U.S. Districts	General Conference
			1960					
Professional and Technical	11.1	12.9	18.0	13.0	11.1	13.4	16.8	15.9
Farmers	20.6	48.2	43.8	24.3	22.2	30.5	30.7	30.7
Proprietors and Managers	3.9	1.6	3.8	3.0	4.1	3.5	6.3	5.5
Clerical Workers	9.4	2.8	4.8	7.6	8.1	6.7	7.1	7.0
Sales Workers	3.0	1.9	3.4	1.7	3.2	2.8	4.2	3.8
Skilled Craftsmen, Foremen	23.2	11.7	7.1	16.4	13.3	12.8	10.4	11.1
Semi-Skilled Operatives	13.3	6.3	4.9	23.4	16.0	13.8	12.9	13.2
Service Workers	9.9	9.6	9.3	8.3	11.2	9.9	7.5	8.2
Farm Laborers	.9	3.0	1.3	.5	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.3
Other Laborers	4.7	1.9	3.4	1.9	9.6	5.3	2.7	3.4
Total Percent	100.0	99.9	99.8	100.1	99.9	99.9	99.8	100.0
Total Number	233	427	1,134	1,018	1,870	4,482	11,995	16,477
			1970					
Professional and Technical	22.6	27.5	25.9	18.3	20.5	21.8	24.4	23.7
Farmers	10.9	33.8	35.2	24.4	15.8	23.5	21.6	22.1
Proprietors and Managers	5.0	6.3	6.3	4.7	5.9	5.7	6.5	6.3
Clerical Workers	11.3	5.4	5.9	8.1	9.0	7.9	9.1	8.8
Sales Workers	4.1	1.6	2.0	4.0	3.6	3.2	4.4	4.1
Skilled Crafsmen, Foremen	16.5	10.3	8.4	17.2	15.5	14.1	10.5	11.5
Semi-Skilled Operatives	16.3	5.1	4.1	10.5	13.2	10.0	9.1	9.3
Service Workers	8.8	8.5	8.7	7.9	7.0	7.5	9.5	9.0
Farm Laborers	.0	1.2	1.0	.7	1.3	1.0	1.4	1.3
Other Laborers	4.5	2.3	2.5	4.1	8.2	5.3	3.4	3.9
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	99.9	100.0	100.0	99.9	100.0
Total Number	221	429	905	1,121	1,740	4,416	12,546	16,982

workers, including professional, construction, manufacturing, food and beverage, merchandising and service industries. Wilfred Ulrich reported on the same Ontario Mennonite survey indicating that the Mennonite Brethren (20 percent) were much more heavily concentrated in the professions than the Old Mennonites and General Conference Mennonites (13.0 and 11.3 percent respectively).[18]

Leland Harder found that of the Mennonite professionals 43.9 percent were teachers and 15.9 percent were nurses, indicating the strong professional service orientation.[19] In addition, Shellenberg's research of 200 Mennonite professional musicians in Winnipeg, perhaps illustrates well the change as professionalization takes place. He found that "new Mennonite musicians who were highly trained, versatile, urban and youthful indicated preferences for popular and classical music, attributing their interest in music to the influence of music teachers and festivals, being highly receptive to change."[20]

On the other hand, Mennonite musicians with less training and versatility, were the ones who were more rural, older, and who tended to prefer sacred to popular and classical music, attributing their interest more to the influence of the Church and family. Such professionalization may well be symbolic of attitudes and aspirations which change the Mennonite church in cities.

2. Social Interaction

With Mennonite concentration in urban centers, with higher education and professionalization of occupations come differential patterns of social interaction. The urban man, constantly bombarded by noise, jostled by crowds, and continually exposed to people on a secondary level, must protect his privacy. The urban man cannot interact intimately with everyone he meets, so unlike the farm person who welcomes people dropping in, visits are scheduled, parties are planned, and acquaintances selected.

Do urban Mennonites tend to reside in segregated areas where they can meet more of their own kind? Although Mennonites in Winnipeg and Vancouver lived in the third and fourth largest Canadian cities, their large concentrated numbers served as a counterveiling ethnic force to large city size. Mennonites in Winnipeg were concentrated in North Kildonan and the West End permitting the establishment of Mennonite institutions.[21] Vancouver Mennonites were highly concentrated in southeastern Vancouver.[22]

Residential concentration seems to be declining, so Driedger and Peters asked Mennonite University of Manitoba students who their best friends were.[23] The majority of both urban and rural students reported that their best friends were Mennonites (83 and 90 percent respectively), although three fourths of both groups thought their choices should not be restricted to their own ingroup. Urban residence did not substantially change choice of Mennonite friends.

Letkemann found that 83 percent of his sample of Vancouver Mennonites claimed their best friends were mainly Mennonites.[24] This proportion did not vary with amount of education. Respondents with children (44 percent), stated their children's best friends were mainly Mennonite. Most of the Vancouver respondents knew the surnames of their next door neighbors; two thirds felt their neighbors knew

they were Mennonites; and respondents were evenly divided as to whether they encouraged non-Mennonite non-church-going persons to come to a Mennonite rather than a non-Mennonite church.[25] One third (37 percent) stated that they never attended service in non-Mennonite churches, and those who did, did so only occasionally. Letkemann also reports that in a given two week period, 82 percent of his sample had at least one contact with relatives; two thirds (64 percent) were in contact with unrelated Mennonites; and half (54 percent) with unrelated non-Mennonites. The general pattern seems to confirm that Mennonite primary interaction is predominantly with other Mennonites even if they live in the city. Increased family mobility, often in pursuit of occupational opportunities lays further stress on family interaction.

The roles of urban family members usually change. Letkemann found that about one third of the wives in his Vancouver sample worked outside the home (32 percent).[26] With wives working to supplement family income, urban husbands need to share household duties, which tends to change husband and wife role differentiations. The North American urban family has been labelled more equalitarian and democratic, with less male dominance. Urban families are usually smaller, so that members of the nuclear family are much more dependent on a few for security and companionship. Such heavy reliance on a few family members and less reliance on grandparents, uncles, and aunts for support, places increasingly more strain on the few bonds which do exist. Divorce rates in cities are usually higher, although according to Harder, Canadian Mennonite divorce rates in 1970 were considerably lower than the national average (18 out of 8851, or .2 percent).[27]

3. Mennonite Cultural Patterns

German language use and special Mennonite foods are the most obvious cultural distinctions. In Vancouver German language use was highly and inversely correlated with length of residence in Canada.[28] All persons in Canada less than ten years used German frequently. Peters found that four out of five Mennonite University of Manitoba students reported high German language proficiency and the attitudes of urban students toward German was much more positive than that of rural students (81 and 50 percent respectively).[29]

A number of churches in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Calgary, Saskatoon, and Kitchener use the German language in church services, but it seems to be declining.

Letkemann found that Vancouver Mennonite meals such as Borscht, Pluma Moos and Vereniky decreases with length of residence in the city. Recent immigrants served them frequently (67 percent) while twenty percent of those in the twenties never had such meals.[30] Two thirds reported baking at home regularly, although of the wives who worked outside the home, less than half (43 percent) did so.

4. Urban Mennonite Religious Life

Although originally the Mennonite movement was strong in cities, it became a rural community group, often skeptical of urban involvements. Reports by Krahn that Mennonites flourish in large urban congregations in Amsterdam (membership 5,500), Haarlem (3,569), The Hague (3,033), Zaandam (1,194), Groningen (1,186), Leeuwarden (1,070) have often been viewed with some uneasiness among North American Mennonites as to what import professionalization, and urbanization will have.[31]

The perils of the urban church lie elsewhere, than has often been presumed by rural Mennonites. The psychosocial analysis of changes within a Toronto Mennonite church by Dyck and Sawatzky,[32] point to some of the problems. The Toronto church of the forties began on an ethnocentric basis. During the fifties it moved to idealistic expansion with the emergence of intimate small primary group experiences; with opportunities to become involved in new experimental programs free of tradition. The sixties brought divergence and realistic disillusionment, with "signs of frustration in the face of mounting evidence that a new building and a modified program was not automatically attracting large numbers of people from the surrounding community."[33] Such urban Mennonite church experiences illustrate that social reorganization does not take the place of charismatic ideology which took hold of the Anabaptists in the sixteenth century, and drove the early Christians to change the Mediterranean world.

Francis has described the rapid transformation of the Mennonites from a religious community, voluntary and selective in its membership, to an ethnic community, involuntary and comprehensive in membership.[34] How can

it again become a selective and voluntary religious community, and where can the dynamic be found to change such structures for urban Mennonites? "The new communities struggling to be born will spring, not full-blown from a sudden blueprint or scheme, devised by some virtuoso more clever than other mortals, but from the pangs which new life always entails."[35]

Gibson Winter has documented well that Protestant churches, as they become upwardly mobile, tend to leave the heart of the city where its greatest need lies, and move with their people to the suburbs.[36] Mennonite upward mobility also means mushrooming churches in the suburbs. Does this flight to the suburbs also represent an escape from social responsibility? A sample of Winnipeg clergymen indicated that among eleven religious groups, Mennonite clergy ranked fourth in social class, liberal theology and liberal attitudes towards social issues, and third in activity in social issues with United Church, Anglican and Presbyterian clergymen. Urban Mennonite social concern seemed to be alive.[37]

A survey of all Mennonite clergymen and university students in Canada indicated that rural-urban distinctions of attitudes toward social issues (war, capital punishment, government witness, politics, capitalism, communism, labor unions, poverty) were slight.[38] Attitudes between clergy and students also varied very little, but there were considerable differentiations between conferences, with the Mennonite Brethren more conservative on many issues. Bergen and Friesen found similar social attitudes among Mennonite university students in Alberta in 1968.[39]

Doerksen's analysis of language as a dynamic which must be in a state of constant renewal at its roots in order to stay alive may be a model for dynamic urban religion.[40] To misunderstand language as a kind of permanent base, a sub-structure or residium which may be considered a constant factor is deadening. Doerksen continues, "terms which have been removed from their vital roots too long tend to lose or change their meaning, images flatten out, abstract language by the very fact of its abstraction tends to become stale."[41] Applying this to culture and religion, urban Mennonites face the dual problem of 1) transforming rural cultural and religious roots into dynamic urban religious images, and 2) becoming aware of the social needs of the city, while living out in middle class suburbs. Thus, many suburban Mennonites are tempted to criticize the

rural past, and talk much about what they should do in the city as a comfortable escape from social responsibility. The decisive Mennonite battle for identity and mission will have to be fought in the suburbs.

Peachey suggests that "if the genius of anabaptism was the creation and perpetuation of the distinct religious community, involving social heterogeneity, then the urban environment provides a more congenial setting for a vital Anabaptism than does the rural."[42] In fact, he holds that despite the seeming rural bias in the Old Testament (Babylon illustrated as the fatal destruction of man) "human history in the larger perspective of biblical eschatology, moves from the garden to the city, from Eden to the New Jerusalem."[43] The freedom and diversity of the city make it a better setting for the believers' church than does the closed rural community.[44] Early Christianity flourished in urban areas, which was also the case for Anabaptist growth in cities. The challenge of the industrial civilization becomes the occasion therefore, not for the abandonment of Christian faith, but for its re-discovery and renewal.

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[3] Leroy Stone, *Urban Development in Canada* (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1967), p. 14.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 29.
[5] *Census of Canada* (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1961), Bulletin 1.2-6.
[6] John Friesen, "Manitoba Mennonites in the Rural-Urban Shift," *Mennonite Life* 23 (October, 1968), pp. 153-154.
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[11] *Ibid.*, p. 31.
[12] Friesen, *Op. cit.*, p. 156.
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[25] *Ibid.*, p. 162.
[26] *Ibid.*, p. 163.
[27] Harder, *Op. cit.*, p. 34.
[28] Letkemann, *Op. cit.*, p. 162.
[29] Peters, *Op. cit.*, p. 92-99.
[30] Letkemann, *Op. cit.*
[31] Cornelius Krahn, "The Dutch Mennonites and Urbanism," *Proceedings of the Tenth Conference on Mennonite Educational and Cultural Problems* (Chicago: Council of Mennonite Colleges, 1955), p. 68.
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[38] Daniel Zehr and Leo Driedger, "Attitudes of Canadian Mennonite Clergymen and University Students to Social Issues," (Winnipeg: unpublished report to MCC (Canada), 1971).
[39] John Bergen and David Friesen, "Changing Attitudes of Mennonite University Students," *Mennonite Life* 23 (October, 1968), pp. 169-172.
[40] Victor Doerksen, "Language and Communication Among Urban Mennonites," *Mennonite Life* 23 (October, 1968), p. 183.
[41] *Ibid.*, p. 183.
[42] Peachey, *Op. cit.*, p. 82.
[43] *Ibid.*, p. 20.
[44] *Ibid.*

15

Economic Questions and the Mennonite Conscience

R. H. Vogt

In the Mainstream of Canadian Economic Life

There is no question that in the past few decades Mennonites have entered the mainstream of economic life in Canada. The fact requires little documentation. One merely has to live for a while in cities like Kitchener, St. Catharines, Leamington, Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Calgary and Vancouver, or in one of the smaller "Mennonite towns", to appreciate the remarkably wide range of economic activities in which Mennonite people can be found today. Traditional occupations like farming, teaching, and nursing are still chosen by many, but urbanization and the enlargement of opportunity through education have taken a growing number of Mennonites far afield from these few endeavours. It would be difficult to select a single industry or occupation in a city like Winnipeg in which Mennonites are not present.

With the broadening of the economic horizon has come prosperity. It is somewhat ironical that the Mennonite people have come to enjoy economic prosperity almost everywhere they have settled: in Holland by the end of the 17th century, in Prussia by the middle of the 18th century, in Russia by

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the second half of the 19th century, and more recently in North America. The irony lies in the fact that there is much in the religious heritage of the Mennonites which is suspicious of wealth and of the economic world in general. The mantle of success may be said to have fallen often on the shoulders of the Mennonites but it has seldom rested there easily.

Economic Progress and the Mennonite Conscience

In 1924 Klaas W. Reimer, a member of the 1874 Mennonite migration from Russia to Canada, looked back upon the first fifty years of life in this country and observed: "When I recall those first years of settlement with the hard work, with the many disappointments but still with faith in God, and then compare those times with today, then it seems as though we were closer to our God in those days. It appears to me as though the real love and humility as well as the child-like devotion is no longer apparent in many of our people."[1]

The roots of these misgivings are not difficult to trace in Mennonite history. Through their reading of the Bible and through impulses passed on from their 16th century Anabaptist origins the Mennonites have often been led to adopt an extremely suspicious attitude toward the outside world and its activities.

The words of Jesus, "How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:23) are familiar to every Mennonite ear. Menno Simons assured his listeners that he would rather see them imprisoned for their faith than to see them marry a rich person or become rich themselves. Though the first Anabaptists came from a wide range of occupations they were warned not to engage in such occupations as trade and finance. It has been asserted that "they never stressed any particular vocation as being most honorable or desirable,"[2] but it was made quite clear to them that as Christians they were to "live the life of farmers or craftsmen, avoiding the worldly life of commercial circles."[3]

This way of stating their attitude to economic matters does not do justice, however, to their main concern. It would be wrong to infer from what has just been said that the Anabaptists generally turned their back on the outside world

because they thought it was inherently bad. Though they were convinced that the devil was actively at work in it they accepted the creation itself as the work of God. For this reason few of the Anabaptists looked longingly to heaven as an escape from this earth. Instead they decided to withdraw from the "fallen world" around them in order to create a new kingdom on this earth. This kingdom was to be a new brotherhood of caring Christians, in which avarice and unfair economic practices would have no place. It was not because they rejected the world but because they wanted to have some control over it that they adopted what seems to be a restrictive attitude to material possessions and to certain vocations. It was difficult for them to see how a person striving to make his fortune in a business career could possibly subject himself to the high ideals of sharing and simple living which were to characterize the Anabaptist community.

Those ideals have been severely buffeted by the passage of time and by the movement of the Mennonite people from one country to another. In a way the ideals seem almost inevitably to be self destructive. The hard work and frugal co-operative living which they call for are at least partly responsible for the economic success which the Mennonites have enjoyed. Such success in turn has led to social differentiation, the breakdown of the brotherhood concept, and to many new types of occupations. During times of economic progress the Mennonite conscience, where it is operative, is almost bound to be torn by conflict. Success can be interpreted and accepted as a reward for being faithful to one's ideals, but a closer look at those ideals reveals that they are disturbingly at odds with such success.

The remainder of this paper deals with the ways in which the Mennonites of Canada seem to be coming to terms with their conscience during another period of prosperity. Finally an attempt is made to outline an approach to economic questions which is based partly on the Mennonite heritage but also points in new directions.

Mennonite Responses to the Modern Economy

The Mennonite people have responded in very diverse ways to the new opportunities opened up to them by the

burgeoning Canadian economy. The responses range from decisive rejection by some groups, resulting in migrations to less advanced countries like Mexico, to wholehearted acceptance by others.

Between these two extremes there are various degrees of acceptance of current economic life by Canadian Mennonites. It can probably be said that few Mennonites never relate their beliefs to daily life. However, there are those in the Mennonite community who seem to apply their religious convictions to a very narrow segment of economic life while others have started to direct their attention to a much wider range of problems. There are those who are interested almost exclusively in the morality of individual acts and those who go further and question their role in modern society and examine larger questions of economic justice. Persons in the first group restrict their concern to specific acts of dishonesty, theft, breaking of contracts and the like. If they sometimes fail to do this it is probably more a lack of will than of insight. When Mennonites today are accused of being overly shrewd or downright dishonest in their economic activity — and such accusations are not heard infrequently — it might be said that their basic difficulty lies not in comprehending what is hard to understand but in applying what is already understood.

There are those in the Mennonite community, however, who feel that it is not good enough merely to question the morality of individual actions. They have come up with a more radical critique of economic life and the Christian's participation in it. These critics are trying to apply the "Anabaptist Vision", discussed earlier, to current economic conditions.

Two Modern Anabaptist Approaches

Two recent "Anabaptist" approaches to economic life can be distinguished. One might be called the "nonresistant" approach, since it tries in a unique way to evaluate economic institutions and actions from the standpoint of the Anabaptist principle of nonresistance. The other might be called the "new community" approach, calling for the creation of a new society with new economic and social relationships and rejecting as inadequate the application of one particular Christian principle such as nonresistance to the existing economic structure.

The most articulate spokesman for the nonresistant approach has been Professor Guy Hershberger of Goshen College, undoubtedly one of the most knowledgeable social scientists among the Mennonites of North America. In a book published in 1958, *The Way of the Cross in Human Relations*, Hershberger extended and deepened the analysis of problems posed for the Christian by the modern economy. To choose the way of the cross should mean, according to Hershberger, that Christians oppose not only clearly immoral acts of stealing and cheating but the use of force which appears to be an implicit part of the functioning of many economic institutions. "The coercive methods and powerful maneuverings of modern agricultural organizations, labour unions, and industrial corporations are of such a nature that today Menno would hardly classify them as innocent procedures of men with an essentially Christian calling."[4]

Hershberger maintained that even though such institutions may use coercion for "just ends", such as higher wages, a higher law of love compels the Christian to forego the use of force and therefore puts him at odds with practices that may seem completely acceptable to others. The Christian should decide in the light of the Christian principle of nonresistant love whether or not, and to what extent, he can take part in modern economic institutions.

This approach, however, is not considered radical enough by other interpreters of the Anabaptist tradition because it accepts such structural elements in the modern economy as private property, competition, and differential rewards, and does not call for the creation of a radically new kind of Christian brotherhood. We have called the alternative proposed by these critics the "new community" approach. One of its exponents has been John Miller, now at Conrad Grebel College in Kitchener-Waterloo but for a number of years the informal leader of a Christian community called Reba Place Fellowship in Evanston, Illinois. In an address given several years ago Miller called for "an absolute renunciation of property rights, a radical distribution to the poor, and a fervent loyalty to Jesus in the expectancy of the inbreak of God's power and rule." This vision, he said, could be realized by "a company of people who, having denied themselves and all that they possess, have found their lives again in the joyous fellowship of renunciation. . . ."[5]

It is unfortunate that in some circles these ideas have been dismissed out of hand because they evoke fears, deeply imbedded in the Mennonite sub-conscious, of a perverted form of communism. But they are worth examining, not only because they assume some interesting things about human nature and its potential but because they probably reflect more accurately than any other statement the type of approach which the early Anabaptists might have chosen.

This is not to say, however, that Jesus would have taken such a position or that it is the best one for contemporary Christians to take. Forceful exponents of a radical type of Christianity may assume that those who do not share their convictions either lack courage or insight. This, of course, is possible. It is equally possible, however, that the convictions are badly conceived and that some people have both the insight and the courage to reject them for that reason.

Something of this kind, I think, needs to be said about the two "Anabaptist" approaches to economic life which have just been described. Their common weakness lies in their attempt to put the "ideal" response of Christians to modern economic life in capsule form. The capsule may bring both pleasure and pain to those who swallow it (the pain, unfortunately, may be interpreted as suffering for righteousness' sake) but like all capsules it may help in only a limited number of cases and prove positively harmful to those who try to use it for more.

The principle of nonresistance is an inadequate response to modern economic problems because it cannot be applied with any consistency. We resist and coerce people in many different ways each day. How is one to draw the line between justifiable and unjustifiable coercion? An employer may be able to justify his firing of a worker on one occasion but not in another. What is needed — as will be illustrated in a moment — is a principle of evaluation which can help us to decide between the two cases. It obviously cannot be the principle of nonresistance since coercion is used in both instances. The principle of nonresistance also has little or nothing to say to modern problems such as pollution of the environment, inflation, monopoly pricing and unemployment, where human conflict is not the major issue at stake.

The "new community" approach does not restrict its evaluation of economic life to one basic principle but it is of limited value for other reasons. What is wrong with it is not that the approach is too radical but that it is radical at

the wrong stage. An idea may be called radical when its realization demands such a high degree of dedication and effort that few people can be counted on to subscribe to it. In this sense the Christian faith is undoutedly radical and correct interpretations of it will also be radical. As pointed out before, however, an idea may be rejected not because it is too demanding but because it is formulated badly (which is not to say that a better formulation would necessarily be accepted). It is unfortunate when an idea is found too radical at the stage of its formulation and not at the stage where people try to put it into practice.

The Christian message of love and responsibility for one's neighbour has an almost universal appeal, and rightly so. One danger is that people may rob it of its true potential by sentimentalizing it in such easy slogans as "universal brotherhood" and "following the golden rule". When a political or business leader says glibly that he follows the golden rule in all his dealings we can be very sure that there is little resemblance between that rule and the immensely difficult commandment to "love your neighbour" that is found in the Gospels. There is another danger, however, and that is that far from being too sentimentalized the ideal may be cast in a form which violates the tremendous variety of human need and experience and makes it impossible for most people even to begin applying the ideal to their daily lives. The real danger in this approach is precisely that it appears to retain the radical nature of the original commandment, while in fact it merely casts the commandment in a form which is too rigid and unrealistic even for those who are trying to take it seriously.

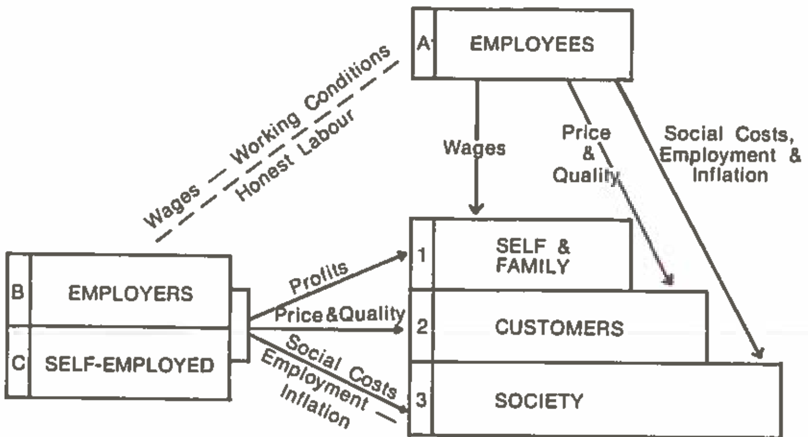
The Christian message, I think, is fairly clear. In all of his social and economic actions the Christian is to act responsibly, out of love, toward all those who may be affected by his actions. Though that formulation may sound too general, and not radical enough, it is important that we don't rush ahead and give concrete form to it too quickly. It *is* a radical message, and it is *not* easy to carry out in practice, but our difficulties should arise first of all in trying to apply the message to real situations in our lives and not because we have formulated it too specifically or rigidly. As we apply the message to our current economic and social problems — and very little of this has really been done — we may begin to sense that the message has certain structural implications. At this point I am not prepared to say what they might be. Does the Christian mes-

sage conflict with the concept of private property, or imply a radical form of economic equality? Does its teaching of neighbourliness necessitate the creation of a special type of brotherhood? Neither the Bible nor human experience provides us with simple answers to such questions.

Another Way

I would like to suggest that what is needed today is a careful formulation of the kind of economic responsibilities which Christians should be willing to shoulder in modern society and the groups to which they are responsible in a special way. We owe fairly specific things to each other. We must identify more clearly what those things are and who the "other" is.

The form that such analysis might take is illustrated in a very simplified way in the following diagram. It indicates (A-C) the three basic types of working groups to which most of us belong: employees, employers, and the self-employed. The first two groups have clear responsibilities to each other in terms of wages, working conditions, and quality of work (broken arrow). Their mutual responsibility must be



stressed. The question to be asked when employers dismiss a worker is not whether it was right to use coercion but whether the employer considered his responsibility to the worker's welfare before making the decision. When a worker strikes against an employer the real question is not whether coercion should be used but whether the worker has seriously considered his responsibility to both his employer and the public at large.

Lines of Responsibility in a Modern Economy

The three producing groups have responsibilities to other groups in society, to which they belong themselves. These are ranked (1-3) not necessarily in order of importance (what **would** be a proper Christian order?) but as a progression from the specific to the more general. Both workers and employers have responsibilities to themselves and their families, which are fulfilled through adequate and dependable wages and profits. At the same time they are responsible to their customers who will be harmed, through inflation and deterioration in the quality of product, by overly aggressive efforts to increase wages and profits.

One of the most serious problems in the modern economy is not that workers and employers are in serious conflict with each other, but that in certain industries they cooperate only too well in raising their incomes at the expense of the unorganized consumer. What is lacking is a comprehensive view of our responsibilities to other persons and groups in society.

The diagram merely suggests ways in which we might define our responsibilities more clearly. It seems to me that the proper response of Mennonites (and other Christians) to the problems encountered in modern economic life is not one of hand wringing, a feeling of nostalgia for the simpler life of the past, or the application of a single principle or idea to all types of problems, but a determined effort to enlarge our vision of the responsibilities that we have to each other in a highly interdependent society. I am convinced that many of our most pressing problems — unemployment, inflation, pollution and work stoppages — can ultimately be attributed to a failure at this point. To consider our responsibility to our neighbour in this way *is*

radical Christianity. Though it may not seem to be so at the stage of formulation it will surely turn out to be that at the stage of execution.

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[1] Quoted in Abe Warkentin, *Reflections on our Heritage* (Steinbach: Derksen Printers Ltd., 1971), p. 26.

[2] Peter J. Klassen, *The Economics of Anabaptism 1525-1560* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1964), p. 89.

[3] Donald Sommer, "Peter Rideman and Menno Simons on Economics," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* Volume XXVIII, Number Three, July 1954, p. 215.

[4] Guy F. Hershberger, *The Way of the Cross in Human Relations*, (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1958), p. 227. See also J. Lawrence Burkholder, *Following Christ in Our Work* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1959), which is a study guide to Hershberger's book. Hershberger's analysis is by no means restricted to the application of the nonresistant principle — notions of "justice" and "fairness" are often referred to — but that principle is the key to most of his analysis and determines both the types of problems which he examines and the conclusions he reaches.

[5] John W. Miller, "Christian Ethics and Current Economic Problems," in *The Church's Witness in Society*, Study Conference sponsored by the Board of Christian Service of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, Winnipeg, 1959, pp. F-5 and F-8.

16

The Struggle For Recognition

Frank H. Epp

> *"The flag of our Conference often flew so low that it was dragging in the dirt. It was always my concern to raise it high by uniting and educating our brotherhood and sending it forth on its mission."*
> —J. J. Thiessen.[1]

As World War II came to an end, the oft-repeated Mennonite struggle for material and spiritual survival entered a new phase. I have chosen to refer to it as the struggle for recognition.

It is somewhat hazardous, of course, thus to characterize the last 25 years of Canadian Mennonite aspiration and development, since we do not yet have the benefit of looking at this period from a distance. Yet by virtue of my assignment I must treat the immediate past, though I propose not to do so without at least a little bit of the long look back.

The survival theme, as already indicated, is an old one with us. We have pioneered not infrequently, usually surrounded by an unfriendly, if not altogether hostile, culture. When, for example, our forefathers came from Russia in the 1870s and 1920s, they were soon engaged in a bitter

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struggle for economic survival. And this was also true in the depression of the 1930s.

At the same time, they were much concerned about cultural and religious survival. As soon as they had bread on the table, and before they had butter, they built churches and schools. So great was their concern, that when cultural-religious survival appeared difficult in the Canadian environment for some of them, they chose to pioneer again in Mexico and Paraguay rather than surrender their values easily.

Those immigrants to Latin America were the so-called 'conservative' Mennonites. The 'progressives' of the 1870s, who stayed in Canada, as well as the 'aggressive' Russian Mennonite immigrants of the 1920s sought cultural-religious survival in another way. They adapted somewhat in 'non-essentials' and looked to a whole series of church-related institutions to preserve 'essentials' and to serve as a counter-force to the cultural onslaughts from the world outside.

The best energies were expended by the leaders and enormous sacrifices were made by the members of the Mennonite society to advance the Mennonite way and to propagate the faith. This they did with some success and often against overwhelming odds. Everywhere there remained convinced islands of Mennonitism in the seething sea of anglo-secularism.

The years of the 1940s illustrate particularly well this thrust for survival through institution-building. Not only did Mennonites in Canada build two colleges in the 1940s, but they started no less than seven church high schools, as well as nearly a dozen Bible schools, and substantially advanced educational institutions already in existence.

Our people were not satisfied, however, merely with survival. The Russian Mennonites of the 1920s, especially, were interested in achieving in Canada the same kind of maturity, if not perfection, which had marked the golden years of Mennonitism in Russia. And beyond this internal intention lay the external obligation — the missionary impulse to bring the good word and the good deed to the outside world. Indeed, survival itself was sometimes couched in those terms: the Mennonite failure to go to the mission field would result in Mennonites themselves becoming a mission field.

In other words, there was a real desire to be good and to

do what was right in their own eyes and in the sight of God. Yet they also had a need to appear good and right in the sight of their neighbours. There was, of course, a good reason for this new Mennonite struggle for recognition, social recognition by their fellow Canadians and spiritual recognition by other Christians.

As World War II came to an end the Mennonites in Canada did not have the best of reputations in Canadian society. As in World War I, the early 1940s brought suspicions that we were enemy aliens, on the one hand, and war profiteers, on the other hand. The accusations arose from our love of the German culture and from our agricultural expansion. In the Fraser Valley, particularly, there was much agitation against "the Mennonite land grab" and against the number of Mennonite sons, who in spite of the alternative service program, remained on the farms, while other Canadian young men were "dying for their country".

We probably weren't aware of it, but deep down in our consciousness we resolved to prove ourselves, as we wrestled with our humiliation, embarrassment, and inferiority complex. One denomination, the Mennonite Brethren in Christ (MBC), did what hundreds of other Mennonites did as individuals. They dropped their Mennonite identification — the MBC's in the year that CMBC was born — in order to become respectable Canadians and respectable Christians, or respectable something else. At the time of this writing, other Mennonite groups, so it appears, will do in the 1970s, what the United Missionary Church (new name of Mennonite Brethren in Christ) did in the 1940s.

In all fairness to the Mennonites it must, of course, be said, that their struggle or aspiration was not isolated or unique. In the post-war era, Canada was itself determined to prove her maturity, a nation independent from Great Britain and USA and an international pace-setter of sorts. Similarly, in other parts of the world, suppressed minorities or majorities became determined to be recognized as peoples, as they joined what became a universal demonstration for humanity, dignity, and peoplehood.

Within our own Conference, the changing of the name was not essential to the recognition we desired but what was essential was a new image for that name and the people it represented. The strong drive for recognition did not necessarily start us doing things that we had not done

before. Nor did it necessarily cause us to do what the trends of the times weren't already suggesting. But it caused us to do them with an intensity and dynamic, which must be the envy of every static society.

In 25 years we moved the center of our Conference dynamic from the farm to the cities. In 25 years or less we moved from a 90 percent use of the German language in worship to a 90 percent use of the English. We entered the professions, business, the arts, and politics, and rapidly moved to the top in all of these. We built prestigious homes and churches and gloried in all of our rewards and achievements, as signs of us having arrived and being at long last recognized.

I still remember how electrified we as students and our elders were in 1952 when the CMBC president, I. I. Friesen, was made a Doctor of Divinity. He already had enough academic education for several doctorates, though he had always stopped short of getting one. Now at last we had a doctor too, and none of us even stopped to ask concerning the obscure source whence the merited honour came. The same pride welled within us when the D.D. was also bestowed on J. J. Thiessen by Bethany Biblical Seminary in Chicago.

We felt we were making it as a people, as a community that was beginning to carry the symbols of success. There were other status symbols, of course, mostly in business and agriculture, in which more of our Mennonites managed to participate, although at the end of the period it wasn't clear whether the Ph.D.s outnumbered the millionaires or vice versa. Both were emerging in significant numbers.

The matter of spiritual maturation and recognition always weighed heavily in the Conference, and the long-time moderator, J. J. Thiessen, was by no means the only one troubled by the 'flag' dragging in the dirt. In our struggle, we took our cues for spiritual measurement largely from the Mennonite Brethren, as we adopted their methods in our congregational life and their language to describe the spiritual process. At another level we opened rather wide our doors to faith-missionaries and revivalists of all kinds, who further defined spirituality for us.

Most of the time our motivation was that of disciples. We were genuine seekers, but the possibility that we were also pharisees, wanting recognition above all else, cannot be escaped. Be that as it may, we expanded our congrega-

tions, built many schools, sent out hundreds of missionaries and relief workers, and in uncounted ways tried to do the work of Christ at home and abroad. Yet, all of it did not prove fully satisfying, and at the end of 25 years it seemed that history was once more suggesting that we weren't really with it.

Just when we had made the adjustment to the city, the city was no longer being recognized as the essential locus of the good life.

Just when we had completed, more or less, a most difficult language transition from German to English, we were told, on the one hand, to adopt French as our second language, and, on the other hand, that multi-lingualism and multi-culturalism were now the in thing in Canada.

Just when we had learned to shed some of our peculiar dress and accepted the fashions of the day, like lipstick in the 1950s and miniskirts in the 1960s, they were going out of style and a new generation was calling us back to simplicity, modesty, and integrity of dress.

Just when we were most becoming embarrassed with peace, the whole of non-Mennonite society seemed to be turning pacifist.

Just when we had learned to do mission work, we were told that the missions-era was coming to an end.

Just when we were no longer quarreling with the crusades and campaigns, with all their organization and promotion, the Sutera Twins and others came to tell us that the spirit was sick of organized salvation.

Just when we had learned to draw up constitutions and to do church work through proper bureaucracy and organization, we were confronted by the structures as obstacles and impossible taskmasters.

Just when we had finally and fully accepted the salaried ministry of the respectable churches, we found that they were reaching for what we had left behind.

Just when we had made the transition from guitars to pianos, to organs, and even to pipe organs, the lowly guitar insisted on a comeback.

Just when we were, bit by bit, losing the former reasons for supporting our high schools, the revolt against the massive public high schools, which impressed us so, was al-

ready underway.

Just when we had become like the MBs and other evangelicals, they and we were still reaching for ever new experiences and movements to assure them and us of spirituality and superior identity.

Just when we were becoming sick of the Mennonite name as the Mennonite Brethren in Christ before us, the Canadian society on the whole, as well as universities, publishers, and the mass media, seemed to think that Mennonite was great.

Was it then all wrong what we had done? Had our development taken a wrong turn? Should we have stayed German and on the farm? No, not necessarily, not entirely. Some of our moves, like the migration to the cities and into Anglo-Saxon culture, were inevitable. Also, some of our movement represented genuine maturation. And, in some instances, our movement was not forward as far, or the reverse trend as obvious, as the above series of juxtapositions may suggest.

Besides, we may have been taught some valuable lessons. Now that we have flirted with all the contemporary symbols of social and spiritual success, we are free once again to look honestly at ourselves, who we are, who we were, and who we ought to be. And, as we examine ourselves, we must look not only beneath the skin of our new identities, but we must also find ourselves behind our old identities. For, our essential Anabaptist character lies somewhat beyond the Mennonite name and culture as it also lies beyond Canadianism and popular evangelicalism.

Fortunately, we are not without a model as we begin the search for ourselves. As an occasional critic of CMBC, I am now free to say that the slow but sure development of a quality education and character by this institution, so often maligned and misunderstood, is pointing to that better way.

While other institutions pursued PR and image, instant success and recognition, CMBC concentrated on solid biblical and educational foundations and honest spiritual manifestations. The school's history is not complete, and we do not yet know where it will all end, but the better way of CMBC, emphasizing spiritual quality rather than spectacle, will always remain for us a worthy heritage from that time in our history when men pursued external image rather

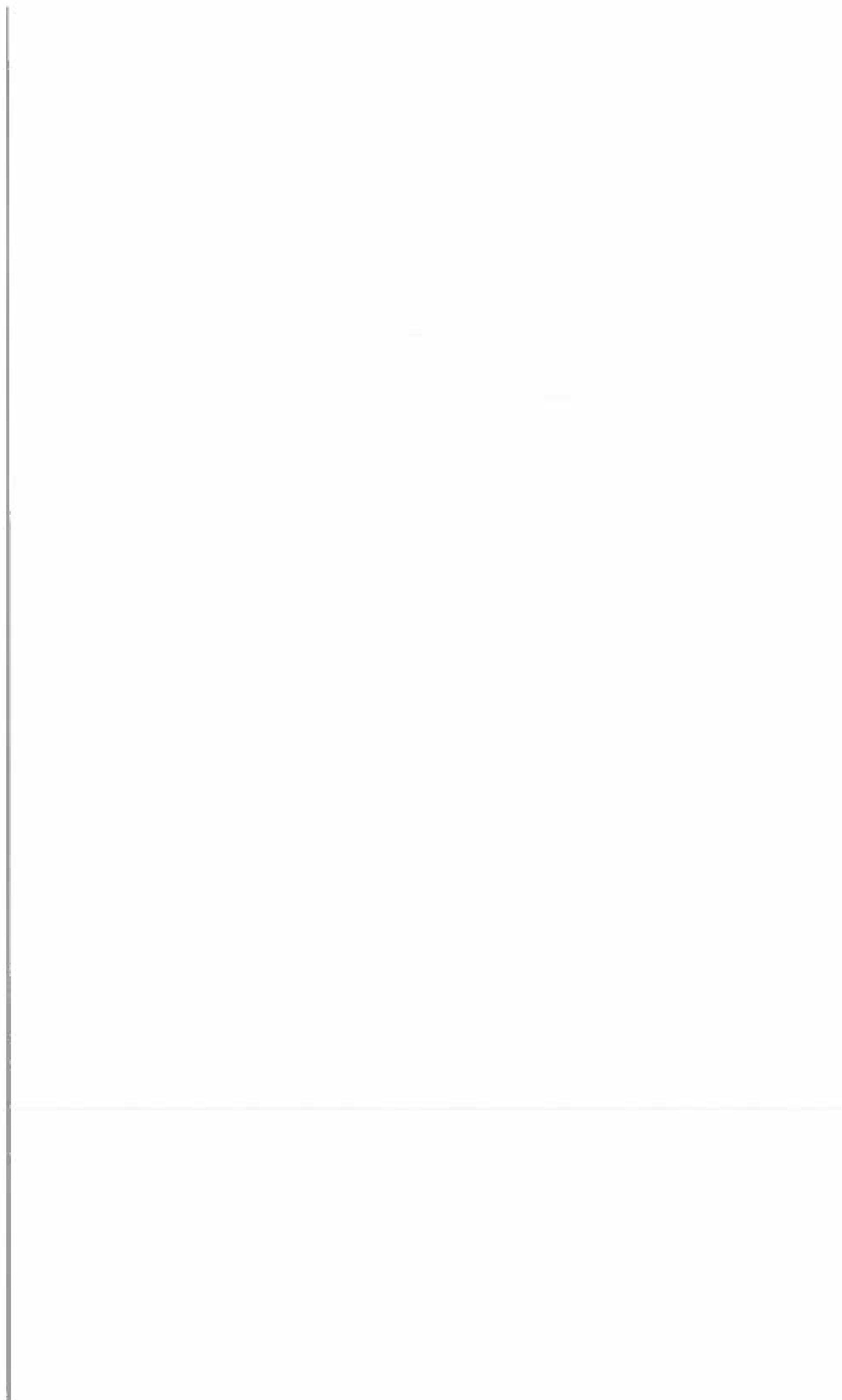
than internal integrity. This is not to say that CMBC did not, does not. have its weaknesses. It did, as for instance in the mid-1950s when David Janzen was released from the faculty. But the CMBC pursuit of quality was eventually recognized not only by the University of Manitoba but by the Mennonite young people themselves.

Thus, it was with our sixteenth century Anabaptist forebears, whose spiritual legacy still shines brighter than anything that the twentieth century, with all its mass religion, has yet produced. But, lest we think we can find ourselves only if we return to the days of Menno Simons, let us take another look at the paradox cited earlier: Just when we were most becoming embarrassed with peace, much of non-Mennonite society seemed to be turning pacifist.

That was only one of many examples or ways in which old Anabaptist convictions were emerging as new values, commending themselves to our contemporary society in the latter part of the twentieth century. The spirit of God was blowing where and how it willed, and, in spite of the Mennonites (sometimes because of the Mennonites), calling people everywhere to simplicity of life, to voluntarism of faith, to baptism after confessing faith, to the exaltation of God above the authority of the state, to the bringing of justice to both the poor and the rich, and to a life of discipleship and selfless service.

In other words, at the beginning of the 1970s there appeared to be a convergence of themes from the Anabaptism of the sixteenth century and the radical renewal movements of the twentieth. Whether modern Mennonites would find themselves at the focus of that convergence remained somewhat problematical. It was not quite clear whether they would be willing to forfeit social and spiritual respectability in favour of a recognition that could endure forever.

Words spoken by J. J. Thiessen as moderator of the Conference in 1956, as they were remembered by the writer 15 years later.

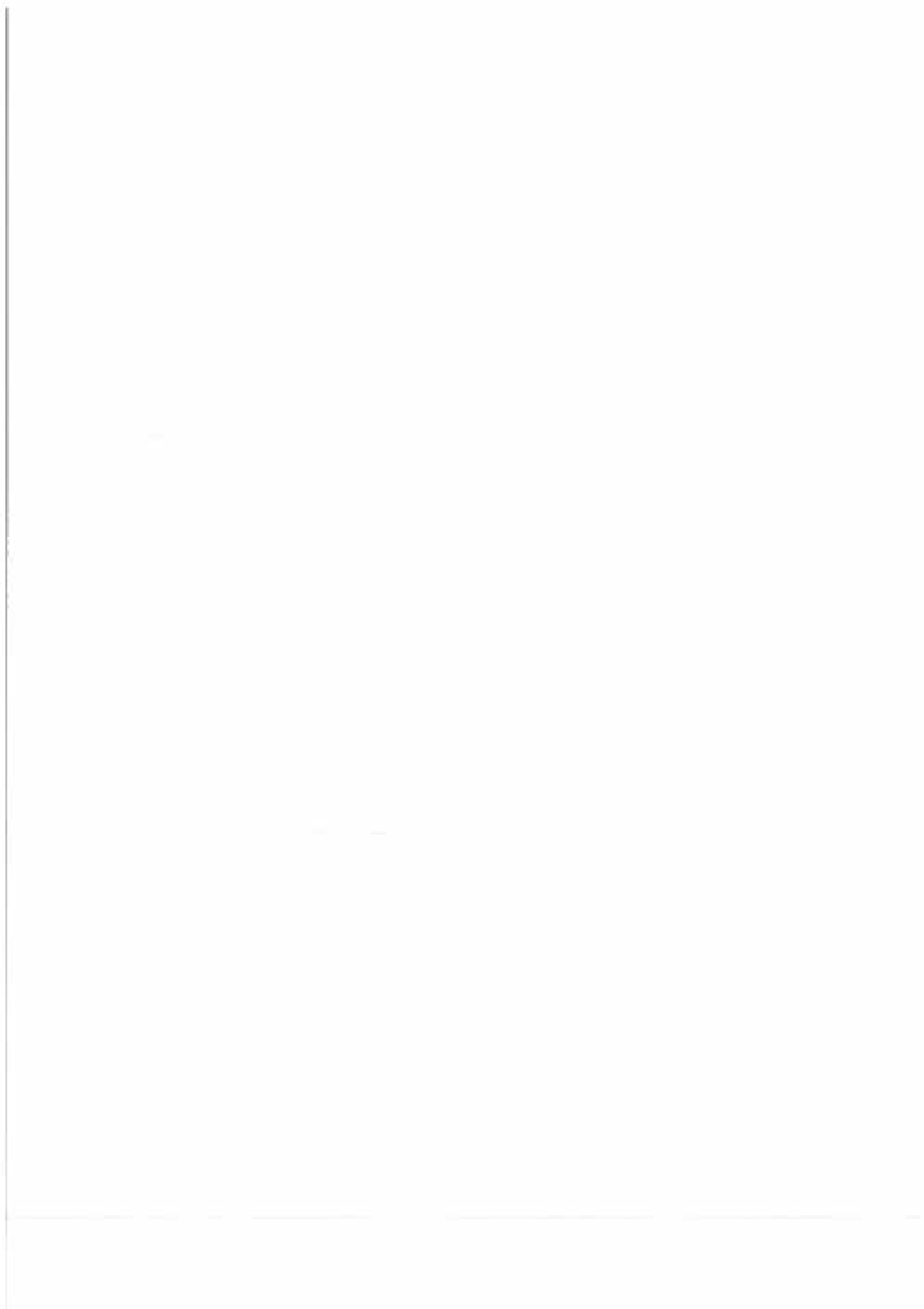


Challenges to Faithfulness

Ideology and Culture

Forms of Expression

Concept of Mission



17

Mennonite Adaptation and Identity

Menno Wiebe

> Failure to identify with some group or groups condemns us to feelings of loneliness, alienation and ineffectuality. We begin to wonder "who we are" . . .[1]

To be or not to be Mennonite people might well be the question that North American Mennonites will begin to ask with fresh seriousness. Indeed that ultimate question has already been asked. It crops up in Mennonite news media, often masked in the form of queries dealing with the pros and cons of retaining the name "Mennonite". The issue is also repeatedly debated when new churches or missions come into existence and are in search of a name.

Whether the name "Mennonite" is a theological or a cultural concept hardly needs further debate. The records of Mennonite history demonstrate conclusively that Mennonites are a religio-ethnic body of peoples regardless of stated ideological goals. We do well to begin by dismissing a number of popular notions which depict culture as some kind of high class manners, quaint museum pieces or some other exotic curios. Similarly readers who attach stigma to

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a discussion of Mennonites as an ethnic or cultural group are reminded that contemporary thinkers in anthropology focus on such relevant considerations as: 1) the nature of human alignments, 2) the relationship of man to his environment and 3) religious ideologies as they relate to the predicament of human survival. This paper will seek to focus on these questions from the point of view of Mennonite identity and adaptation.

Of particular interest to Mennonite people should be the fabric of relationships which makes the difference between being and not being a people.

> a thin thread alone
>
> ties us together
>
> at times it seems
>
> that thread will snap

In order to focus on the corporate dimension of human experience, we might speak of "peoplehood", a term which is not as restrictive as brotherhood. The latter too closely connotes organizational systems, e.g., "brotherhood of Labourers in Manitoba", or references dealing with brotherhoods which are congruent with membership lists. The term brotherhood also has that strong male orientation. For instance, we do not talk about sisterhoods. Similarly terms like "community" usually connote geographical restrictions. The term peoplehood is not restricted by generation, geography or altogether by organization, and for that reason fills a niche in the inventory of current expressions.

To speak of peoplehood in the setting of western industrialized society is to counteract the prevailing and more popular ideology of individualism. The educational system, the payroll office and economic achievements are categories where the response is to individuals not to corporate bodies. I wish to contend that peoplehood in the form of religio-ethnic relationship is indeed operative within larger bodies of people.

Theologically stated, man is not created in isolation but as a member of a given human group, specifically of the family. Beyond the immediate family there is always some larger body of people with which he is aligned. The Hebrews knew and know themselves as a people, a basic fact of wholesome theological and social self-understanding that obviously contributes substantially to the psychic strength of any body of peoples.

The way in which peoplehood operates is not at all restricted to religio-ethnic and intergenerational bodies. In the broadest sense, humans everywhere require the assent of the relevant community for their action. Notably it has been demonstrated that such ostensibly objective undertakings as scientific research are really handcuffed without the assent of a relevant body of scientists which approves the particular means of inquiry.[11]

Before Mennonites talk about themselves as a religio-ethnic body of peoples they tend first to look both ways to see who is listening in. In other words, there is a good deal of self-consciousness about the Mennonite identity. In the high schools (even private Mennonite high schools and colleges), on the university campuses and within sophisticated business circles there is not a ready openness for members to identify themselves as Mennonites.

I think it could be fairly said that Mennonites are suffering from a case of ethnic shame. And I would like to contend that there is something unwholesome, even masochistic about that self-concept. Perhaps the mass media has caused public opinion to focus on the curious life-style of Mennonites. And it is probably correct historically that the members of earlier generations of Mennonites had a common bond with one another in that they conformed to uniform dress, common occupation, unique settlement pattern, dual German languages and a somewhat unique ideology. But Mennonites of today have shed most of the externals which formerly helped to establish the ethnic/social and to some extent geographic boundaries of their members. The dramatic leap from a geographically confined agrarian way of life to an urban industrialized life-style has clearly upset the majority of criteria which symbolized Mennonite identity.

Much of the reaction to a Mennonite identity is a reaction to a former exclusive way of life. While it is correct that religio-ethnic reformulation will have to take place within the adjustment to a new urban environment, it remains unclear why Mennonites themselves frequently scorn their traditional way of life. There simply isn't reason for a negation of Mennonite history and tradition. Rather the opposite is true. Mennonites as an agrarian people have ingeniously found ways of coming to terms with their environments. If exploiting the maximum resources with a given technology is a criteria for survival, then Mennonites

have ranked very high. If, however, the externals of geographic confinement, unique language, common vocation, symbolic dress, the village settlement pattern and to some extent the biological heritage no longer serve to prescribe the parameters (boundaries) of the Mennonite people, then we do well to examine whether there are alternative ingredients to a Mennonite identity.

A renewed identity, I am here suggesting, is largely dependent on 1) a successful environmental shift via the teaching profession, 2) a new confrontation of structural realism, and 3) a contextual hammering out of a basic unique Mennonite ideology.

There are some risks involved when considering the future identity of Mennonite people. Perhaps it is the overspecialization, that is, the specialization of farming that reduced possibilities of quick re-adaptation by Mennonite agriculturalists to the new urban-industrialized setting. Overspecialization, which tends to be a deterrent for re-adaptation anywhere, thus becomes a hazard for the survival of a human group. If Mennonites were agriculturalists in Russia and in America, then that occupation held by Mennonites was not exclusive to them. There was not complete uniformity of vocation. The teacher, for instance, was an alternative specialist, and as such was a professional who did not rely on farming for his upkeep. Interestingly enough it has been the Mennonite teacher who has probably been the most instrumental in bridging the rural-urban, or agricultural-industrialized gap. The origins of many, if not most Mennonite city churches, for instance, are due to the promotions of Mennonite teachers. Teachers have also provided an important link in Mennonite missions. Mennonite Pioneer Mission for instance had its beginning with teachers in northern Indian communities. The relevant factor here is that teachers could be transplanted from one environment to the other without a total vocational change.

If teachers are the pioneers of urban Mennonitism, then it is significant that these were better equipped than some others to understand the basic Mennonite ideology and that possibly because of their training. David Toews, A. H. Unruh, B. B. Janz, J. H. Janzen, C. F. Peters, F. C. Thiessen and J. J. Thiessen, it should be remembered were teachers. So are many of the younger, current, strong proponents of Mennonite ideology. To begin listing these would be hazardous but any quick review of prominent voices

will substantiate that impression. Ethnic shame, I am suggesting, seems to be less of a problem with Mennonite teachers than it is with those of other vocations. (This would include perhaps even a few of the theologically trained young men who are co-proponents for the dropping of the name "Mennonite" from church and conference designations.)

It is a particular strong point to the advantage of wholesome ethnic reformulation that Mennonites have an abundance of teachers. The reason for that abundance of course lies in the encouragement of the teaching profession at private schools, notably Mennonite Collegiate Institute at Gretna, Manitoba. It should be noted too, that the teaching profession, as one of the few alternatives to the non-agricultural specialist has had at least some social acceptance with the Russian Mennonites. As such, that profession served as a trailblazer for the pioneering of a new identity in the very new industrialized urban environment.

Structures of Mennonite Solidarity

The realism of indispensable social structures seems never to have been completely accepted by Mennonite people. Yet the nature of continuing Mennonite cohesiveness hinges on an honest confrontation of that question. The question could and ought to be answered on the basis of informal group alignments or it might be answered in terms of the more formal official Mennonite church organizations. I will address myself briefly only to the latter. It is really a matter of church conference structures. With the urban to rural — agrarian to industrialized — shift come the significant structural changes in the Mennonite social networks. The shift is most notable in the authority system.

On the rural scene, the Mennonite minister was vocationally and in every other way part of his parish. He was a hometown man who intercepted the informal conversation from the local gossip channels. When he then made his statements from the pulpit on Sundays, he expressed himself in keeping with the current and prevalent trend of thought. If this sounded authoritarian he could get away with it because he was sufficiently tuned in to be able to risk doing so. His statements were largely an

amplification of that which was already majority opinion in the informal but important gossip themes. Since the rural minister was typically not professionally trained, he didn't have to fight the "snob" image which was thoroughly established and reflected by the low German proverb "Ye yelieda, ye fechieda".

The pastor of the post-rural church is markedly different. Typically:

a) he is not a hometown man;

b) he is elected by recommendation, kinship usually not being a factor;

c) he is professionally trained as a theologian;

d) he is vocationally different from all other people in his congregation;

e) he is salaried;

f) he is often younger than his counterpart, the rural minister; and

g) he is rarely bilingual.

The post-rural congregation, too, is vastly different in terms of its cohesiveness. While kinship is not as influential in the makeup of the modern rural congregation, its impact is still evident. Similarly the particular wave of Russian migration remains visible in the way memberships in the city congregations line up, especially where there are several in an area to choose from. But it is in the diversity of vocation, life-style, status and area of residence where cohesiveness is coming to a severe test. In a number of churches, the trilingual nature of the church presents communication difficulties since the younger members no longer speak all three languages, English, Low German and High German.

The distinction between rural and urban pastors and churches itself is rapidly fading. Geography is no longer a valid criterion for the designation of those two categories.

To some extent the modern pastor faces the problem typical of many professionals of today, namely, that of overspecialization. Mennonite leadership is becoming increasingly differentiated. Typical of bureaucratic behaviour elsewhere, Mennonite leaders freely refer inquiries to the "proper department". While specialization and differentiation is inevitable, Mennonites do well not to buy the bureaucratic system which is designed for a larger, totally non-

familiar business corporation. Overspecialization is hazardous because of the possibility of omitting the more fruitful means of communication via recognized remaining strong networks based on kinship, migration waves or other similar criteria.

A particular strain is placed upon the relationships between the pastor and his congregation in the modernized urban setting. The pastor's formal training is typically that of the education system generally, be it in the high school, college, university or seminary. These institutions are known for following restricted contexts of communication. All the formal communication in the educational institutes takes place within the setting of the captive audience of the classroom. Added to these restrictions is the assumed analytical and/or evaluatory stance of today's scholar. Emphasis seems to be decidedly on analysis rather than creation. For the professionally trained minister, there is a crucial hurdle to overcome, namely to move from a stance of analytical description to a stance of visceral appreciation of the people he is serving. It was during a moment of intense concentration on the matter of Mennonite leadership that I thought of my good friend, Rev. J. J. Thiessen to whom this volume is dedicated and for whom I formulated the following lines:

to jj with love

look at those horizontal arms
sufficiently prolonged
to hug the brotherhood

he viewed in time
that specialization
would conveniently become
the mode of socially decreed
passing the buck
to his successors
I hear him saying
be not too specialized
to give a general care
to devote your love and skill
to those vocational slots
but let not your differentiating mind
replace your arms
to love the brotherhood

On the question of social structures, Mennonites probably

have moved in two extremes. On the one hand, it was assumed too frequently that Mennonite notions of brotherhood and particularly the concept of the prieshood of believers were theologically valid stances. However, the theological discussion occasionally failed to take into account dimensions of social realism. One social given which I am proposing is the inevitability of minimal hierarchy as a requisite for the sustenance of any human group. The hierarchy within any organized group assumes differentiation among individuals. Even the idea of the priesthood of all believers requires roles for some priests which are more "priestly" than others. When specialization in the form of professionally trained ministers did hit the Mennonite brotherhood, they bought the package without sufficient discrimination.

Mennonite Ideology Reformulated

Future Mennonite cohesiveness, if it is not dependent on externals, must be sought elsewhere. Perhaps it can be found in an honest assessment of who Mennonites are sociologically and what they are supposed to be theologically. In other words, the ethnic quality of Mennonites should be regarded as a given. This could mean that Mennonites ought to shed their ethnic shame and quit divorcing what they believe from what they are.

What are Mennonites sociologically? Is there indeed any solidarity remaining with the Mennonite people? The answer is yes. The human community does not survive alone by externally created symbols of identity. Man also lives by ideology.

The several centuries when Mennonites lived as an agrarian people, seemingly reduced the need for cultivating a strong ideology. The solidarity was retained by externals, notably geographic isolation. To some extent Mennonites coasted on the unique theological themes. In terms of their solidarity they could afford to do so. It is only now that Anabaptists are once again readapting to a new type of agricultural environment that the question of basic ideology emerges. In the absence of a well cultivated and up to date Anabaptist ideology Mennonites find themselves scrambling for a reason to be. And so the pressures to borrow a basic ideology. In particular, the theology of American evan-

gelicalism is being embraced as a form of loaned ideology.

The influence of evangelicals seems to have filled the void created by the absence of a strong Anabaptist theology created while Mennonites lived as isolated agrarian peoples. Evangelical theology already began to have its influence during the pietistic sweep in Russia during the mid-century of the 1800's. But the influence meant an emphasis on a theology of personal salvation without a theology of "the people of God". Or what there was of God's peoplehood tended to be spiritualized into non-empirical entities, quite unlike an actual body of twelve men — human men called by Jesus — several of which were even biologically related to one another. Similarly the churches to which Paul addressed himself were bodies of actual people, men and women, who presumably had children to form a second generation set of believers. Whenever this is the case, you of course have stage one of an ethnic group.

The question for Mennonites, I would like to propose is not to forsake an ethnic identity in favour of a supposed non-ethnic body of "neutral" Christians. Always the question is one of transferring one's encampment to another body of peoples. Evangelicalism itself it should be observed, is by now almost complete in its process towards becoming an ethnic group. The observation made at a Campus Crusade Institute at Arrowhead Springs last spring was that parents of participants in that Institute were members of one or another of the evangelical churches of North America. Wherever there were a few notable exceptions there one could quickly observe that their actions did not mesh with the well-established behaviour patterns of the Campus Crusade "ritual". That is, all participants had ancestral genetic, as well as theological influence from their parents.

Mennonites who are satisfied to borrow theologies are therefore asking for a switch of allegiance. If some Mennonite sectors lean towards evangelicals, then they must ask whether the switch is honest, honest not in light of an abstract notion of God's truth, but honest in the light of who Mennonites are. Always the bigger question is one of integrating what Mennonites are with what they believe.

I'm strongly in favour of rediscovering the genius of Mennonitism and discovering what it is that Mennonites need to inject into the unchristian world about them. The worst that can be done is to live off someone else's theology. To

buy the theological systems of contemporary popular evangelicals, Billy Graham or Bill Bright, without being able to internalize these honestly is the easy but sterile way out. All authentic Christian expression must take into consideration the roots out of which its people grow. The unfortunate allegiance, even subservience, to national ideologies of evangelicals is not at all native to Anabaptist theology. Mennonites have grown out of their own soil. The ferocious suffering endured by Anabaptists, the courageous stand on warfare, and that against mainline Protestantism, the unique sequence of world and national migrations represent typically Mennonite experiences. Those who know their history will gain from it and move on. Those who choose to ignore it will repeat its follies, while ignorantly assuming that they have made great advances.

A particular question that has faced the Mennonite peoplehood for some time is the exploitation they have endured from visiting non-Mennonite proponents of mission and evangelism. The Mennonite audience has been easy to capitalize upon. Mennonite solidarity is the fruitful ground for others to exploit. And that has hurt. It is painful not alone because Mennonites have "lost" their members, but because those same groups are not providing, in turn, the same kind of honest solidarity for their future generations. That is, there the solution is salvation without peoplehood.

But what hurts even more is the failure to recognize the very much needed punch line, that Mennonites are ideologically equipped to give. The world is crying for reconciliation of man to man and nation to nation. Christianity, if it is to regain credibility, must take on non-partisan dimensions. The world is asking for a theology that is not confined to national and cultural parameters, and certainly not confined to a faith whose scope is limited to codes of personal moral behaviour. A broken, sinful world is pleading for wholeness. The churches, particularly the evangelicals, are not responding. And evangelicals are handicapped because theirs is a personal, private faith. To speak about immorality, peace, and justice in evangelical circles is always only to speak of it in its personal dimensions. In that circle of Christians the faith is a personal matter and socio-political behaviour is outside of the scope of Christian concern.

Since evangelical Christianity has made and continues to make deep inroads into the Mennonite community but since there are some hidden traps in their otherwise correct

and well motivated verbiage, Mennonites do well to examine their own ideology in terms of evangelicalism. It would seem that there simply is no reason to surrender and every reason to sustain an Anabaptist theology which is deeply embedded in a people who have been through the roughest of human experience, whose theology embraces the personal as well as the corporate dimensions of human experience, and whose basic stance is one of vigorous evangelism.

I suspect that the American melting pot ideology is also influencing Mennonite faith. Therefore we do well to take another look at ourselves in light of the melting pot notion. Specifically we need to acknowledge that the question is not one of loyalty to an ethnic group versus loyalty to the rest of "neutral" society. Rather it should be acknowledged that all sectors of North American society are ethnic in character. The difference is only a matter of the size of that ethnic group. The ideology propounded by the overpowering ethnic body of an Anglo background has found its way into school curriculum, newspaper editorials and socially acceptable theologies. But as a Jewish friend said to me, "Show me a man of colour and I will tell you he has a people behind him." A Mennonite peoplehood is recognized for its strength by those who exploit that beautiful resource. It is high time Mennonites overcome their ethnic shame and recognize the Jesus-like brotherhood of their own people.

If concession to a borrowed theology is granted, then Mennonite people have to face the question of dissolution. For Mennonites, it means a separation of what they are from what they believe. But I don't think that God who calls a people into being is interested in a careless genocide of that people, be they Mennonites or any other body of Christian believers.

Let it be emphasized that the answer is not theological or ethnic purism. Purists tend to repeat what was pure for the preceding generation without taking into account fresh environmental and ideological variables. The bid is for a theology that is true to the people who propound it and to the circumstances within which that people now finds itself. What is needed is not only an accurate verbal theology that describes the past and the present but also the kind of divinely inspired insight that will permit Mennonites to get a jump on the future.

There are a few modern prophets among Mennonites

emerging on the horizon. These are predicting that unless Mennonites can rehammer the theological concepts native to original Mennonites but do so in the context of the presence of other parallel Christian theologies and of their industrialized environment and the non-familial, socially diversified contexts, Mennonitism is en route to the museum. I believe those prophets. But they are not very popular. Much more popular are the ones who ride the crest of socially feasible religious trends. Those who question religious subservience to national ideologies are sparse. The few who press the point of active peace-making often find the Mennonite audience rebellious. Those who regard the Church as an actual empirical group of human beings, a peoplehood, representing the body of Christ in the here and now, too quickly receive labels that hurt rather than help the building of a modern Anabaptist dream. But it is above else a Mennonite dream that is needed for a fruitful and valid reformulation of a Mennonite peoplehood.

If the choice is between a borrowed theology and discovering an up-to-date Anabaptist theology, I'll go for the unique peoplehood represented by the ongoing Anabaptist body of believers. It is exactly the rediscovery rather than the surrender of themselves that caused the Mennonite people to find the fulfillment of their specific calling to be reconcilers in a modern world of hatred, injustice and degrading materialism.

If Mennonites can successfully transplant themselves into the turbulent industrialized modern society, rediscover their solidarity and reformulate their basic ideology in the context of that present environment then they will indeed have demonstrated the credibility of a Christian people of God in an increasingly de-humanizing world. Of the Asians it was said, once they were no people, now they are a people. Might it be said about the Mennonites that once they were called to be a people and they, despite socio-environmental changes, are being sustained as a dynamic people of God.

If a Mennonite renaissance is dependent on a reformulation of a relevant Anabaptist ideology then the onus is largely on the Mennonite training institutions to create or discover that ideology. Particularly the Mennonite colleges find themselves hammering out a theology that will provide for contemporary Mennonites a valid reason to be.

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[1] Alvin Toffler, *The Future Shock* (New York: Random House, 1970), p. 310.
[2] Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 93.

18

Pacifism and Mennonite Identity

Rodney Sawatsky

Not all Mennonites are pacifists.[1] Most recently significant Mennonite support of the Viet Nam conflict through soldier power and ideological assent documents this statement. Despite this reality, pacifism symbolizes that conception of the Gospel and that stance towards the world which provides the Mennonite churches with their unique identity and their reason for existing as a separate Christian group. When the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church in 1947 dropped the name "Mennonite" to become the United Missionary Church, it was also declaring its de-emphasis of pacifism.[2] Similar examples could be multiplied which suggest the loss of Mennonite identity through the undermining of pacifism and vice versa. But rather than providing negative support for the thesis, it is the intention of this chapter to indicate the correlation between pacifism and Mennonite identity and to offer some suggestions as to the significance of that correlation for the contemporary situation.

Any discussion of twentieth century Mennonite identity must be built on the foundation of Mennonite history. It is in the orginal and developing Mennonite "story" that direction for the contemporary situation must be sought. The almost unparalleled interest of Mennonites in their past has provided that inspiration and vision to continue a

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minority witness in spite of size or reception. When Mennonites lose their past, they lose their soul; when they take their past seriously, not as escapism but for orientation, they gain meaning for their existence as an important limb in the total body of Christ.

I

At least four stages mark the development of Mennonite history. In each of these stages — the Biblical, the Anabaptist, the Diaspora and the Awakening stages — pacifism has been integral to the definition of Mennonite identity.

The Bible is the primary document in Mennonite history. To see the Biblical era as a phase in the Mennonite story may seem presumptuous; however, this claim is obviously not exclusivistic and, furthermore, most Church historians would agree that the Mennonites are front-runners as people of the Book. This Biblicism, at least prior to the twentieth century, did not grant equal normative weight to all parts of Scripture and did not try to develop a systematic dogmatism in the tradition of Protestant scholasticism and Fundamentalism.[3] Rather, it looked at the Bible with the event of Jesus Christ — his life in word and deed, his death and resurrection — as the small end of the telescope through which all Scripture was interpreted.

Christ is more than a key to the intellectual understanding of the Scriptures; for as the most perfect revelation of God he entered into human history as a man and thus shattered all attempts to encase the Good News in written statements. It is in experience, in relationship, in discipleship that Jesus Christ is known. It is the following of this Jesus as perfectly and humbly as God's grace through the resurrection and the Holy Spirit makes possible, which the Mennonites have affirmed to be central to salvation and the abundant life. Yet again this discipleship must always be tested, given direction and placed into context by careful reference to the richness of the Biblical documents.

With the Biblical materials thus interpreted Christocentrically and the essence of Christianity seen as following the way of Jesus Christ, pacifism finds its context and dynamic. Jesus' own incarnate message of peace, love and nonresistance led to his death. Yet in his resurrection Christ conquered the principalities and powers, set in

motion the kingdom of God and established the Church as a sign of the new age. Thus for the Christian, faithfulness in following the pacifist route of Jesus, despite the possibilities of suffering and despite its apparent naivete in the face of political and social realism, finds its assurance of victory in the eschatological confidence of a new day.[4]

II

This understanding of the Bible and the Christian faith came to the Mennonite tradition through the "evangelical" Anabaptists of the sixteenth century.[5] These Anabaptists — who represent the second stage in Mennonite history — were convinced that the Lutheran and Reformed movements were not willing to follow Christ as radically as the Bible directed.

The Church is a voluntary community entered upon only by committed disciples through adult baptism, the Anabaptists argued. Such a position logically implied religious toleration and pluralism. Furthermore these Christians refused to swear oaths in a court of law and to bear arms in warfare, not because they opposed the government but because commitment to the way of Jesus stood above the way of the state. Their insights implied a revolutionary critique of society, for the medieval structure depended upon the reciprocal relationship of church and state into which all citizens entered at birth as symbolized by infant baptism. This arrangement was not challenged by the other reform movements who joined the Catholics in establishing their own state churches. Thus the civil disobedience suggested by Anabaptist theology was considered not only heretical but also treasonous, especially when its adherents declared their refusal to fight the Moslem Turks who threatened Christian Europe from the East.[6]

The radical implications of Anabaptism have ofttimes been underestimated by Mennonites. But they were fully understood by Catholics and Reformers alike who straightway passed laws against these dangerous heretics, hunted them down and destroyed a goodly number. These martyrs who challenged the standing order and refused to take up arms even against the "atheists" of the sixteenth century, are the forefathers of modern day Mennonites. Those Men-

nonites who in any way undermine a vigorous pacifist witness should be reminded that they thereby are questioning the legitimacy of the martyr deaths of their sixteenth century fathers.

III

The Anapabtist phase of Mennonitism was short-lived, even though these dedicated Christians had a strong missionary program as they fanned out across Europe pursued by their persecutors. The pressures of persecution and the constant concern to be separated from the evils of the world combined in the latter sixteenth century to drive them into secluded communities where at least some toleration could be found and a regularized believer's church instituted.[7] These enclaves gained nurture from such leaders as Menno Simons whose name soon was used to identify a large portion of the scattered Anabaptists. A literal diaspora rapidly followed as ghettoes of Mennonites migrated to various centres of Europe, to Prussia, to Russia and to America. "Ghetto" is a legitimate label for these largely rural communities, for as they sought to be separated from society they were in turn separated and restricted especially in evangelistic outreach by society.

The theological emphases of this diaspora period, which lasted from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, modified the radical social critique of Anabaptism considerably. With the rise of comparative religious toleration and the decline of eschatological urgency, the Mennonites sought a new theological identity to lend credence to their search for peace and quiet. Pietism served this end admirably for although it had many similarities to Anabaptism, its emphasis on personal piety rather than the earlier radical discipleship provided the needed apologetic for a program of withdrawal.[8]

This *Stillen im Lande* approach although modifying Anabaptism, maintained a consistent pacifist witness. Granting a mixture of motives and some blatant compromises, Mennonite migrations were based to a large extent on the pursuit of a land where exemption from military service would be granted. The receipt and defense of the coveted *Privile-*

gium by the migrants to Russia and Canada, for example, attest to this concern to be faithful to pacifism. Once settled, these folk were almost always known to be more peaceful, honest and trustworthy than ordinarily imaginable.

The pacifist witness of the Mennonite diaspora was rarely missionary in approach, but rather the witness of an alternative life style or even, if you will, of a counter culture. As the separation from the world motif discouraged proselytization but rather fostered an in-group in mentality and heredity, "Mennonite" came to denominate an ethnic as well as a religious entity. Thus Mennonitism was seen but rarely heard. Although too often comfortably enjoying its own purity and economic wellbeing, at its best Mennonite ethnicity provided a powerful cultural vehicle for the Christian message of love, peace and mutual aid. Every religious message must have its cultural medium and the strengths of the Mennonite ethnic form developed during the diaspora dare not be overlooked despite its weaknesses.

IV

The ghettoed diaspora began to disintegrate in the mid-nineteenth century, although the process in some areas is far from complete even today and in other areas is being consciously reasserted. Whereas seventeenth century Pietism aided the rationalization of Anabaptist withdrawal, a new surge of pietism exhibited in Russia by Moravian pietism and in America by revivalism broke open the ghettoes and encouraged a new concern for revitalized personal religion and evangelism. In 1860 the Mennonite Brethren in Russia and the General Conference in America were formed to spearhead new programs of education, missions and the like. Under the influence of D. L. Moody, John F. Funk became the father of the "Old" Mennonite Awakening and encouraged revivalistic, publishing, conference and other programs in his wing of the diaspora.

This opening of the doors of the ghettoes to "foreign" influences was not necessarily conducive to a reinvigorated pacifist witness. Educationally and theologically ill-prepared for an open society, Mennonites suffered cultural accommodation not only in the breaking of Mennonite ethnicity but also in the weakening of the theological basis of pacifism.

Thus, for example in America, militaristic Fundamentalism persuaded some of its Mennonite friends of the legitimacy on Biblical grounds of American military action, on one hand, and the folly of preaching world peace and encouraging social reform, on the other. Similarly ecumenical relations, as in the Federal Council of Churches early in the century and especilly as in the National Association of Evangelicals and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada most recently, have been approached almost consistently by presenting pacifism as a Mennonite denominational peculiarity which is peripheral to the central Gospel and need not be emphasized.

Somewhat paradoxically although related to the same process, during this time of accommodation many Mennonites theorized upon and practised their pacifism most persuasively. Spurred on especially by the need to establish a Mennonite identity for the twentieth century, Mennonite Biblical and historical scholarship has done much to recapture the Anabaptist vision and hopefully even to move beyond that vision. A new concern for the pacifist witness has come from those most convinced of the Mennonite identity in the past and the present. Most concretely MCC, MDS and VS projects give credence to this new and ongoing vision.[9]

V

Yet, given the seriousness of the world's social ills, the Mennonite pacifist witness is much too weak. The far from perfect record of conscientious objection during wartime, the uncritical support of our militarized societies, and the seemingly consistent unwillingness to speak a strong word on social problems exemplify this weakness. Among the multiplicity of reasons for this weakness are four interrelated phenomena. For one, due to theological and political influences especially of conservative militaristically inclined spokesmen many Mennonites no longer believe in pacifism. This influence becomes especially potent as Mennonites relate to obviously genuine Christians who are not pacifists. Secondly, in order to reap the benefits of the evangelistic and missionary enterprise, seeming handicaps to the process such as pacifism are minimized or entirely dropped. A third reason looms large when pacifism is seen to jeopar-

dize the social and material well-being which most North American Mennonites have attained. And the fourth reason is fear of being identified as "different" in a largely friendly society.

This fear can be seen as the ultimate root of all reasons for the weak Mennonite peace witness. It is based on insecurity, and this insecurity in turn is founded upon lack of knowledge, lack of conviction or lack of willingness to take a stand. Such insecurity, which members of the closed Mennonite communities rarely knew, is very understandable given the plurality of faiths bombarding urbanized society in which the modern Mennonite is challenged to work out his faith in fear and trembling.

However, if the Mennonite people want to maintain their identity as Mennonites they will need to deal with their insecurities and restudy their pacifist position, for historically the very meaning of Mennonite is integrally related to pacifism. Through a new appreciation for the Biblical and historical understanding of Mennonite pacifism a new fearlessness to stand in that tradition is possible.

With renewed Mennonite consciousness several implications to the peace witness need to be considered. For one, in ecumenical relations Mennonites will need to assert the centrality of pacifism to the Christian Gospel while accepting their fellow non-pacifist Christians as no less recipients and agents of God's grace. This seeming paradox is the only way at present to be honest witnesses to the Mennonite understanding of Christianity while at the same time recognizing God's work through the many other Christian branches. Secondly, it will mean that Mennonite evangelism and mission outreach dare not water down the pacifist implications of the Good News in order to gain numbers by a cheapened grace. Again, Mennonites must be true to their understanding of the Gospel and God will provide for the gaps through his other servants for surely all recognize that the Mennonites are but one limb in the total body of Christ.

And thirdly, by consolidating the insights from the various phases of Mennonite history, a consistent and penetrating yet quiet and unassuming witness must flow out of the Mennonite churches in word and deed. This means speaking valiantly to the powers that be concerning social injustice, indicating by examples models for a renewed society, and always working at the many small sores of society through

voluntary and professional personnel even where any response seems hopeless.[10]

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[1] No single word is available in the English language to express the Mennonite peace position. "Nonresistance" for many suggests passivity whereas "pacifism" carries overtones of liberal optimism. For our purposes the two words could be used interchangeably but to suggest the aggressive nature of peace-making the term "pacifism" has been adopted.

[2] H. S. Bender, "Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church" *Mennonite Encyclopedia* III (Newton, Kansas: Mennonite Publishing Office, 1957), p. 602.

[3] C. Norman Kraus, "American Mennonites and the Bible, 1750-1950" *Mennonite Quarterly Review* XLI (October, 1967), p. 309.

[4] See esp. John H. Yoder *Peace Without Eschatology? A Concern* reprint availabe from Peace Section, Mennonite Central Committee, Akron, Pennsylvania, 1961.

[5] The use of the term "evangelical" here is to differentiate them from the "revolutionary" and "spiritualist" Anabaptists, not to identify them as is sometimes incorrectly done with contemporary evangelicalism.

[6] A good discussion of the radical implications of Anabaptism is found in: W. Klaassen "The Nature of the Anabaptist Protest" *Mennonite Quarterly Review* XLV (October, 1971), pp. 291-311.

[7] On the move to separated communities see: C. J. Dyck "Anabaptism and the Social Order" in Jerald C. Brauer, ed. *Essays in Divinity* Vol. II (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 207-229.

[8] R. Friedmann *Mennonite Piety Through the Centuries* (Goshen, Indiana: The Mennonite Historical Society, 1949); and E. Crous "Anabaptism, Pietism, Rationalism, and German Mennonites" in G. F. Hershberger, ed. *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1962), pp. 237-248.

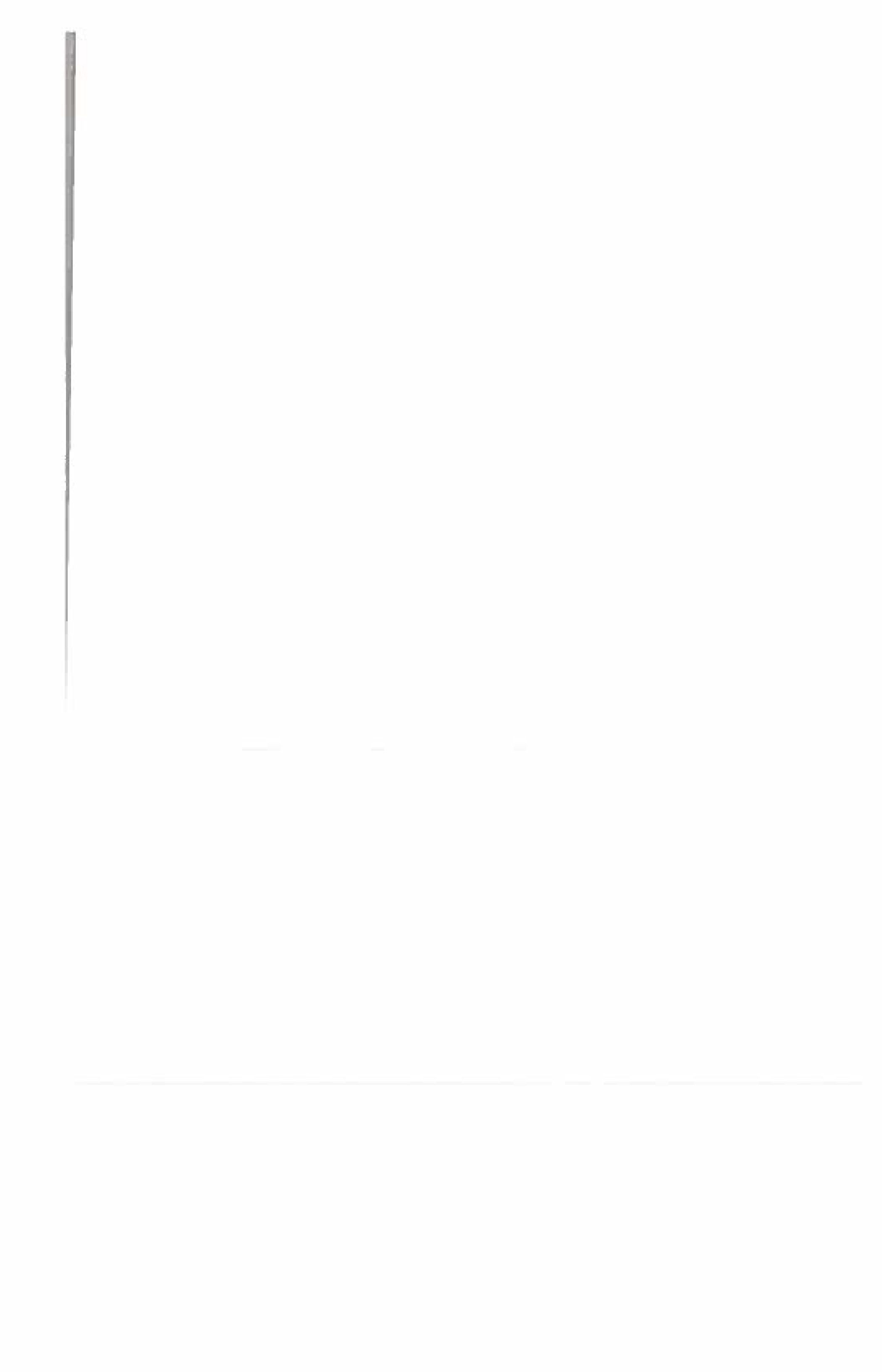
[9] On the acculturation process see: L. Harder "The Quest for Equilibrium in an Established Sect" unpub. Ph.D. dissertation Northwestern University, 1962.

[10] For another discussion of pacifism and Mennonite identity see: F. H. Epp *The Glory and the Shame* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Canadian Mennonite Publishing Association, Inc., 1968).

Challenges to Faithfulness

Ideology and Culture

Forms of Expression



19

Faithfulness to the Arts

George Wiebe

The various articles in this publication witness to the fact that Mennonites have "come of age" in education and culture. Within the last 30 years the arts in particular have flourished with a rapidity unsurpassed in Canadian Mennonite history. Much of this art was of a modest variety, produced for private enjoyment and local use. An appreciable amount of creative art received public attention in the form of published original poetry, short stories and novels, historic writings, public displays of paintings, ceramics and woodcarving. In addition there were innumerable song festivals and other types of musical performance. These arts were pursued by Mennonites in other countries in other eras of history. What makes the development of the arts within the last 3 decades unique in the history of Canadian Mennonites is the rapidity of the development and the natural, organic way in which this took place.

Changing Views on Art

At the outset of this artistic development Mennonites were not always vocal in giving a rationale for the arts. Part of the reason may well have been the slight feeling

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of suspicion that too much preoccupation with the arts could be a deterrent rather than an aid to a vital personal faith. The fine arts or "die Kunst" (a typical and all-inclusive designation), was actually viewed by some brethren as a potential hindrance to true discipleship — a concept which accurately reflected the suspicions of the early Anabaptists as well as some of the ultra conservative Mennonites of our time.

However, with the founding and development of private schools, the rapid sociological changes and the increased exposure to society at large, contacts with the fine arts were not only unavoidable, but desirable. Leaders and laymen alike, including many with only a very limited formal education, began to sense that a higher education, with a strong emphasis on the fine arts, was most desirable for their children.

The fine arts, particularly music and literature, were held in high esteem because of the "ennobling" effect they had on the development of character and personality. As long as the artist and the culturally informed person remained true to his faith and to his church, his abilities and knowledge were recognized as a great asset to the brotherhood. Ministers with a good education or literary ability were usually regarded with highest esteem, particularly if their communication with congregations was clear and uncomplicated. The use of decorative art, paintings, carvings, lacework and embroidery was cultivated to varying degrees in most Mennonite homes, with certain strict limitations by the ultra conservative groups.

Musical Development: A Phenomenon of an Era

Of all the arts, none has been more closely associated with the religious life of the Mennonite church and the cultural events of the community than music. It must also be said that no other art has received as much attention or experienced as much growth. To review progress and to contemplate the factors which contributed to this development is to recognize a fascinating phenomenon of growth.

a) *Roots:* The impulse to sing is native to all of the earth's peoples. This impulse is generated by events and experiences which make us aware of our individual and

group identity. Song and music making becomes a way of celebrating and symbolizing common feelings and experiences. This is repeatedly illustrated when immigrants from the same country come together in their new country of adoption to sing familiar folk songs of their mother country. Nothing (excepting a deep sense of spiritual unity) can establish a sense of "belonging" so quickly and so effectively as the singing of folk songs in the mother tongue.

The Mennonites have enjoyed a tradition of hymn singing which was motivated by the need to worship. The hymns used spoke of their trials and difficulties as well as their hopes. To the natural impulse of singing for recreational and social reasons was added the religious impulse generated by a vital faith, a faith that waxed strong through persecutions and untold physical and mental hardships. The "Ausbund", the oldest existing Anabaptist and protestant hymn book is a testimonial to this kind of religion which sent martyrs singing to the stakes. After the era of physical persecution of the 16th century, Mennonites continued to publish songbooks in great numbers and variety, borrowing those hymns from other Protestant groups which best expressed their faith and life. Very few original hymn texts or tunes were added, and until the end of the 18th century no instruments were used to enhance the service and to support the singing; instead, there was a single minded devotion to use corporate singing to worship the Lord of their lives.

This tradition of congregational singing was not necessarily due to the presence of an abundance of musical talent. This could vary greatly from one denomination to another. In view of the sparsity of original Mennonite hymn tunes it is doubtful whether the Mennonites ever produced a gifted composer of national repute. The Mennonite heritage of song is not therefore a perpetuation of superior musicality or vocal ability, but a tradition of corporate worship in which the "priesthood of true believers" concept was fittingly and beautifully symbolized through corporate song. Although the Lutheran Church was responsible for reintroducing congregational singing, it, as well as the Anglican Church, relied heavily on various aspects of the liturgy — composed prayers, creeds, rituals and organ music. Because of these additional worship aids, the congregational singing of these two major denominations did not and still does not reflect that same degree of corporateness that was and fortunately still is in evidence in many Mennonite congregations.

The sincerity, depth, and inherent beauty of such corporate singing impresses itself early in the minds and hearts of children. This was the simple secret of perpetuating tradition and developing the inherent vocal and musical gifts. This also explains why such a large percentage of Mennonite young people joined choirs. They had grown up with the idea that singing is for everybody.

b) *Choral Culture:* Choral singing among Mennonites in Canada originated around 1910 and was cultivated chiefly in the newly formed Bergthaler Church and the Mennonite Brethren churches of Manitoba. It had its roots in the 4 part congregational singing of these two denominations and was given impetus in those early years through the choral programs at the Mennonite Collegiate Institute and somewhat later at Rosthern Junior College. At first choirs performed at "Jugendvereine" where they were particularly appreciated, and later they sang in the regular worship service as well. Their repertoire consisted mostly of gospel songs, chorales and simple anthems. Since those modest beginnings, choral singing has developed into a highly skilled art form and today almost every Mennonite church in Canada is served by a church choir.

c) *Music festivals and competitions:* As choral singing became an accepted feature in churches, schools, and communities, a great deal of interest for instrumental music and private vocal music was wakened. Pianos, guitars, violins, and other musical instruments became part of household furniture, even during the economic crisis of the 1930's. In Manitoba, music festivals were organized in communities like Winkler, Altona and Steinbach to encourage youngsters to compete in music and the speech arts.

d) *Orchestras:* Closely connected with the organization of musical festivals was the creation of a Mennonite orchestra in the early 1940's in Winnipeg and Winkler. This resulted in more young musicians receiving competent individual instruction on a variety of instruments. The combined influence of the festivals and the activity of the Mennonite orchestra helped greatly to expand the musical horizons of youngsters by discovering music as an art form which could be a wonderful outlet for creative energies. It was this combined influence of musical festivals and participation in an orchestra that prompted several talented young people to develop into fine musical artists.

e) *Music Programs of the two Bible Colleges:* With the growing interest in music, the need for a higher level of theoretical and practical musical instruction became apparent. This need was met to an appreciable extent through the music curriculum of the two Mennonite Bible Colleges. With the offerings of post Bible school theological studies it seemed logical that the Bible College was the proper place to cultivate and train church musicians to appreciate and introduce better and more challenging music to their churches and private schools.

The decision of the conferences and college boards to give music a prominent place within the theological curriculum has proven to be a wise one. In speaking for the college with which the present writer has been associated it seems increasingly apparent that theological and musical studies can not only exist side by side, but they need each other. The biblically centred studies, sharpened and deepened by the disciplines of philosophy and languages created a deep awareness on the part of the students as to the place of music and the arts in the life of the Church. This kind of awareness and the concern for its effective communication are attributes for which no amount of sheer technical or musical ability can compensate. The attitude of academic and artistic freedom within the Bible College setting allowed the musical directors to strive for technical and musical excellence to match academic abilities and theological insights of the singers.

Into this community of theology and the arts the colleges opened their doors to interested singers of the community to join college students in the rehearsal and performance of major choral works ranging from works such as Carl Loewe's "Suehnopfer" to Bach's "St. Matthew Passion", Haydn's "Creation", and Honegger's "King David". These events were significant not only because they happened to be well attended or successfully performed, but also because a community of faith and worship was created. This became particularly apparent in the combined performances of the two College oratorio choirs.

f) *Professionalism:* As in other areas of learning and endeavour, so Mennonites began to choose music for their professional careers. To a large extent the incentive has come from the colleges. In the three year music program young musicians had to make their decision with regard to pursuing further studies. As a result, a considerable

number of graduates have gone on to acclaimed music schools and conservatories in both Europe and the U.S.A. The number of students entering music professionally has greatly increased in the last several years. Many of them expect to come back to serve in Mennonite schools, churches, and communities. Others will be looking for college or university positions.

An Assessment of the Present

a) *Musical sophistication:* Within the last decade, Mennonites have attained a place of some prominence in the musical and artistic world. The many top winners at festivals, recipients of gold and silver medals, the excellent standards of choral singing which have been set by children's and adult choirs, the increasing number of CBC presentations of individual artists and choirs have set an enviable record of achievement. The musical momentum which has been created shows no signs of lagging. Instead, there is keen interest in professional concertizing and opera on the one hand, and the experimentation with various contemporary musical styles within the Church on the other hand.

This flowering of musical culture has produced a certain musical sophistication. It has done much to dissipate the various misconstrued images of Mennonites as being anti-secular, unsocial, and suspicious of the rest of the world. Instead of feeling apologetic and embarrassed about their heritage, Mennonites tend to view it with gratitude and a certain sense of pride.

b) *The frustrated artist:* For the dedicated musician, tension often arises between giving the necessary time and energy to do justice to the art itself and conserving the necessary time and effort to cultivate the personal, social, and spiritual needs of one's person. The tension is a very real one in that the artist does not want to lose distance from the "ideal performance" or from himself and the people for whom the work is being performed — ostensibly for their benefit and inspiration. The driving desire to achieve artistic satisfaction has in some instances resulted in impatience and dissatisfaction with the prevailing attitudes and situations in the particular church in which the Men-

nonite artist is involved. This is followed by a breach in the bond of brotherhood. The artist then seeks out the fellowship of other artists and establishes himself within a community of artistically minded people. He is then left to practice his art outside of the umbrella of the church which nurtured his Christian life. The new community which he enters may be most satisfactory in terms of gratifying artistic needs, but at the same time may do little to meet some of the deeper personal and spiritual needs which can be met only in Christian community. Since this alienation of artists from the brotherhood is always a real possibility, it may be helpful to recognize that the two spheres — the Christian community and the circle of artist friends — do not have to be mutually exclusive, *i.e.*, that he can sincerely belong to both. The realization of this in practice could result in a most unique and fruitful witness. If Christ is to be Lord of our lives, He is also Lord of the arts, through which we can glorify Him. (This is an area which requires further specific investigation and study.)

c) *The gap:* (misunderstanding between professional musician and layman): The spiralling of musical development has been too rapid for many of the churches and communities who support the institutions where this is happening. Progress — excellence of musical performance — is desirable and expected, but it has often not taken the direction or form which was anticipated by the Church. The misunderstanding is often created at musical concerts, not only by the inclusion of contemporary music (classic or folk), but also by the presentation of unfamiliar traditional church music. Not only is the "new music" then held in suspect, but also the motive for doing. it. This misunderstanding can be dealt with effectively only as musician and layman meet on the basis of their identity, their oneness in the body of Christ. Fruitful dialogue has often followed public performances containing controversial musical elements. The musician stands to learn as much from these dialogues as the critical brother.

d) *Curators or Creators:* So far the evaluation of the present musical situation has dwelt on achievements and problems of musical performance. In addition to possessing the necessary musical and technical skills, a performer needs to have a sense for rediscovering some of the musical ideas and impulses which motivated the composer to write in a certain way. It takes a high degree of

intuition, sensitivity, and intelligence to recreate a work of art — to make it sound as if the performer himself is creating it "on the spot". Every true artist detests a "mechanical rendition" of a work.

However, if Mennonites wish to continue to regard themselves as pilgrims, as "people on the way", whose purpose is to bring hope and enlightenment to mankind, we cannot afford to remain at ease (whether it is in theology or in the arts) to only perpetuate the writings and compositions of others. We cannot be content to be curators of theology and the arts. We need to have writers, artists, and musicians who are willing and able to create new works of art which are relevant to the needs of our time.

It is therefore refreshing and encouraging to witness the recent surge of original poetry and folk music created by young people in their teens and early twenties. These young people have reflected a dissatisfaction with many of the traditional values, including certain types of literary and musical forms, and theological language and have dared to create new forms of expression. It is this surge of new creativity which needs to be taken into account as seriously as the rapid development of musical performance in our evaluation of the present, and more importantly as we consider the possibilities of future musical development within the Mennonite brotherhood and beyond.

Implications for the Development of the Arts

It is this strange new culture sometimes inadvertently referred to as the "guitar culture" that has emerged at a time when the cultivation of classical music among the Mennonites has reached its highest point. In a sense these two cultures seem poles apart, yet there exists a good deal of respect of these groups toward each other. In addition we have the "traditionalists" who often have little sympathy for either of these groups, but have a deep devotion to familiar traditional music and art.

a) *The Artist as Synthesizer of Past and Present:* The present calls for composers who are sympathetic to all these styles and cultures and who are able to blend these various

elements into a unified musical mosaic. Such creative writing could also contribute much to unify the gaps in human relations wherever these have been created.

We should also encourage people with literary talent to recreate for us in poetry, drama, or novel, the significant events and personages of the past. People with creative musical gifts would find great incentive to compose a contemporary musical melodrama or opera on biblical or historic themes which are particularly relevant for us now. Painters and sculptors could inform and enrich our lives by incarnating in contemporary art form the triumphant suffering and struggle of our forefathers and biblical personages.

b) *The Artist of the Future:* But the artist of the future cannot remain satisfied by recreating past events from church history or Bible history. He cannot help but sense the future-oriented mood. Ecologists are concerned about avoiding extinction of mankind through pollution; professionally trained futureologists openly publish their picture of the world and man inhabited planets by the year 2020. On the other hand, we have the "Jesus People" unabashedly proclaiming the imminent bodily return of Christ, while the theologians of hope have radically challenged theological thinking by interpreting the past and present in terms of God's action in the future. The mood is one of imminence — for some people foreboding and frightening.

Such an era requires its own kind of artists of hope who have experienced the forgiving love of Christ and the life-generating powers of the Holy Spirit. Such artists, be they composers, painters, writers or teachers must, as the prophets of old, disregard the desire for reaping personal glory and lay themselves completely open to the still small voice of God's Spirit. They will need to renounce the prevalent secular image of the acclaimed artist in order to be free to listen to God's voice. Such "artists of hope" will run the risk of misunderstanding and perhaps ostracism from elite artistic society. But if their chief desire is to be God's vessel of communication to a perplexed humanity, then the God of the Old Testament prophets, the God of Christ and His apostles, will use these artists to communicate a vital message of hope and encouragement. The medium of the message, *i.e.,* the art form, will not draw attention to its uniqueness or cleverness, but will reveal the "word from God" with clarity and power. Already there are these

artists of hope proclaiming this word, many of whom have come out of the hippie culture into a vital relationship with Christ. Dr. Charles C. Hirt, president of the American Choral Directors' Association, sees the present widespread renewal in the land as a harbinger of new hope and promise for our time. In his open letter to the membership of the most recent issue of the "Choral Journal", he writes:

> "I have often expressed my conviction, or prediction, that we are on the threshold of a new and wonderful period. There is not only historical precedent for it, but there is evidence all around, if we will but look. It's in the renewal movement of the organized church, in the new, fresh, uncompromising statement of youth; it's in our new assessment of values emulating man and not his possessions, in the new idealism expressed through educational goals, and in the emerging optimism which is replacing the nihilism of the past decade. New spiritual forces are being unleashed free from sterile tradition and free from the fetters of ecclesiasticism and cliches. It is all fresh and real, and very promising."[1]

Conclusion

The continued "unleashing" of these spiritual forces will play a significant role in determining the shape of religious art. One can predict a new freshness and spontaneity in the whole area of celebration and worship which constitutes such a major part in this renewal. What an opportunity we have of allowing the arts to incarnate this new awareness of the gospel!

In the light of the many unpredictable, often strange and spectacular ways in which God's Spirit has worked throughout the world within the last decade, it becomes somewhat presumptuous to attempt to present specifics for the future of the arts in the Church, other than those already referred to. It is of greater significance that all concerned disciples of Christ be open and alert to what is happening around us and within us, and allow the

impulses of God's powerful creative Spirit to become creative within us, to help meet the present and future needs of the total man.

The first half of the article might have led the reader to anticipate a rather specific projection of musical and artistic development of the Mennonites, resulting ultimately perhaps in an ideal culture of which we might be justly proud. To do so would have been an enjoyable excursion of fantasy and imagination. The refusal, however, to do so, has been deliberate. The "signs of the times" and the thrust of the biblical message and the voice of God's Spirit all seem to point into an entirely different direction. We must not confuse Christian discipleship and proclamation of the good news, with cultural achievement and artistic success, regardless how desirable and valuable this may be for the present. For those who desire to see a greater flourishing of the arts in the building of His Kingdom, an exciting future lies ahead. We can stand on tiptoe and look forward with eagerness to what will happen and expect to find ourselves involved!

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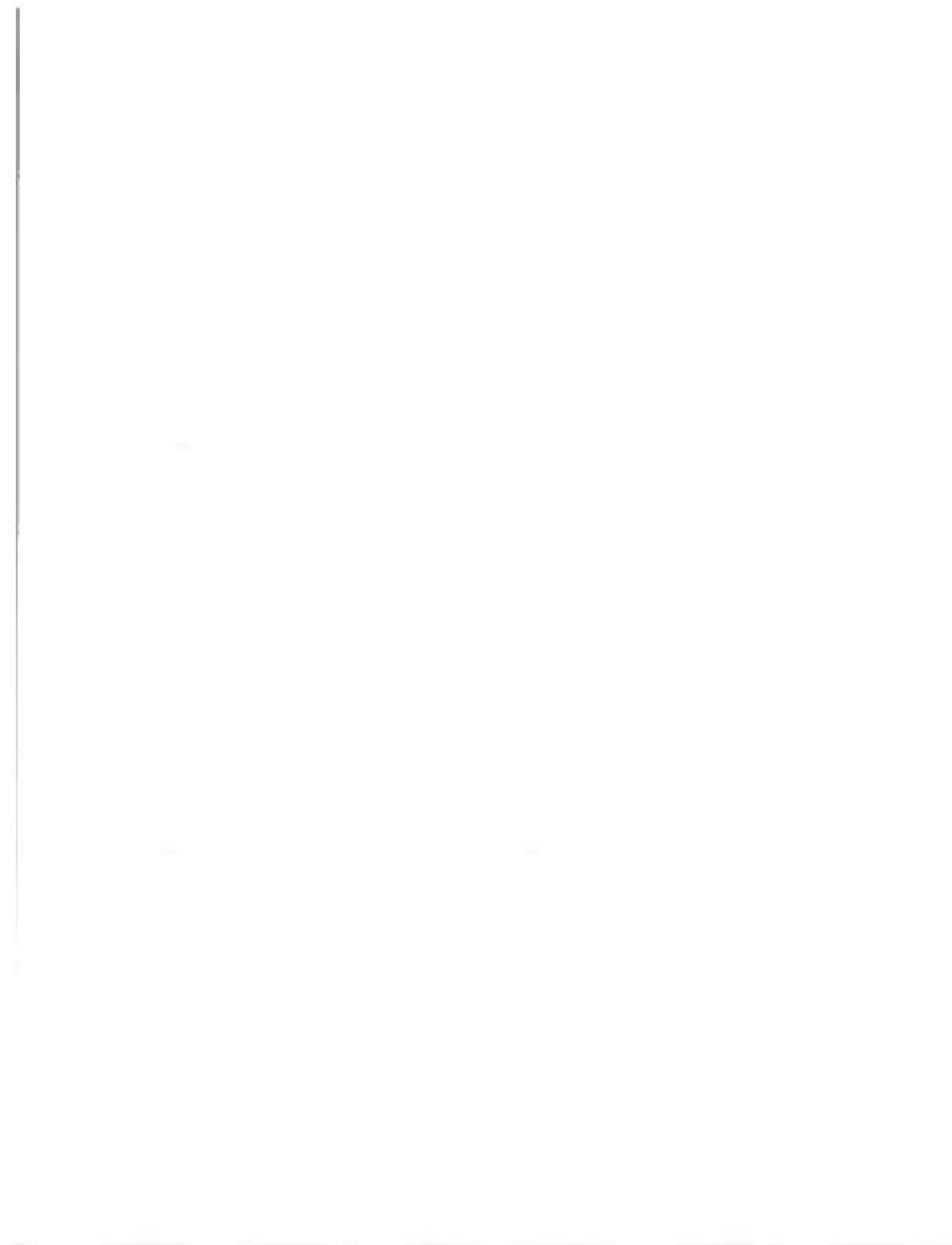
[1] *Choral Journal*, February, XII, vi, 1972, Official Publication of the American Choral Directors Association, Tampa, Florida.

Challenges to Faithfulness

Ideology and Culture

Forms of Expression

Concept of Mission



20

An Unfinished Task

Cornelius J. Dyck

What is the Mission of the Church?

What is the purpose of all its activity in the local congregation, in its learning and healing institutions, in its world-wide program of witness and service?

It is to announce that the Kingdom of God has come, and to incorporate men into it. Since Christ was the bearer of the Kingdom on earth, it means representing him, being his living body among men (I Cor. 12:27).

This is the calling of the whole people of God. The Church *is mission.* No part of its individual or corporate life is exempt from this calling to represent Jesus. Before World War II there was a great deal of talk about *missions.* This meant raising large sums of money to send men and women across the seas to the heathen of other lands. This is still necessary. But instead of letting a few missionaries, to whom we gave halos, represent the entire Church we have come to where every member is called upon to stand up and be counted. Modern communications have made the world a global village in which the poor of the non-Christian Third World are watching us. We have discovered that North America is as pagan as any land in some things, and theological renewal has recovered the essential meaning of believers' baptism as the commissioning or ordination of

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every member. Under the old covenant, Israel was chosen as the people through whom others would get to know the Lord of Hosts; under the new covenant the Church, and every member in it, is the people of God through whom others are to know Jesus. Israel was not chosen just to enjoy its election but to be the suffering servant to the nations. So also is the Church.

Yet faithfulness in mission does not mean frenzied activity. The greatest spiritual fruits have often come in times and places where men least expected them. Nor does it mean feeling guilty because a small community, or health, or being tied to the home by family responsibilities keep us from doing great things for God. It does not even mean just being faithful in small things in a determined and resigned kind of way. It means simply to be free to let the Holy Spirit have his way in our individual and group life. It is God who sends and saves; it is Christ who commissions; it is the Holy Spirit who makes missionaries out of disciples.

How Have We Done?

Mennonites brought a strong missionary concern with them to Canada from Russia in the migration of 1873. In his article "The Mennonites of Russia and the Great Commission" Gerhard Lohrenz has introduced substantial evidence to show how deeply they were involved in evangelistic-missionary efforts in Russia itself,[1] while the article "Foreign Mission Interest of the Mennonites in Russia Before World War I" by Waldemar Janzen gives similar documentation for the work of these Mennonites outside of Russia.[2] Gnadenfeld in the Molotschna settlement becomes synonymous with missionary concern as early as 1835. Baptist origins in Russia are tied closely to this Mennonite activity, as is now being studied by Lawrence Klippenstein. As late as 1910, Russian Mennonite missionary activity compared rather favorably with that of the North American Mennonites who were much larger in number.[3]

The years immediately following the arrival of the 1873-1883 immigrants were filled with the pioneers' struggle for bread and economic survival. There seems to have been little concern for others, but further research is required in this area. The founding of Mennonite Collegiate Institute in

1889 may be described as mission-related in its concern to train workers for the Church. It appears that some money was being sent to India for child support in the same year.[4] In 1892, Elder Johann Funk wrote, "We also want to support the preaching of God's Word to the heathen world through an extended helping hand. . . . "[5] Ladies mission sales began in the Gretna area in the same year, and by 1897 an annual mission festival had been established.[6] At the same time funds were being sent directly to Kansas for the support of General Conference missionary activity. In 1902 the Bergthaler Church of Manitoba and the Rosenort Church of Saskatchewan took the initiative to form the Canadian Conference (Conference of Mennonites in Canada) primarily to strengthen their home missions efforts with their own people.[7]

The immigration of the 1920s strained the resources of the Mennonites already in Canada and diverted mission funds to that emergency, but support continued for the work of the General Conference mission board. The Depression and the *Reiseschuld* severely drained the resources of most Canadian Mennonites until World War II. In 1944, the Mennonite Pioneer Mission was organized and missionary work was begun in Mexico the following year, but discontinued in 1948 in favor of work with the Indians of northern Manitoba.[8] In 1949 the Canadian Conference organized a Foreign Missions Committee to strengthen and support missions, but not to initiate work overseas except through the General Conference. By 1960 the Mennonite Pioneer Mission and the Conference committee had merged to form one committee under the Canadian Conference. Workers and funds were channelled through it to the General Conference and to the northern Manitoba work.

In the area of what was known as Home Missions the *Mädchenheime* were important as centers for fellowship and the pastoral care of Mennonite girls working in cities. Not the least of these was the home founded by J. J. and Kaethe Thiessen in Saskatoon in 1931. Schools were established as a part of the larger Home Mission effort to train ministers, Sunday school teachers and summer vacation Bible school workers, as well as to deepen the Biblical knowledge and spiritual life of individuals and congregations. These included the following: German English Academy, now Rosthern Junior College, in 1905; Elim Bible School at Gretna in 1929; the Rosthern Bible School in 1932; Swift Current Bible Institute in 1936; Menno Bible Institute at Didsbury,

Alberta, in 1937; the United Mennonite Educational Institute at Leamington, Ontario, in 1944; and Canadian Mennonite Bible College in 1947. There were other schools operated for shorter periods of time. Major energies were also directed towards the conscientious objectors of World War II and the alternative service camps, of which the first was established in 1941.[9]

It is clear from this review that missionary activity among the Conference of Mennonites in Canada was quite traditional before 1945 — when compared with present standards. Primary attention was given to the nurture of children and young people within the household of faith. Concern for non-Mennonites was expressed through financial and personnel support of the General Conference mission program and the work of the Mennonite Central Committee, which was substantial. The Bergthaler Church was showing interest in working with Indians.

But there was also much personal witness and service. The DVBS program reached many non-Mennonite children. We know from published reports and personal observation that a significant witness to Christ was given across the land by the words and deeds of many faithful Mennonites in their own communities. The effects of this witness cannot be measured, but it undoutedly helped to prepare the way for later witness by creating a climate of trust and goodwill, though the numbers of non-ethnic members joining the Mennonite congregations were few. It was the era of acculturation and of preparation in which the image of Mennonites as hard-working, reliable, and acquisitive farmers may have reached its peak.

How Are We Doing?

The annual yearbooks of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada for the past twenty-five years provide a wealth of information which cannot all be interpreted here. Some key readings, however, may help us interpret the meaning of developments and provide interesting data for reflection. In 1945, for example, the membership stood at 12,748, in 1955 at 14,192, in 1965 at 20,719, and in 1970 at 22,032 persons. For the same period new members received through baptism were 475 in 1945, 410 in 1955, 508 in 1965, and 528 in 1970. We note from this that the number of baptisms have

obviously not kept pace with the growth in membership. Considering the fact that the late forties and early fifties brought many immigrants into nearly every congregation, one might wonder where all the members stayed were it not for the statistics of those who died. The older generation, which had brought their families from Russia in the twenties, was fading away soon after World War II, and a new generation was arising for a new day.

In connection with the membership statistics, twelve yearbooks give reports on excommunication, including a total of 257 members, with the highest being in 1960 when 75 persons were excluded. The total would obviously be higher if reports were available for every year. These statistics testify to the concern for moral purity and clear witness, of course, but also to stress and strain within the brotherhood, particularly where larger groups were excluded in given congregations as the records indicate. Since the primary purpose of church discipline is the redemption of the sinner, one cannot help but wonder how many of the excommunicated were won back to the Church or, if not, what happened to them and to the spiritual life of the congregations from which they were excluded.

The financial record during this period is encouraging. From total reported giving of $201,626 in 1945, the amount rose to $690,065 in 1955, to $2,351,885 in 1965, and to a record $3,151,287 in 1970, which would average $143 per member. It is clear that many are giving sacrificially to achieve this high per capita figure. Of these amounts, local expenditures claimed a sharply increasing share — from $73,380 in 1945, to $328,429 in 1955, to $596,100 in 1965, and to $1,717,678 in 1970, probably reflecting more salaried church workers and major building programs. Expenditures for all types of education increased from $10,596 in 1945, to $72,063 in 1955, to $294,239 in 1965, but decreased to $119,734 in 1970, though the statistics permit several interpretations. Giving for missions and Christian service rose from $81,430 in 1945, to $145,092 in 1955, and to $465,339 in 1965, but decreased to $367,761 in 1970. These figures do not include contributions to the Mennonite Central Committee, which were not recorded consistently. The apparent decrease in 1970 is offset by strongly increased giving to Canadian and provincial MCC treasuries.

What were the major issues moving the Conference

during this period? Sunday schools, publication, education, and missions continued throughout, with a strong bulge centering in the founding of CMBC, referred to in preliminary discussions as a need for *eine höhere Bibelschule.* The 1946 conference session showed a continuing and increasing concern for nonresistance, which was to lead ultimately to the 1970 statement on "Conscience and Conscription" in support of non-cooperation with the draft in the United States, intended as a statement of encouragement to Mennonite congregations in that land. Emergency relief was a strong concern at every session, including immigration and South American refugee issues during the late forties and early fifties. Care for the mentally ill received low-key but continuing attention. Intemperance surfaced in the mid-fifties and gathered momentum until "alcoholism" and its curse was rejected in favor of total abstinence by a vote of 494 to 26 in 1961. Campus ministries and voluntary service grew as issues of the sixties, as did the concern for draft-dodgers, the welfare recipients, poverty, affluence, and violence. One of the most sobering issues was family living, particularly divorce and its correlation with urbanization. It climaxed in a penetrating report on "Marriage Breakdown, Remarriage and the Church" which, together with proposed guidelines for action, was given serious attention at the 1969 sessions.

The late sixties also led to increasing participation of young people in the work of the Conference, including its annual sessions. Maxis and minis and blue jeans, modern hairstyles and guitars, rebellion and indifference all became a part of congregational and Conference experience, as did deep commitment and fearless witness by many young people. A greater freedom to change structures and experiment with new models became apparent and led to the provisional Conference reorganization in 1971. A new social consciousness was developing within the Conference membership. Work was begun on a high level of competence with offenders in the nation's prisons. At times the concerns of the younger generation for social justice and action threatened to destroy the unity of the brotherhood, but love won out in the end. The Biblically-prophetic brief submitted to the Prime Minister of Canada in the spring of 1970 set a new high level of Mennonite concern in behalf of freedom and justice for all men. It was no longer acceptable to simply ask for special privileges, but rather as citizens to stand for what is right for all men before God

in word and deed.

By 1971 the concern for unity had grown to a deep commitment, but not to an obsession. In most congregations the language transition from German to English was accomplished in love, though not without anguish and crisis. The annual Conference yearbook, which had been German to 1964, in both languages in 1965, and in English thereafter, was again bi-lingual in 1971, reflecting a healthy freedom to do what seemed best. With the approval of the Canadian Conference the General Conference bookstore was merged with that of the Mennonite Brethren. Procedures were adopted to explore ways of meaningful cooperation between the two Mennonite colleges in Winnipeg. And in 1968 the Conference extended official greetings to the fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Uppsala, Sweden, "in the spirit of Jesus Christ and in His name." Cooperation with others in the work of MCC was taken for granted, and efforts were made to promote MCC's concern for the needy among non-Mennonites through radio and television. A history of all the Mennonites in Canada was being written cooperatively. In Ontario, relationships with (Old) Mennonite conferences seemed particularly productive of significant witness. The 1971 Conference theme was taken from Jesus' prayer for unity as recorded in John 17.

Thus the years following World War II were marked by growing vigor and creativity in witness. From initial inner-directed concerns for survival and economic security the Conference membership moved to a broad witness through education, music, missionary activity, press, radio and television. But the character of Conference congregations was also changing. An increasing number of teachers, doctors, lawyers and other professional men and women joined the ranks of farmers and lay ministers to do the work of Christ. Some saw their presence as a threat, some as a promise of new beginnings. The successful businessman was added to their ranks. A new self-image was emerging in which the Christian strand of Mennonite identity was beginning to overcome the ethnic and the quietism of tradition.

What May We Hope For?

These developments have provided a substantial base from which to launch into the seventies. There is present a unique

blend of resources, commitment, and opportunity. Canada represents, as does every nation, a unique environment for the proclamation of the Gospel. The Canadian context is exerting its influence upon the gospel, and the gospel message must be adapted to it, but without changing its essential nature. That is a difficult task. In an age of new nationalisms in the world, it will become more difficult also for Mennonites in Canada to avoid the idolatry of subtle nation worship while at the same time reaffirming the relevance of the Canadian environment for proclaiming the gospel to Canadians. The gospel is meant for a particular time and place, but it is also universal, above nation or race or history.

The commitment to unity referred to earlier is leading Mennonites to discover other denominations and spiritual movements which also constitute a part of the Canadian milieu. This is true particularly on the local level, but a first meeting of nationally representative Baptists with designated representatives of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada took place in Winnipeg in 1970, albeit on the initiative of the Baptists. We have been too slow to learn from others! Some of the best things Mennonites affirm have been borrowed or recovered from others, as for example, mission concern. Historically, new life has often come to them from outside of their own ranks. Why not? No person or group has a private claim to the gospel. We must open ourselves to the winds of the Spirit that our sails may again be filled with power.

But we must also learn to discern the spirits that are not of God. The other side of Mennonite reluctance to learn from others has sometimes been a sudden, and quite uncritical identification with movements we have not probed for their integrity and Biblical faithfulness. Not every new spiritual movement, not even if it flies the flag of evangelicalism, can be assimilated helpfully into the faith and lifestyle of the Believers' Church. What is needed is a process of discernment in the congregation in place of uncritical acceptance or rejection (I Cor. 2:14-15; 12:10). And with it a new appreciation of the contemporary relevance of the Anabaptist or Believers' Church heritage. It may be that small heritage committees could be formed in each congregation to help Sunday school teachers, program planners, women's organizations and the pastor, with counsel, encouragement, and resource materials to this end with the help of the new Congregational Resources Board.

This leads us to the nature of the congregation. New forms of congregational decision-making and new patterns of worship are already being tested with encouraging results in many of our congregations. Pierre Berton might not have written *The Comfortable Pew* in 1965 if he had known some of these, but others just might have confirmed his convictions.[10] We need to work and pray with all our energies for a recovery of authentic congregational life and a new level of integrity for church membership. Our individual witness is distorted, or not even heard, when no congregation stands behind it as a visible demonstration of the truth of our message. In the seventies we need to say what we want to say together, backing it up with open, authentic personhood and with the way we live amidst the generally unquestioned values of our society.

Small groups are the in thing today, but they also have a good history in the Church, particularly the Believers' Church; renewal does not begin with the masses. Small groups can be helpful at many levels, including therapy and secular groups. But the Church is the Church only if Christ lives in it now and, in the small group, if his Spirit helps us become more faithful in relation to him, to persons, and to things. The small group has the time and commitment to listen to the hurts of its members, to receive their confessions of repentance or failure, to explore their understanding of the will of God for each other in a way that the larger congregation does not.

Beyond the small group, the integrity of membership in the congregation is impaired inevitably when one of its members is paid to do the work for all, rather than to mobilize the resources of the entire congregation. No one person can be faithful for another. The integrity of membership is also impaired when half of the members, the women, are not permitted to give full expression to their gifts for ministry. They have been denied this integrity because their gifts have been denied and wasted. These are two signs of hope for the seventies: that members are ready to join their chosen leaders in a partnership of ministries, and that the men are willing (?) to set the women free for authentic ministries in Church and world.

In describing the mission of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada for the seventies, we have reviewed the history of their involvement, but in the final section concentrated particularly on inner-directed questions of identity. This

assumes that the good work being done in education, social action and evangelistic witness will continue. It must continue and grow as human, spiritual and financial resources are available. The Indians need our help, as do the poor and the rich, the offenders and the oppressors, the alcoholic, our neighbors, our government. But even more important is the knowledge that *we need them*. There can be no participation in the mission of Christ without participating in his mission in the world also.

Yet the focus on identity was deliberately chosen. We are strong enough, and able enough, and at times even willing enough to do great things, but the roots of our action lie in who we are. Have we gone deeply enough into our being as pilgrims and Canadians, heirs of the Anabaptists and late twentieth century men, followers of Christ but in a society of men to bring these all together joyfully for the Kingdom? Mennonites have come into their own in Canada. It is a good land. Will its environment dilute the gospel among us or will our Biblical, historical and inner resources make it the context for a unique proclamation of the gospel to our nation and beyond? We have waited long in the corridors of history for our moments on the stage. They have been brief and few. It may be that another moment has now been given us. Let us not forget the lines we have waited so long to say.

In one of the more difficult periods of Adoniram Judson's missionary work in Burma, he was asked about his view of the future for the Christian faith in that land. His answer can be our answer when he said, "The outlook, Sir,' is as bright as the promises of God."[11]

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1. In *A Legacy of Faith*, Cornelius J. Dyck, ed. (Newton: Faith and Life Press, 1962), pp. 171ff.
2. In *Mennonite Quarterly Review* (January, 1968), pp. 57ff.
3. *Ibid.*
4. H. J. Gerbrandt, *Adventure in Faith* (Altona: D. W. Friesen and Sons Ltd., 1970), p. 330.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, p. 331.
7. J. G. Rempel, *Fünfzig Jahre Konferenzbestrebungen*, 1902-1952.
8. Gerbrandt, *op. cit.*, pp. 332ff.
9. Melvin Gingrich, *Service for Peace* (Akron: Mennonite Central Committee, 1949), pp. 414f.
10. Pierre Berton, *The Comfortable Pew* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1965).
11. William J. Danker and Wi Jo Kang, Editors, *The Future of the Christian World Mission* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), p. 113.

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